

## Happiness Is Filling Spring Air With Gratitude

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I love spring. I loved it when I lived in Minnesota. The freedom from the weight of parkas, mittens, boots, gloves and scarves was delightful, but the sense of new beginnings is what really excited me. I feel that same way on my Island, too. Paradise is coming back. I feel it when I rake the sea grape leaves, smiling, as raking should be a fall chore, of course. I feel it when the sea calms and the breezes shift to the south. And, I cross my fingers the currents will bring more of the sand back that winter stole from my beach. Today I saw schools of manta rays and soon the manatees will be cruising the shore with me right along side in my kayak. Nice. Spring is nice. I appreciate it. Today I'm practicing gratitude.

Now if I were a preacher I'd give a sermon on gratitude, for all we are about to receive as nature unfolds this spring. Lucky, for you, no sermons and perhaps you're not a nature buff anyway. However, I bet somewhere inside, you do appreciate something, be it your home, job, family, friends, or your talents. But how often do we let others know we appreciate their efforts? How often do we give an off-hand "thanks" that sounds more polite than heart-felt? And what's more, how often do we appreciate ourselves? Do we have to break a bone in our leg or hand before we realize how much we appreciate being able to walk or write? Sometimes we only give air time to what is wrong, what is lacking, what we can't do or haven't accomplished. And when we do receive compliments or promotions do we graciously and humbly accept them?

My challenge to you this week is to fill the air with gratitude. I heard from a few of you that you practiced a non-judgment day after reading my last column. Great. I like to make a difference, even a slight one. Now, I want to express my gratitude for the positive feedback, which I like as much as spring. It makes me smile and happy to think someone is actually using my suggestions. Thank you.

Now I invite you to try a gratitude exercise. Title a sheet of paper: I AM GRATEFUL FOR: Then start writing, as fast as you can, everything you can think of...in a brainstorming fashion. After you've exhausted your mind, thank yourself for your great memory, and reflect on the following questions.

- Am I more grateful for people, places, or things?
- Have I listed traits about others I appreciate? Or others actions?
- Have I listed traits, actions, talents I appreciate about myself?
- Do I tell others how much I appreciate them?
- Do I tell myself how much I appreciate my mind, body and spirit?
- Is there a place, person, or idea I'd like to focus awareness on, appreciate more?

Add more appreciations to your list today or this week if/when they come to mind. Then read your list to one other person. Or place your list on the refrigerator with a magnet for your family to view and you or they can add to. Or carry your list with you to glance at from time to time. Or read your list before you go to bed. Or the next time you have a family gathering, have everyone say one thing they're grateful for...like an early Thanksgiving dinner. The possibilities are endless to increase your awareness.

There is so much stimulation in our lives, that we automatically limit our awareness to tasks at hand. Sometimes only the negatives, the things we don't do or didn't say, come to mind. Gently put them aside. Let the subtler, less forceful, kinder awareness' surface. Be your own best friend, don't pick at; appreciate. With attention, gratitude will multiply, fill your heart and the spring air.