

## Do You Know How Gratitude Benefits You?

I've noticed that the majority of the prayers in Gongyo are prayers of appreciation and gratitude. Since it is Thanksgiving I decided to look into gratitude and what it does for our lives, as I am sure those prayers are no accident.

A research project at the Greater Good Science Center at UC Berkeley studied 300 students seeking mental health services for depression and anxiety. They divided them into three groups. The first wrote a letter of appreciation to someone each week. The second recorded their thoughts and feelings about negative experiences. The third did not engage in any writing activity.

Results showed that students who focused on gratitude reported significantly improved mental health weeks after their writing exercise had ended. An MRI scanner found that the brain activity of participants in the gratitude vs negative writing groups differed. Three months after the exercise ended the gratitude group showed greater activation in the medial prefrontal cortex, an area in the brain associated with learning and decision making.

“How Gratitude Changes the Brain”, <https://www.worldtribune.org/2018/05/gratitude-changes-brain/>

Here are some of the benefits of gratitude derived both from the study and Daisaku Ikeda.

- Higher emotional intelligence.
- More forgiving attitudes towards other people.
- Depression goes down
- Worry and anxiety go down
- Relaxation and the feeling of protection grow
- Peace of mind expands
- Greater feelings of social connectedness.
- Better sleep and fewer headaches.

Daisaku Ikeda takes the benefits of gratitude even further. In the Wisdom of Creating Happiness and Peace, he says that “Appreciation and joy multiply our good fortune” Gratitude expands the heart, elevates enriches and expands the human spirit.

He also says that “Those who always have a sense of appreciation and gratitude never reach an impasse in life.” [ikedquotes.org/gratitude](http://ikedquotes.org/gratitude)

Mitsuko Afolabi decided to apply this guidance to her life at a time when she was struggling. She began to pray. “I will appreciate everything.” I chanted to have gratitude for even the smallest things. [World Tribune/2017/05/will-appreciate-everything/](http://WorldTribune/2017/05/will-appreciate-everything/)

“With that prayer, amazing things happened. Friends and professors approached me and offered me places to stay for free during the summer, and opportunities to earn a living opened up. Through these multiple jobs, I saved up enough money to attend my first conference at the Florida Nature and Culture Center in 2004, a life-transforming experience that enabled me to see

the importance of introducing others to this practice as part of my vow as a Bodhisattva of the Earth.” Thus she began to pay her debt of gratitude to her teacher.

As Ikeda says, there is no one as strong as a person whose heart is always filled with gratitude.

“To repay one’s debts of gratitude is the highest virtue, while neglecting gratitude is the reflection of a life controlled by innate negativity. Feeling boundless appreciation for all around us who have nurtured and helped us become who we are, is an indication that we have broken out of the lesser self and into the greater self. The Hope-Filled Teachings of Nichiren Daishonin, p. 222-23

He says that the path of a practitioner is one of unflagging seeking spirit and unceasing gratitude. Always express appreciation for the things others do.

### **Strengthening the Muscle of Gratitude**

So since having a constant attitude of gratitude is this important and can benefit our lives to this degree, how do we strengthen that muscle.

Satori Izumi, former Japanese Guidance Leader says that often we tend to see only the tiny benefits but not any of the big ones. For example we see the benefit of recovering from an illness, but we don’t recognize that we have been healthy for ten years. Or we are happy when a potential car accident is averted but we forget to appreciate the fact that we drove home without incident for the last year.

So we need to try and notice everything good that is happened to us every day. Many of these things are going to be things we have taken for granted. That’s going to require paying attention instead of living life half asleep.

It means actively appreciating what our parents and friends do for us, instead of taking them for granted. To be grateful to our mentor for everything he has given us, means to spread the teaching, to live our vow.

Some practitioners try to give gratitude for what has happened during the day when they do their prayers at night. This sense of appreciation goes out to the universe and gives the practitioner more things for which to be appreciative.

Another way of strengthening the muscle is keep our practice refreshed and growing, refusing to succumb to negativity. Then appreciation and gratitude will naturally grow in your life.

### **Summary:**

Today we discussed the benefits of practicing gratitude, how it improves our brain function lowers rates of depression and anxiety, gives a feeling of being protected, lower stress levels, feelings of being more connected to other people and greater relaxation.

Then we looked at what Daisaku Ikeda says about gratitude, how the attitude of a practitioner should be one of seeking spirit and unceasing gratitude. Then we examined what we can do to strength the muscle of gratitude and appreciation in our lives.

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Comments: I always enjoy hearing what you have to say. And I'll see you in two weeks.