

A Heart Full of Gratitude

"Love is the way I walk in gratitude." ~ A Course in Miracles

When you think of the upcoming holidays what comes to mind? Family get togethers? Spending money? Stress? For most of us, singing to the tune of the "holiday blues" seems more realistic than "Joy to the World." Depression occurs more frequently during the holidays than any other time of the year. Although the holidays present us with a wonderful chance to bond with each other, to celebrate the spirit within each and every one of us, they're often imbued with stress and anxiety.

Why? Because we've been taught to succumb to societal norms; spending time with others and buying gifts is *expected*. Yet whenever we do something out of obligation--versus pure desire and willingness--we're not following our heart and stress and anxiety are likely to ensue. Obligation demands sacrifice and sacrifice is in opposition to love. And since most of us have been raised to believe that love requires sacrifice, our perception of what we *should* do, versus what we truly *want* to do, has become convoluted. Whenever we feel obligated to do anything (this applies to giving *and* receiving), there's a sense of sacrifice and expectation.

The greatest gift we can give another is our willingness to be happy and at peace, which means taking care of our body, mind and soul. These "gifts" are not only genuine and from the heart, but they're free. This year, while contemplating what to give, consider first, what you *want* to give, then notice your body and your energy. If your energy sags while thinking about what to give--stop. It means you're considering something you really don't want to do and are not following your heart. Giving from your heart means listening to it and following it. As you access your heart's desire, your energy will increase, leaving you inspired and at peace. Think

about it; what better gift can you give someone than your love? Despite the commercialism around the holiday season, the greatest gift we can ever give is our willingness to be ourselves, to be true to who we are and extend to *that* to everyone.

Finally, appreciating all that we have produces inner peace and tireless joy. As we relish all the wonderful aspects of our life, more abundance is allowed to pour forth, creating a consistent wellspring of balance, joy and peace. Therefore, this holiday season, practice focusing on that which is good in your life. I once read an article on prayer where a Unity minister stated, "Most people pray for what they don't want, not what they want." This observation is indicative of the tremendous resistance we have to staying in the moment and to affirming the beauty present in our life.

I invite you to celebrate not only the big moments during the holidays, so worthy of appreciation, but also the little blessings that come your way. Below are three practices for living in gratitude and when applied, will increase the flow of love and abundance in every area of your life:

1. ***Start Your Day with a Heart Full of Gratitude.***

As you awaken each morning, bring gratitude into your awareness. Before getting out of bed, take a deep breath and silently say a prayer of thanks for the bed that you slept in, for your body that will carry you through you through another day, the song bird singing outside your window, and the new day that is awaiting you. No blessing is too small to count and everyone counted sets a tone for whatever the day may hold.

2. ***Take Time to Appreciate Life by Slowing Down!***

Too often, we're in a hurry. Our breathing then becomes shallow and we're not fully in the moment. It's difficult to experience appreciation when we're feeling aggravated, impatient or stressed. Rather than moving quickly, take a moment to slow down, breathe deeply, and focus on one thing or person that you are grateful for.

3. ***"Book-End" the Day in Thankfulness***

Just as it is essential to begin your day with a prayer of gratitude, it's equally important to end the day with a prayer of thanks. Before going to sleep, think of all the blessings you received throughout the day (and keep in mind that even "challenges" can be "blessings in

disguise”). Further, consider the people in your life who deserve gratitude and acknowledgment. Remember all of the love that you have given, and all of the love that you have received. Nothing will create more abundance and fulfillment than experiencing the love that has flowed through your life, and continues to flow through it each and every day. This is how you “book-end” your day and usher in a peaceful night’s sleep.