

GROWTH Wisdom



Neena Verma, PhD, PCC
 Author | 'Grief & Growth' Specialist
 Appreciative Inquiry Thought Leader
 Life-Purpose, Resilience & Growth Coach
 +91-9910021187 | drneenavermachimes@gmail.com

Begin with Gratitude



A gratitude letter can feel deeply therapeutic if it is about someone who is no more. And it can prove particularly helpful if it is about a genuine feeling of gratitude you feel for someone you otherwise have a strained relationship with.



In the midst of dark, we must keep faith, hope, dreams and strength kindled. Live to the fullest, for each moment is rich with possibilities, which we can contemplate only with appreciative eyes and grateful mind. Let us begin the 2022 orbit around the sun, with gratitude in our hearts, wonder in our eyes, curiosity in our minds and strength in our spirit.

The tragic stampede at the Sri Vaishnodevi Shrine that took several lives and left many injured is deeply saddening. I begin today's article by holding a moment of prayerful silence, and request you to join me by doing the same. May the departed souls rest in peace, the injured receive best care, and the bereaved stay in faith and strength.

It is unfortunate to begin the new year on such a traumatic note. It is in moments like these that we don't just become acutely conscious of the stark reality of transience of life and inevitability of death, but also experience a deep sense of gratitude for the precious gift called 'life'. Of course endings do tear us apart. That said, gratitude for what we have and hope to have in future, inspires a sense of meaning and purposefulness. It is perhaps for sombre times like this year's tragic beginning and all that we suffered at personal and societal levels in the year gone-by, that great philosopher Ralph Waldo Emerson's message of gratitude feels even more profound –

*"For each new morning with its light,
 For rest and shelter of the night,
 For health and food, for love and friends,
 For everything Thy goodness sends."*

– Ralph Waldo Emerson

Honouring such innate human spirit of gratitude,

lence of a summer afternoon, an evening walk in garden, riot of blooming spring colours. Feel gratitude for the warmth of proper clothing on a winter night. Delight over a surprise call from someone you have been thinking of. As stoic philosopher and Roman Emperor Marcus Aurelius says, "Dwell on the beauty of life. Watch the stars, and see yourself running with them." See with mindful eyes, and savour with appreciative heart.

2. Gratitude Meditation

First a disclaimer. My intent is to show you the power of meditation when centred on the feelings of gratitude. What I share below is only a suggestive way to do so. I would encourage you to learn meditation from a credible forum/teacher.

Find a quiet moment and space where you can be by yourself in undisturbed solitude for a brief while. Sit in a comfortable position. Gently allow your eyes to close. Breathe slow and deep. Take your time to feel connected within. Notice your breath as it flows in and out, and the thoughts and feelings that show up. Just witness and let them pass. As you feel fully present in the here and now, begin to focus on life experiences, events, things and people that evoke gratitude in you. It could be things that we ordinarily don't notice like

personal space where we make reflective notes about our life experiences and insights. A gratitude journal serves a specific purpose, whereby we consciously express gratitude for experiences, events, things, people or just about anything that we feel appreciative and thankful of. Such a conscious expression of gratitude deepens our appreciation for life, in triumphs and trials alike.

Research shows that gratitude journaling three times a week is more impactful than routine journaling. Not that I mean to discourage you from writing your daily journal. Rather I suggest that two-three times a week you devote yourself to journaling only about your gratitude experiences. And if you have yet to start the practice of journal writing, gratitude-journal is just the perfect way to begin. If possible, keep a separate notebook or diary for this purpose, and give it a name. I call my gratitude journal – **abundance**. I would strongly encourage you to write by-hand. Gratitude is a beautiful feeling that we experience at body, mind, heart and spirit levels. Writing by-hand allows you to embody and feel this experience at a deep level.

There is no right or wrong way to write a gratitude journal. What I share below are few friendly tips to help you get started. Let your personal style evolve based on what holds meaning for you.

disciplined. Follow your natural and spontaneous feelings.

4. Gratitude Letter

If you are one of those people who are not quite comfortable with verbalized in-person expression, please try writing a letter expressing your feelings of appreciation and gratitude. A gratitude letter can feel deeply therapeutic if it is about someone who is no more. And it can prove particularly helpful if it is about a genuine feeling of gratitude you feel for someone you otherwise have a strained relationship with. You may or may not want to send or share it yet. Nonetheless, giving an outward expression to your feelings gently nudges you to look for fresh possibilities in the relationship. And if you do decide to share it, try handing the letter personally.

Make it personal. Address the person in direct voice. And make it specific. Elaborate on details that matter and evoke positive feelings in you. Name the feelings. Please avoid pressuring yourself to get into details. Write only what naturally arises in you along-with or because of this experience and expression of gratitude.

5. Appreciative Conversations with your kids

As I mentioned in my last article, exemplifying practice of gratitude is our noble responsibility towards our children. One good way to do so is by holding appreciative conversations with kids. Encourage them to acknowledge what they have and express how they feel about their privileges. Ask them to talk of special highlights of their day, and the things that they enjoyed and value, rather than asking a casual "how was your day?". Nudge them to express their feelings of appreciation and gratitude, and share their privileges with the less-privileged.

6. Imagine not having...

What if you never had the opportunity to pursue the course that you did! What if you never had the special watch or pen or phone that you can't do without! What if you never had the money to go for a special trip! What if you didn't have the house you feel so secure living in! The list goes on. Whether they are hard-earned or received as a blessing from Supreme-Grace, it is important to value the privileges and gifts we enjoy in life. This exercise is an antithetical but harmless way to do so. Imagine life without the things or people that are inseparable for you. Express gratitude for having them.

7. Give, share and do what you can

What we receive is what we must give back and share forward. This is the way of nature. The more we give and share, the more full we feel receiving. Feel grateful for being blessed with the ability to give, share and serve, and do what you can for others.

Finally, remember that the trials of the year gone-by are not over yet. The air continues to feel thick with anxiety, pain and grief. Yet in the midst of dark, we must keep faith, hope, dreams and strength kindled. Live to the fullest, for each moment is rich with possibilities, which we can contemplate only with appreciative eyes and grateful mind. Let us begin the 2022 orbit around the sun, with gratitude in our hearts, wonder in our eyes, curiosity in our minds and strength in our spirit.

*"Let us believe in a long year that is given to us,
 new, untouched, full of things that have never been,
 full of work that has never been done."*

– Rainer Maria Rilke



Savour every moment of joy. Allow yourself to be mesmerized by the golden glory of the rising sun and the saffron-grey splendour of the setting sun. Revel in a child's gurgling laughter and a young person's glowing smile of confidence. Relish a filling meal and a relaxed evening-out with family. Enjoy the lazy silence of a summer afternoon, an evening walk in garden, riot of blooming spring colours.



and taking forward from last article, I share today some of the most meaningful and impactful ways to practice gratitude in everyday life.

1. See and savour

The neuropsychologists maintain that noticing and savouring pleasant experiences keeps our happy hormones in flow, which in turn do not just boost a feel-good factor, but enhance our overall wellbeing in a substantive way. However, caught in the everyday humdrum of activities or ambitions, we often tend to miss on tiny joys that life offers us in subtle ways. Savour every moment of joy. Allow yourself to be mesmerized by the golden glory of the rising sun and the saffron-grey splendour of the setting sun. Revel in a child's gurgling laughter and a young person's glowing smile of confidence. Relish a filling meal and a relaxed evening-out with family. Enjoy the lazy si-

the gift of sight, sound, touch, smell, taste, or something out of the ordinary like a big life-event such as graduation, wedding, child-birth or promotion. It could be some special people who you value, or some invisible ones like home-helps, colony staff or public utility staff whom we generally take for granted. Allow yourself to feel the sense of gratitude in your whole being. Become aware of the experience at body, mind, heart and spirit level. Notice your breath as you savour the experience of gratitude. As you move towards the closure, rest quietly for a while. Soak in the experience before you return to the buzz of life.

3. Gratitude Journal

It is great to follow gratitude meditation with gratitude journal. Their combined effect is deeply transformational. Many of us are familiar with the concept of 'journal' or what is also known as 'diary'. It is that

- Be specific. For example, "I am grateful to my friend" is better expressed as "I am grateful to my friend ABC (their name) for XYZ (specific act/feeling)."
- Depth enriches the experience. Instead of pressuring yourself to recall and record all details, go deeper into the specific part/aspect of the experience that holds special meaning for you.
- Express gratitude for all that matters, things or events, but most of all for human interactions. When we experience and express gratitude at person-to-person level, it adds richness in relationships and enhances personal wellbeing.
- Avoid repeating. See with fresh eyes and you will notice more and more new things to appreciate.
- Be consistent and regular. Try to journal two to four times a week. But don't be feverishly