



McGill Office of Religious and Spiritual Life (MORSL)

MM4: Gratitude and Humility

Practicing gratitude and humility towards life-long positive development

Saying “thank you” means that we recognize the gifts that come into our lives and, as a result, acknowledge the value of others. Very simply, gratitude can make us less self-focused and more focused on those around us—a hallmark of humble people. Gratitude and humility are mutually reinforcing. Expressing gratitude can induce humility in us, and humble people have a greater capacity for conveying gratitude.

Gratitude is an act of noticing and appreciating all the good you have received from others, from God or a higher power, or from other good things in your life. A gratitude practice can teach us to notice and appreciate the good things, then express gratitude for them. Having a grateful mindset is important because it changes the way we see the world around us and how we think. Gratitude shifts our perspective, so we begin to notice and appreciate all the good things around us. We begin to have more positive thoughts as a result.

To practice gratitude, it is helpful to be intentional in creating activities to help us express gratitude. Below are some suggested activities that can help you start to think of ways to practice gratitude.

1. **Journaling:** Writing down a few things you are grateful for is one of the easiest and most popular exercises available. The purpose of the exercise is to reflect on the past day, few days, or week, and remember 3-5 things you are especially grateful for. In this way, you are focusing on all the good things that happened to you in a given set of time. Imagine your life without the things or people that matter to you before you begin writing. Paying attention to what you are grateful for becomes easier as you practice it.
2. **Practice mindful moments of gratitude:** Take 1 or 2 minutes every day and practice what is called “mindful moments of gratitude”. Simply take a few moments and focus on the present, wherever you are, and start noticing and mentally saying everything you are grateful for. You can even take it a step further and do a gratitude meditation. There are many guided gratitude meditations online. Alternatively, you can simply focus on what you are grateful for during meditation. On the other hand, you can even repeat a simple gratitude affirmation like “I am grateful” during your meditation practice.
3. **Share your gratitude:** A great way to bring more feelings of gratitude into your life is to share and spread your gratitude around. Just like a smile can be contagious, so is a positive, grateful outlook. Simply modelling a grateful attitude is a great way to share your gratitude practice. Writing and sending thank you notes is another great way to express and share your gratitude. Even mentally thanking someone helps put you in a grateful mindset. Speaking about what you are grateful for is another easy way to share your gratitude. It can inspire people around you to notice the good things and feel grateful too.
4. **Use gratitude reminders:** There are many ways to use gratitude reminders. It could be as simple as putting a sticky note on your bathroom mirror that says “I am grateful” or a quote that inspires gratitude for you. Or maybe framing a gratitude quote or affirmation on your wall. Even a mug with a positive saying/quote on it, or one you just designate as your



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gratitude mug, can be a great reminder to focus on gratitude. One can also find songs/music that they can play or sing to help them cultivate gratitude.

5. **Gratitude rock:** The secret to this exercise is that the rock is a symbol, a physical object you can use, to remind yourself of what you have. Just pick a small rock of your choice, or you may substitute it with another object of your choice you may like. Carry this rock around in your pocket, leave it on your desk where you will see it throughout your day, or even wear it on a chain around your neck or your wrist. Whenever you see it or touch it, pause to think about at least one thing that you are grateful for. When you take the stone out of your pocket or off your body at the end of the day, take a moment to remember the things that you were grateful for throughout the day. When you put it on or in your pocket again in the morning, repeat this process to remember what you were grateful for yesterday. When you flip this switch multiple times a day, you will likely find that your average day has become much more positive.

Finally, gratitude grounds us. Focusing on the good things in your life shifts your perspective. It keeps you from overlooking the gifts that are easy to take for granted, which makes you feel more generous, compassionate, and whole.

Further Resources on practicing gratitude and humility

- Here Brother David Steindl-Rest, discusses how various virtues such love, trust hope weave together into Gratitude as a gateway of encountering the other: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gzpFRFsPRMg>. (55 mins, 32 secs)
- Mary Davis explores the theme of spiritual practices of gratitude in times of crisis <https://www.everydayspirit.net/post/spiritual-practices-in-times-of-crisis-gratitude>



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10 Questions to bring more awareness to your gratitude practice¹

Gratitude practice benefits include health and well-being perks, such as reduced anxiety and depression, better sleep, and a greater capacity to stay present in the moment. By letting go of regrets from the past and expectations for the future, we surrender to the present moment and begin to see the beauty in all experiences. With a little practice, this enables us to find immense thankfulness for more of the things we experience.

We Already Have What We Need

Despite the power of gratitude, inner peace and happiness do not lie in specific experiences we pursue or people we lean on themselves. We cannot always count on others to treat us how we desire or provide what we want. It is important that we nurture ourselves and try to cultivate our own happiness rather than looking for it externally in other people, material items or fleeting stimuli.

What many people need to realize is that they already have everything they need to cultivate their own happiness regardless of their circumstances. This is sometimes difficult in a culture that values immediate gratification and materialism, but the type of peace and happiness that comes from within is more fulfilling and sustainable than happiness obtained externally.

Gratitude practice supports intrinsic peace and happiness whether we face joyful or adverse situations.

Let It All Go

We do not have to rely on our past to determine our actions in the future. Each day, we can make a choice to turn away from feeding past patterns such as excessive negativity and live our lives with thankfulness. The choice is always ours.

We, as humans, are not victims of emotional lives beyond our control, but rather have great power to shape the meanings and emotions we experience through our choices. When we decide it's time to let go of thoughts about *what should be* or *what could have been*, for example, we tap into our own power as this choice enables us to reconnect with simple pleasures that we only recognize when staying in the present.

The subjects of our gratitude will likely include simple things like watching light dancing through leaves or a favorite song coming on the radio during a traffic jam, as well as much greater things, like the wisdom we gain through a challenging life process. Thankfulness for whatever we find good in our lives and the world, regardless of circumstances, helps us to cultivate resilient joy and to feel more fully alive.

¹ Adapted from 10 Questions To Bring More Awareness To Your Gratitude Practice (Feb. 5, 2018) from the Pachamama Alliance Website <https://blog.pachamama.org> © 2017



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Awareness Questions

1. What relationships am I thankful for?
2. What am I grateful for that I learned about myself the past year?
3. What activities am I grateful for?
4. What insights have I gained that I'm grateful for?
5. What have others done that has benefitted my life - even if these people are strangers?
6. Is there anything I'm taking for granted that I'm grateful for?
7. What challenges have I been faced with? What did I learn and how can I be thankful for them?
8. What about my environment can I be thankful for?
9. What opportunities or privileges do I have that I'm thankful for?
10. How can I say thank you to others, to myself, to the earth and to something greater more often?

**To find additional Meaning Making
Workshop resources, visit our website:**



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