GRATITUDE FOR THE SENSES:

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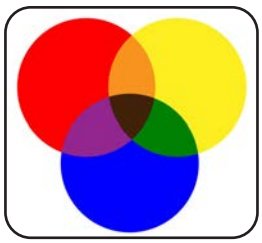
VISION!

We have five major senses: vision, hearing, touch, taste, and smell. They are all quite complex, versatile and marvelous. Our life experience is majorly associated with them. They serve us daily throughout our lives. Although all our senses are important, most people think vision is the one most difficult to live without.

As is the case with all other animals, vision is a crucial factor in survival. Our visual system is a triumph of Nature and DNA. Complex, image-forming eyes developed early in animal evolution. Vision helps animals navigate their environment, tell day from night, find food, peers and mates, and avoid predators and dangers.

Here, let's discuss vision from the standpoint of gratitude. How can we thank our visual powers enough? It is estimated that 40% of our brain capacity is involved with vision, and 80% of the information we receive is through our eyes. That's major!

How do our eyes work? Light energy in the form of photons enters through our clear, front corneas. Then it enters through our pupils and gets focused by a lens onto a back screen, the retina. The retinae are actually outgrowths of the brain. They are highly innervated, with specialized cells called rods and cones. Rods are most concentrated on the sides of the cornea, and respond to low levels of light. Cones are concentrated in the center of the retina and are sensitive to colors. As in photography and television, color is a mixture of red, blue, and yellow components. The retinal neurons have photosensitive neurotransmitters called *opsins*.



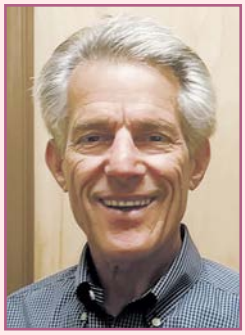
Opsins convert color input to electrical output. The optic nerve delivers this output to the visual cortex, which makes sense of the signals with the speed and power of a supercomputer!

Gratitude comes from realizing how much we rely on vision all through our waking hours, and how difficult our lives would be without it. Vision allows us to take in our surroundings, including hazards to avoid, as well as information to take in, and beauty to admire.

How can we best take care of our visual system? Protecting our overall health can go a long way to keeping our eyes healthy. Eat a balanced diet. Be physically active. Wear UV-blocking sunglasses on bright days.

Good nighttime sleep is important. If you spend a lot of time using a computer—who doesn't nowadays?—consider using amber-colored, blue-blocker glasses. Also, use the 20:20:20 rule—every 20 minutes, look 20 or more feet away, for at least 20 seconds. You could also close your eyes for 20 or more seconds, and imagine a peaceful scene. While doing so, you can form a Mona Lisa smile and breathe slowly and smoothly.

Finally, it is advisable to get an annual exam from an Optometrist or Ophthalmologist. I hope we see eye-to-eye! ■

— Namaste!

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