

Gratitude When You've Got Attitude

Guided Meditation

Date / Time:

So far today, have you brought kind awareness to your:

Thoughts? Heart? Body? None

To begin this Meditation, please bring kind awareness to

- why you chose this topic
- how your belly, chest, and head each feel when you reflect on this topic
- the emotions that you can associate with these visceral feelings
- the positive or negative impact of any stories you believe in regarding this topic
- the fact that many others are feeling similarly about this topic as you
- how you might feel with increased awareness around this topic
- when you can apply increased mindfulness to this topic in your day-to-day life



MEDITATION

“Count your blessing! Stay positive! Good vibes only!”

Pop culture puts a lot of emphasis on gratitude.

But it can be really hard to be grateful when we're full to the brim with anger, frustration, hopelessness or grief.

Instead of trying to force gratitude, which often doesn't work, this meditation allows the experience of not being grateful – of being pissed off, sad, lost, or in despair – before finding the space to be grateful.

So how do we do this? What does it mean to “make space” for a feeling?

Psychologist and biophysicist Dr. Peter Levine studied how animals release trauma. After they've been under threat, animals recover by allowing their bodies to shake.

Because emotions live in our bodies.

As much as they might feel like ephemeral things we cannot grasp or understand, our emotions are actually physical and chemical manifestations of our thoughts, which our bodies are trying to process.

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If you want to experience gratitude but are feeling blocked, ask yourself:

What's eclipsing my gratitude?

What is stopping me from feeling more grateful?

Try to keep to keep the answers to feelings (i.e. "I'm feeling frustrated") rather than stories (ie. "I'm mad at my sister and she won't return any of my texts and she's being passive-aggressive and...").

It might help to write your answers down, or say them out loud.

"I'm feeling lonely."

"I'm anxious and afraid."

"I just feel hopeless."

(pause a while...)

Once you feel you've listed out the range of difficult emotions you're feeling, choose one, and explore your body to see where you are experiencing it.

Emotions often dwell in our chests, our throat area, or our stomach. We may feel a tightening or a fluttering. It might feel like there's a brick or a rock sitting in one of these areas.

The idea is not to blast through this feeling, but simply to notice and experience it, the way we would a work of art at a gallery.

(pause)

Resistance can come up at this point.

I don't want to feel this – it's uncomfortable!

If that's happening for you, validate the resistance as an emotion too, and start there.

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As Buddhist nun and writer Pema Chodron wisely says, "Start where you are."

Where does that resistance live in your body? Where do you feel not wanting to feel?

Observe your emotion and its accompanying sensations as you would looking at a piece of art at a museum – with curiosity, not trying to change it.

Does the emotion feel like it has a texture? Or a color?

If the temptation to jump into the story comes up ("I just need to tell my sister she's wrong!"), that's okay.

Notice it and gently put it aside, returning to the experience – the energy of what's going on.

Pema Chodron also has great advice on experiencing our emotions:

"Stay."

She advises us to ask ourselves to stay the way we would with a puppy. Except now, we're asking ourselves to stay with the emotion, even for a few moments.

But we're doing it kindly. We're not shouting "STAY!" at the puppy, who would probably react by cowering and doing the opposite of our request. We're being gentle.

"Staaaay..."

"Staaaaay..."

We might take a few deep breaths, breathing into the area of our body where we're having this experience.

As you go through this exercise, you might notice the emotion moving, or changing consistency, or... vanishing.

This is the beauty of meditation: we see that everything we experience is impermanent, and that our bodies are actually designed to process emotions.

(pause for a while)

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Once you've stayed with your more difficult emotions for as long as you feel called to, you might notice if a tiny space opens up for some gratitude to come in. Which might simply be,

"I'm grateful to have the time to sit quietly."

And that's it.

Or you might notice the beauty of the light where you're sitting.

You might experience gratitude for your health, or the fact that you are safe, right now.

Gradually, you might notice there is room for a bit of lightness. And sometimes, a bit more.

You might find that the longer you stay gently with your emotions, the more space there is for gratitude to seep in.

(pause)

It might not happen the first time you do this meditation. Or the fifth.

Sometimes, we are overflowing with other emotions that need to be seen, heard, and accepted before we can get anywhere near gratitude.

But if you practice regularly, you might notice that you get to more and more of a sense of spaciousness – for the difficult emotions AND for gratitude.

The difficult negative emotions might still be present (it's not an easy thing to be alive today and NOT feel anxiety, grief, and anger), but you might notice a widening of your circle, which also includes gratitude.

And the more we practice this – this genuine experiencing of gratitude, rather than forcing it on ourselves – the more easily it comes the next time, and the next.

