

GRATITUDE

In a previous article, I described the “dimensions of gratitude” as Intrapersonal, Interpersonal, and Transpersonal. I will now focus on Interpersonal Gratitude, the thanks we have for other people in our lives.

It’s highly likely that we have received much benefit from many people in every phase of our lives. Our infancy and early childhood had constant need for parental and para-parental care and concern. In our school years, there were teachers and other caretakers who helped our development. By High School, there was likely a teacher or two who excited our interest in one field or another. Our family and peers probably played an important role. We may have been excited to develop a special interest and/or mentored through difficulties by a special, caring person. We were the recipients of givingness.

The success of society and community is based on webs of cooperation (including people we are not acquainted with). Gratitude is intertwined with the will to cooperate, and has been called “societal glue.” We give a courtesy, receive a courtesy, and we are “all in this together.”

I’d like to emphasize the benefit of expressing our gratitude. “Thank you,” verbalized when any benefits are received, is common in community. All cultures have words for it. Written thanks are highly recommended to individuals who have



been lastingly helpful. When we write down our gratitudes in the form of a journal, it is particularly beneficial.

Expressing gratitude renders us happy. Scientific studies have been conducted using a technique called functional MRI (fMRI). fMRI can detect changes in activity and blood supply to specific centers in our brain. What they found was that when a subject expressed deep gratitude, there was activation of brain centers rich in dopamine, serotonin, and oxytocin. These are neurotransmitters described as “pro-social,” “pro-pleasure.”

Gratitude leads to positive emotions. Additionally, gratitude is a Relaxor, and induces the Relaxation Response, which suppresses the Stress Response. It helps to have intervals of gratitude in times of stress.

In summary, Interpersonal Gratitude is a response to benefits we have received from others. Expressing our gratitude elevates the state of mind of the receiver and the giver. One of the very best things we could do with our gratitude is pay it forward, in the form of acts of kindness, generosity, and love. ■

— *Namaste!*

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