

Gratitude as a Spiritual Gift

By the time the ambulance had arrived at our home, my husband's speech was slurred, his mobility was impaired and his eyes were not focusing. He was unable to get on the stretcher. An hour later he was in the Albany Med ER, alert, moving without assistance and speaking clearly. His eye movement appeared to be normal. Within that short time, his stroke had apparently resolved leaving no residual damage.

As I think back on that night three years ago, a profound sense of gratitude lingers to this day. I've had plenty of time to consider what the flip side of the coin could have meant for us, and I've begun to make myself more aware of the gift of gratitude-the gift that keeps on giving. For me, it has become a deliberate pause that helps me to center on what's really meaningful in my life and that I am not always in control. Maybe I take too much for granted, or feel entitled, or settle into unrealistic expectations. Certainly, I have lost that sense of appreciation for that which has been given to me.

Gratitude, on the other hand, seems to have become a grounding force, reminding me of my interdependence on all of God's creation. I am equal, not better or more worthy. I am free because others allow me to be free. I am blessed because I need others and they need me. Although It may be an unfamiliar feeling to experience the presence of gratefulness in our lives, that awakening must be developed and nurtured if it will endure. We need to retrain our thoughts to be alert to those times when we have received from others. As Robert Wickes writes in *Everyday Simplicity*, "Receive, don't take. What will help me be more deeply grateful so that I am open enough to receive what I am being given In so many different (and sometimes mundane) ways by God?"

Practice, practice and more practice! Some find it helpful to end the day by recalling meaningful moments, or to reflect each morning on an opportunity to share a small measure of gratitude that day. Sending a thank you note is a tangible reinforcement of appreciation, as is an email or a phone call. Make a habit of saying "thank you" for help given, and remember that "please" tells others that their assistance is needed. Look for the glass half full, or the silver lining, and share your positivity with others. By voicing our own appreciation, we can reinforce our new conscious awareness and also plant the seeds of gratefulness for those around us.

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A recent article from NIH also discusses the emotional and physical health benefits that may well be related to the attitudes of gratitude and thanksgiving. *Practicing Gratitude: Ways to Improve Positivity* was taken from the web at <https://newsinhealth.nih.gov/2019/03/practicing-gratitude>

