



# FEELING GRATEFUL

By Halé Sofia Schatz

It was the end of a busy work day with back-to-back client consultations. When I wasn't meeting with a client I was glued to the computer, returning emails, planning programs and speaking engagements. When my days are this hectic, I like to treat myself by going to the health club. For me, nothing washes away the worries of the day like a good long steam. I attribute this to my Turkish roots.

I settled into the misty quiet of the steam room, removed from the hustle and bustle of the world. The heat enveloped me and allowed my body, mind, and emotions to completely relax. I let out a long sigh. Sitting alone in the small steam room, a profound sense of gratitude welled up in me—for my family, my work, the many lives I'm privileged to touch, the freedoms I enjoy. And I felt a deep sense of well-being. As I walked out to my car in the fresh air, my heart was wide open to the birds I heard chirping in the trees, the late day sun and crisp wind on my face. I felt so grateful for the gift of life.

Gratitude has the power to transform us. When we feel grateful, we step outside of our little, self-involved idea of the world and experience a larger, more connected way of being. The feelings of connection, expansion, hopefulness, and optimism that are inherent in the attitude of gratitude are our natural state. Young children embody these attitudes in everything they do. A three year old who falls down while chasing her ball may cry for a moment but she will get up again and go after that ball.

Feeling grateful doesn't mean we live problem-free lives. Who doesn't have numerous daily concerns, from health to relationships, family, or frustrations with work? To top it off, the world we live in now is so connected technologically that we can see, read about, and hear the fears, concerns, and injustices that affect people all



over the globe. How can we not be affected by the perpetual litany of global problems that stream through our computers, televisions, newspapers, and go straight to our heart?

Most of my clients are completely overloaded with the pressure of keeping up with their lives and utterly overwhelmed by the amount of stimulation that buzzes through their day. The easiest way to deal with this is to sedate and comfort ourselves: we bury our emotions in overeating, overwork, non-essential medications, addictive shopping, too much media, or over-indulgence in sex. We build walls around ourselves in attempt for protection. But walls mean that we might push away others and to feelings of isolation and disconnection, and like nothing is ever enough.

Gratitude is a terrific antidote to 21<sup>st</sup> century malaise. I know a young woman who has suffered chronic depression for most of her adult life. During a particularly dark time, she decided that she must be able to think of at least a dozen things to be grateful for each day or else her life wasn't worth living. When she realized there was considerably more than a mere dozen things she was grateful for, she knew she had reason to push through the hard times. The practice of gratitude lifts you up, buoys your spirit, opens your heart. It means recognizing much of life for the gift it is, and not taking it for granted.

Sometimes we can transform problems into happiness, or at least into moments of personal growth, by feeling grateful, rather than resentful, for unpleasant situations we face. Traffic jams, for example, are terrific opportunities to practice gratitude. Nobody really likes to be stuck in traffic, but when it happens you do have a choice: you can be frustrated about your situation, just fuming that you can't get where you want in the time you want, or you can let go of the agitation and accept where you are. Instead of focusing on your frustration, try for a moment to feel grateful for the extra time you suddenly have (and we all want more time, right!) and for the breath in your body and the fact that you are alive.

Ayse, a 37 year old professional woman who was diagnosed with colon cancer, worked with me for 6 months before she was ready to make dietary changes. She was fearful of any change and needed my help to relax, release, and receive before she finally made the healthier food changes. Cultivating an attitude of opening and receiving is equal in importance – and often a

necessary prelude – to putting healthy food into one's body. Just like my relaxation and release in the steam room, this opening and willingness to be grateful can allow us to connect to a deeper sense of ourselves in the world, which in turn naturally leads to healthier choices in every other aspect of our lives.

Living a life filled with meaning and connection can be simple. The key to this is in the details of our lives as well as our attitude. If we are open and willing to receive, then we can be nourished. Try this simple exercise. Make a fist. Now open your hand. How did you feel when your hand was in a fist? How about when it was open? Now try the same exercise with your heart.

Earlier this year I initiated a 40-day gratitude project online and invited people from the U.S., Europe, and Turkey to participate. Twice a day, people from all over the world focused at the same exact moment (we worked out the time zones) on the feeling of gratitude in our lives. Feeling the power of the group's intention allowed everyone to feel connected. It was quite a significant experiment to unite with each other through the power of gratitude. Each of us experienced transformational shifts in our daily perceptions of what is important and how to nourish that awareness of our deeper self. One of the most transformational experiences for people through this practice was learning that they could receive. The attitude of gratitude allowed each person to pay closer attention to what they have rather than what is missing. As a result, many people had the experience of life slowing down, becoming more meaningful, an adventure rather than a chore.

After only three days of gratitude practice, Zeynep, a full-time working mother of three, noted that previously when she was stressed, she inevitably became short-tempered with her children and ex-husband. By attuning to gratitude ever day, she was able to catch herself when she became tense or negative. She was able to stop, take a deep breath, acknowledge her feelings, and feel how insignificant her problems seemed in comparison to all the beauty, love, and support she had in her life.

Another participant who was in the process of moving, dealing with many difficulties at work, and generally going through a stressful period, realized that tuning into gratitude allowed her to awaken each morning with an openness for

something to happen. A more joyous approach to her life emerged as she released the worries and stresses which were previously overwhelming her. She realized that every day something came into her life that was a complete and unexpected surprise and she opened and actively engaged in this awareness with a spirit of fun and adventure.

Practicing gratitude daily allows us to open to receive nourishment at deep levels of body, mind, and spirit. Many people in our 40-day practice testified to the feelings of love that emerged as they practiced gratitude. To open and maintain the expansive quality of gratitude, we need to nourish it by attending to it, valuing it and in these ways feeding it. My clients find it so much easier to nourish gratitude and all the gifts it brings when they are also feeding themselves well. Feeding yourself cleaner, stronger, and lighter, and more vibrant foods will naturally motivate you to gratitude for the many gifts in your life. In feeling gratitude you will naturally feel full. Full of life, full of love, and full of joy.

*If you have had experiences involving gratitude in your life, please share them with me. You can write to me at [info@heartofnourishment.com](mailto:info@heartofnourishment.com)*

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**Note:** *Join Hale Sofia Schatz at Hillside Su Hotel in Antalya, October 4 - November 5 for her Fall Holistic Detox Programs. For more information please contact: Sibel Ak, 242 249 07 00 or [sibelak@hillside.com.tr](mailto:sibelak@hillside.com.tr)*

*For more information about her November Istanbul programs and individual consults please contact, 212-352-9350 or [ay@aydanismanlik.com](mailto:ay@aydanismanlik.com)*

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