

# What does it mean to be a People of *Gratitude*?



## Gratitude is the Foundation

**G**ratITUDE is the foundation for so many of the values and qualities we hope to nurture in our lives. Gratitude is a foundation for turning our thoughts from unrealized desires, to an appreciation of what we already have. Gratitude is a foundation for appreciating our loved ones and bringing more love and care to the relationships that matter to us. Gratitude is a foundation for building more joy and happiness in life. It helps us turn anxiety, worry and fear, into acceptance and recognition of the good we know in life. Gratitude is a foundation for touching this earth with reverence, a foundation for seeing life and the beauty of creation as a gift, and treating it as such.

Practicing gratitude, however, takes discipline and practice. Sure, we are grateful when something really unexpected and positive happens, but what about the thousands of small things that are a part of each day that we often take for granted. The sun rising,

the breath we take, the friends we have. These give us life and give our lives meaning and connection. And then, of course, there are things like clean water from the tap (if we have it, because not everyone does), enough food to eat and shelter (if we have it), a car that starts (when it does), a pet that is happy to see us, a stranger who smiles at us when we feel alone.

A dozen years ago, I read a newsletter article from a Unitarian Universalist minister who shared that he had created a regular practice of taking time each time he walked through the doorway to his home (going out and going in) to stop and take a moment to be grateful, to think of something or several things that he was grateful for. He talked about the difference this simple practice had in reshaping his attitude in more positive ways. He felt happier, more satisfied. He experienced more joy internally and in his relationships. After all these years, I still remember that article. After reading it, I too tried this practice. Every time I crossed the threshold of my apartment, I stopped to give thanks – for people, for conveniences, for a sunny day, for getting to work on time, for being home – for anything and anyone that I was grateful for in that moment. And indeed, it shifted how I looked at my day and how I felt throughout my day.

Now a confession. My regular gratitude practice, since reading that article, has been intermittent. For a month

or two, I will develop a regular way of being intentional about giving thanks – from beginning and ending my day with gratitude, or each time I enter or leave the house, or even ending a regular meditation practice with gratitude. I know the power of gratitude. I have experienced its power to unlock more love, joy, hope, and reverence in my life, but I also know my practice of it is imperfect and irregular. This month, I invite all of us (me included) to choose a regular way to be grateful each day and to pay attention to how the regular practice (or even momentary practice) of gratitude shapes your attitude and outlook.

In our world today, we are bombarded with negativity, slights, criticism. This attitude spirit undermines collaboration, appreciation, hope and collective action. We are often quick to criticize and slow to offer praise. What would it mean to shift this - to be quick and abundant with praise, and reserved with criticism? What would it mean to really live lives of gratitude, to be a people of gratitude? Could it be that practicing, sharing and living the value of gratitude might be one of the most radical things we can do?

*Rev. Susan*

*I will be grateful  
for this day.*



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## Living the Theme: Gratitude

Choose one of the exercises below to engage the theme. Come to the meeting prepared to share how you tried to experience gratitude and what you learned from the practice.

### 1 *Gratitude Reading*

Select a reading that is meaningful to you and can carry you through the entire month of gratitude. Perhaps it is a book of poetry, scripture, a book on gratitude, or the quotes from this packet – anything that resonates with you and allows you to look inward with gratitude. Next, try to practice a daily morning and evening reflection.

### Morning Practice

**Quiet your Mind:** Sit in a comfortable place and take a few breaths to quiet your mind and focus your attention.

**Engage the Reading:** Engage the text by reading it silently and aloud several times. Allow the words and their meaning to settle within you.

**Contemplate:** Consider the reading and your response. You may want to write down your responses. Are there certain words or phrases that especially catch your attention, words that comfort or unsettle? Why? How could the reading, its meaning and wisdom, inform your actions on this day?

**Act:** Allow the wisdom that resonates in you through your contemplation of the reading to inform how you act. What does this wisdom mean for your life? What does it mean for this day?

### Evening Practice

**Quiet your Mind:** Sit in a comfortable place and take a few breaths to quiet your mind and focus your attention.

**Reengage the Reading:** Read the text one more time to make it present for your evening practice.

**Listen to Your Life:** Now, turn your attention to the day itself. Recall the experiences that were especially meaningful, comforting, or disturbing. What do these mean to you? These experiences are the sacred texts of our lives. They have the power to teach us if we allow them to do so. You may want to record your reflections in a journal.

### 2 *Thirty Days of Gratitude*

**Personal Activity:** November is a good time to count our blessings as we approach Thanksgiving Day. This month, make an intentional practice of keeping a gratitude journal. This can be a physical journal or even an electronic one. Choose a time of day (perhaps morning, before bed, or mid day) and each day at same time, take a few moments to find a comfortable spot, take a few deep breaths, center yourself and ask yourself “What am I grateful for?” List the things that come up. Each day, try to think of two things that you did not think of before that you are grateful for (while also feeling free to repeat things or people you have named on previous days). Even if you are not successful at doing this each day, try to keep it up throughout the month. In other words, don’t give up if you miss some days. At the end of the month, take time to reflect and write

about how – or IF – this practice made a difference to you, in outlook or attitude or in other aspect. Was it ever difficult to find something to be grateful for on a daily basis? Did you find that you became more aware of gratefulness while you practiced this exercise?

### Family Activity:

Invite your family into this practice of gratitude. In a kind of reverse advent calendar (as we approach Thanksgiving), invite your children to create small drawings for each day of something(s) they are grateful for and post them in order by date. At the end, take a picture of the 30 pieces of art to remember their gratitude collage. You can also take time before a meal or at bedtime as a family to share things you are grateful for. Consider writing them down and taking a picture of list. How might you use that to remember to be grateful? For more ideas about observing 30 days of gratitude, go to the website

<http://www.30daysofgratitude.org/>

### 3 *Gratitude Circle*

**Family Activity:** This can become an ongoing activity before a meal. Each person seated around the table is invited to share one thing for which they are grateful. It can be for that day, for the last week, or just in general. Sometimes by going around a second time, family members can play off of and build on what others have shared. The point is that there is often much to be grateful for if we are paying attention.

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## Questions to Live With

Simply look over these questions and find one that “hooks” you. Live with it for a while. Allow it to regularly break into – and break open – your ordinary thoughts. Then come to your group prepared to share the journey.

1. **What is your most profound experience of gratitude?**
2. What value do you place on the **experience** of gratitude? On the **expression** of gratitude?
3. When has someone shown you profound gratitude and what impact did that have on you? **How did you feel when someone expressed deep gratitude?**
4. What would a **spiritual practice of gratitude** look like? Is it a practice that calls to you? Have you ever had one? What was the impact?
5. **Where are the deep places of gratitude in your life?**
6. **Where did you learn about gratitude?** Did you learn it early or late in life? Are you still learning and who or what continues to be your teacher?
7. **How do you model gratitude for others, including younger generations?** Are there ways you try to teach your children and/or grandchildren about gratitude? Are there struggles or obstacles you find in practicing, sharing or teaching gratitude?
8. Where do you feel like you need more gratitude? What parts of your life do you wish to feel more gratitude, but struggle to find it? **What are the obstacles to feeling more grateful?**
9. Gratitude and appreciation are connected in that we often feel appreciated when others show us gratitude. Are there place where you feel under-appreciated? **How do you navigate or communicate your needs for being shown gratitude and appreciation?**
10. **Do you regard life as a gift?** Why or why not? How do you respond if you do consider life to be a gift?
11. **What in your life—people, events, places, objects, etc.—do you regard as gifts?** What obligation or responsibilities, if any, do these evoke in you?
12. **What stories of gratitude would you like to share?**
13. If you were to win an award and had to prepare a speech, **who would want to thank?**
14. **How do you notice others expressing gratitude?**

*We often take for granted the very things that most deserve our attention.*

*-Cynthia Ozick*

# What does it mean to be a people of *Gratitude*?



## Wise Words

An awe so quiet I don't know when it began. A gratitude had begun to sing in me.

*-Denise Levertov*

### We Lift Our Hearts in Thanks

For the sun and the dawn  
Which we did not create;  
For the moon and the evening  
Which we did not make;  
For food which we plant  
But cannot grow;  
For friends and loved ones  
We have not earned and cannot buy;  
For this gathered company  
Which welcomes us as we are,  
From wherever we have come;  
For all our free [congregations]  
That keep us human and  
Encourage us in our quest for  
Beauty truth and love;  
For all things which come to us  
As gifts of being from sources  
Beyond ourselves;  
Gifts of life and love and friendship  
We lift up our hearts in thanks this day.

*-Richard M. Fewkes, UU Minister*

If the only prayer you ever say in your whole life is "thank you," that would suffice.

*-Meister Eckhart*

This a wonderful day. I've never seen this one before.

*-Maya Angelou*

From experience we know that whenever we are truly awake and alive, we are also truly grateful.

*-Br. David Steindl-Rast*

Piglet noticed that even though he had a Very Small Heart, it could hold a rather large amount of Gratitude.

*-A. A. Milne*

If you must look back,  
do so forgivingly.

If you must look forward,  
do so prayerfully.

However, the wisest thing you can do  
is be present in the present...gratefully.

*-Maya Angelou*

Many years ago, when I was married, I was becoming increasingly unhappy with the way life was going. My ex wasn't a bad person, I wasn't a bad person. We just weren't good for each other. Toward the end of the marriage, a coworker asked me one day if I realized that everything out of my mouth was a negative. Of course, I wanted to deny that. Who wouldn't? But later that night I thought long and hard about what she had asked. From that moment forward I made the decision that everything out of my mouth would be positive. If I wasn't happy with something in my life, I would change it. If I was happy with something in my life, I would be consciously grateful for it. This person never realized that with that one question she transformed my life into one that I am very grateful for today.

*-Small Group Facilitator*

When brimming with gratitude, one's heartbeat must surely result in outgoing love.

*-Bill Wilson, co-founder of AA*

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## Wise Words

We all have our personal reasons for gratitude, but it also seems important to express gratitude as a community. If we're grateful for what we've found in a UU congregation, let's make more effort to pass it on. If we're grateful for material things, let's be more generous. The importance of gratitude isn't who or what it's directed to, but what the grateful feeling inspires us to do. I think expressing gratitude as a community will in every way affect our attitudes and actions as a congregation.

*-Small Group Facilitator*

Gratitude can transform common days into thanksgivings, turn routine jobs into joy, and change ordinary opportunities into blessings.

*-William Arthur Ward*

I write about the power of trying, because I want to be okay with failing. I write about generosity because I battle selfishness. I write about joy because I know sorrow. I write about faith because I almost lost mine, and I know what it is to be broken and in need of redemption. I write about gratitude because I am thankful - for all of it.

*-Kristin Armstrong*

“Thank you” is the best prayer that anyone could say. I say that one a lot. Thank you expresses extreme gratitude, humility, understanding.

*-Alice Walker*

I had just graduated from college in Michigan and decided to “Make my fortune in the West.” I packed up some stuff, tied it to the back of a motorcycle, and set off for California. Towards early afternoon it started to rain rather hard and I sought shelter under a bridge. I was feeling rather disappointed as I was only a few hours into my trip and already it was delayed. As I was waiting for the rain to lift, I looked around and noticed something at the top of the bridge abutment. I climbed up the slope and

there sheltered between the bridge beams was a sleeping bag with a note attached. It read. “You are welcome to use this sleeping bag but when you are finished, leave it in this location so that others can use it.” It lifted my spirits to know that others were passing this way on their own journeys. I felt part of an “On the Road” culture and was grateful to the donor of the sleeping bag. This was just the beginning of a journey that would last two months. There were many times when I was grateful for the help I received from strangers and a few times when I was able to offer help to others. Gratitude was an integral part of that journey, from beginning to end.

*-Small Group Facilitator*

Lyrics from “The Dance” by Garth Brooks:

“And now I'm glad I didn't know  
The way it all would end, the way it all would go  
Our lives are better left to chance; I could have missed the pain  
But I'd have had to miss the dance”

When I lost my partner of 28 years to an accident, I was devastated with grief. Even in the darkest, deepest hole of that grief, these lines played over in my head. Had I known how it all would end – with sudden tragic death – I still wouldn't have wanted to miss the dance. It was the gratitude I felt for the 28 great years that we did have that helped pull me through the pain and allow me to become whole again.

*-Small Group Facilitator*

Silent gratitude isn't very much to anyone.

*-Gertrude Stein*

Feeling gratitude and not expressing it is like wrapping a present and not giving it.

*-William Arthur Ward*

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## Wise Words

Thankfulness is the beginning of gratitude. Gratitude is the completion of thankfulness. Thankfulness may consist merely of words. Gratitude is shown in acts.

*-Henri Frederic Amiel*

Enjoy the little things for one day you may look back and realize they were the big things.

*-Robert Brault*

At times, our own light goes out and is rekindled by a spark from another person. Each of us has cause to think with deep gratitude of those who have lighted the flame within us.

*-Albert Schweitzer*

A hundred times a day I remind myself that my inner and outer life depend on the labors of other people, living and dead, and that I must exert myself in order to give in the full measure I have received and am still receiving.

*-Albert Einstein*

If I had my life to live over again, I would ask that not a thing be changed, but that my eyes be opened wider.

*-Jules Renard*

Gratitude turns what we have into enough and more. It turns denial into acceptance, chaos into order, confusion into clarity....it makes sense of our past, brings peace for today, and creates a vision for tomorrow.

*-Melodie Beattie*

A thankful person is thankful under all circumstances. A complaining soul complains even if he lives in paradise.

*- Baha'u'llah*

## GRATITUDE

Often I have felt that I must praise my world  
For what my eyes have seen these many years  
And what my heart has loved.

And often I have tried to start my lines:

"Dear earth," i say

And then I pause

To look once more.

Soon I am bemused

And far away in wonder.

So I never get beyond "Dear Earth."

*-Max A. Rapp, To Meet the Asking Years*

I read about this idea right before New Year's this year. I can't remember it's official name, but I call it my "jarful of gratitude."

A jar sits on my kitchen counter as does a Ziploc bag full of paper slips and a pen. Everyday I write the date and something for which I am grateful that occurred during the day. Sometimes it is specific, such as "morning hike with Heidi and good conversation" while other times it's general, "good friends." I do forget some days, and if I have been traveling, I put in one slip for the dates I was gone, but I am pretty consistent.

This jarful of gratitude has become an incredible spiritual practice for a few reasons. First, I have found it is truly good for my soul to think about one or more things that have occurred during the day for which I am grateful. I am sure it will come as no surprise that the practice is especially powerful on challenging days. Also, I have occasionally gone into the jar to check the last date I wrote something. It is amazing how quickly I forget the things I was grateful for even two weeks ago!

*(continued on next page)*

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## Wise Words

I am looking forward to spending some time this New Year's Eve revisiting all of my thankful moments of 2015. And, I plan to continue the practice in 2016.

*-Worship Associate*

For this fragile planet earth, its times and tides, its sunsets and season: We give thanks this day. For our human community, our common past and future hope...our capacity to work for peace and justice in the midst of hostility and oppression: We give thanks this day.

*-Excerpted from "We Give Thanks This Day" by former UUA President, Rev. O. Eugene Pickett*

May we recall in gratitude all that has given us birth.

*-Joy Atkinson, UU Minister*

In relation to others, gratitude is good manners; in relation to ourselves, it is a habit of the heart and a spiritual discipline.

*-Daphne Rose Kingma*

Gratitude is heaven itself.

*-William Blake*

i thank You God for this amazing day:  
for the leaping greenly spirits of trees  
and a blue true dream of sky;  
and for everything which is natural which is infinite  
which is yes.

*-e.e. cummings*

As we express our gratitude, we must never forget that the highest appreciation is not to utter words, but to live by them.

*-John F. Kennedy*

The way to develop the best that is in a person is by appreciation and encouragement.

*-Charles Schwab*

### All That Is Left to Say

When the scent of wild strawberries wafts from the woods,  
and returns the juicy-sweet meadows of childhood,  
when the double pleasure of present and past throws me this heady bouquet  
on a day already fully flowered with gifts,  
I praise.

While on the cedar boardwalk through the mangrove forest,  
when glossy green leaves reach out,  
when tangled and twisted prop roots snare imagination's strange wildness, and warblers unseen call out in song,  
I praise.

And when at last the calm pond of the gulf stretches blue beyond the horizon, sews itself seamlessly to the sky,  
when it lifts the edge of its white-skirted flounce to the sand,  
what can I do but praise,

and praise again  
as thousands of filmy wings flit backward, forward, hover  
their last hurrahs, their last two weeks in the air after a lifetime of water—  
these dragonflies, damsels, their new resplendence mating, creating—Oh joyous affirmation of life—

Praise and praise and praise.

*-Mary Jo Balistreri*

# What does it mean to be a people of *Gratitude*?



## Wise Words

### Gratefulness

Each day the engine of my gratefulness must be coaxed and primed into action. Of course like any old clunker, it would just as soon stay put. For even after the labored start beats the inertia, and the plume of white smoke struggles upward, the same hills always appear, soaring daily—tall and ominous as before. There is the long slow hill of “aging” so gradual and smooth at first. And then that steep grade called “the news.” Yes, and always some mountain of a war looming out there, never too far in the distance. Even an old idea or a feeling long abandoned might conspire to halt this fragile progress – valves sputtering, tires flattening, clutch slipping. But the old “potato, potato, potato” sound of the engine, and all its mysterious fuel, for which I am truly grateful somehow keeps stumbling along.

- Dale Biron

One can never pay in gratitude; one can only pay “in kind” somewhere else in life.

-Anne Morrow Lindbergh

Whatever our individual troubles and challenges may be, it's important to pause every now and then to appreciate all that we have, on every level.

-Shakti Gawain

Gratefulness – great fullness – is the full response of the human heart to the gratuitousness of all that is.

-Br. David Steindl-Rast

### The Messenger

My work is loving the world. Here the sunflowers, there the hummingbird — equal seekers of sweetness. Here the quickening yeast; there the blue plums. Here the clam deep in the speckled sand. Are my boots old? Is my coat torn? Am I no longer young, and still not half-perfect? Let me keep my mind on what matters, which is my work, which is mostly standing still and learning to be astonished. The phoebe, the delphinium. The sheep in the pasture, and the pasture. Which is mostly rejoicing, since all ingredients are here, which is gratitude, to be given a mind and a heart and these body-clothes, a mouth with which to give shouts of joy to the moth and the wren, to the sleepy dug-up clam, telling them all, over and over, how it is that we live forever.

-Mary Oliver

***Acknowledging the good that you already have in your life is the foundation for all abundance.***

***-Eckhart Tolle***



# What does it mean to be a people of *Gratitude*?



## Wise Words

### The Guest House

This being human is a guest house.  
Every morning a new arrival.

A joy, a depression, a meanness,  
some momentary awareness comes  
As an unexpected visitor.

Welcome and entertain them all!  
Even if they're a crowd of sorrows,  
who violently sweep your house  
empty of its furniture,  
still treat each guest honorably.  
He may be clearing you out  
for some new delight.

The dark thought, the shame, the malice,  
meet them at the door laughing,  
and invite them in.

Be grateful for whoever comes,  
because each has been sent  
as a guide from beyond.

*-Jalaluddin Rumi*



## Recommended Resources

### Books:

The Psychology of Gratitude, by Robert A. Emmons, Michael E. McCullough, 2004

The Mayo Clinic Handbook for Happiness: A Four-Step Plan for Resilient Living by Amit Sood MD, Mayo Clinic, 2015

For This I Am Grateful: 400 Inspiring Thoughts from All of Us, Everyday Wisdom Press, 2006

### Articles:

The Science Behind Gratitude (and How It Can Change Your Life)  
<http://www.happify.com/hd/the-science-behind-gratitude/>

Interview with Jack Kornfield:  
Cultivating an opening to gratitude also helps us to become more mindful of the life around us and what circumstance we're in.  
<http://tinyurl.com/kornfield-gratitude>

Alex Korb shares the results of four studies that show how gratitude can, among other things, help you exercise more, sleep better and be happier.  
Alex Korb, PhD, "The Grateful Brain," Psychology Today  
<http://tinyurl.com/psychologytoday-gratitude>

# What does it mean to be a people of *Gratitude*?



## Wise Words

Teaching from Phillip Moffitt  
“Selfless Gratitude”: <http://tinyurl.com/gratitude-in-buddhism>

Robert Emmons, the world's leading scientific expert on gratitude, reveals why gratitude is good for our bodies, our minds, and our relationships.  
<http://tinyurl.com/why-gratitude-is-good>

How to Practice Gratitude:  
<http://www.gratefulness.org/resource/how-to-practice-gratitude/>

A Deep Bow by Br. David Steindl-Rast  
<http://www.gratefulness.org/resource/a-deep-bow/>

### Videos and Music:

Gratitude Meditation:  
<http://tinyurl.com/meditation-for-gratitude>

The one thing all humans have in common is that each of us wants to be happy, says Brother David Steindl-Rast, a monk and interfaith scholar. And happiness, he suggests, is born from gratitude. An inspiring lesson in slowing down, looking where you're going, and above all, being grateful.  
<http://tinyurl.com/ted-be-grateful>

Music video for Josh Groban's song “Thankful”  
<http://tinyurl.com/josh-groban-thankful>

Music Video for Natalie Merchant's “Kind and Generous”  
<http://tinyurl.com/kind-and-generous>

Music Video for Alanis Morissette's “Thank You”  
<http://tinyurl.com/thank-you-video-with-lyrics>

Music Video for John Mellencamp's “Thank You”  
<http://tinyurl.com/mellencamp-thank-you>

Sound recording of John Bucchino's song “Grateful,” sung by Margaret Wakeley  
<https://soundcloud.com/gratefulnessorg/grateful>

спасибо 谢谢  
GRACIAS  
THANK YOU  
ありがとうございました MERCI  
DANKE धन्यवाद  
شُكراً OBRIGADO