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Dear Reader,

If you were to monitor what occupies your mind, let's say over a period of 24 hours, what would that list contain, and in what proportions? Would worries and problems occupy most of your waking attention? What emotions would accompany your thoughts? Fear, anger, doubt, powerlessness, impatience? Sounds toxic! Certainly our daily life requires a lot of problem solving, with big and small challenges everywhere. As someone said, on no morning do we know what the day will bring. But how can we make our life lighter (without escaping on a retreat or a vacation)? Try gratitude, is what author Ocean Robbins says.

Enjoy the reading,

Isabel Rimanoczy
Editor

Quote of the Month

"Some cause happiness wherever they go; others whenever they go."

Oscar Wilde
(Irish writer and poet, 1854-1900)



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The Benefits of Gratitude^[1]

By Ocean Robbins

It's true: Our world is pretty messed up. There's certainly no shortage of justification for disappointment and cynicism.

But what are you grateful for? It's a question that could change your life.

Recent studies have concluded that the expression of gratitude can have profound and positive effects on our health, our moods and even the survival of our marriages.

As Blair and Rita Justice reported for the University of Texas Health Science Center, "a growing body of research shows that gratitude is truly amazing in its physical and psychosocial benefits."

In one study, Robert A. Emmons, Ph.D. of the University of California at Davis and Mike McCullough of the University of Miami randomly assigned participants one of three tasks. One group kept a journal in which they were told to briefly describe five things they were grateful for that had occurred in the past week, another group recorded five daily hassles from the previous week that displeased them; and the neutral group was asked to list five events or circumstances that affected them, but they were not told to focus on the positive or on the negative. Ten weeks later, participants in the gratitude group felt better about their lives as a whole and were a full 25 percent happier than the hassled group. They reported fewer health complaints, and exercised an average of 1.5 hours more.

If you've forgotten the language of gratitude, you'll never be on speaking terms with happiness.

In a later study by Emmons, people were asked to write every day about things for which they were grateful. Not surprisingly, this daily practice led to greater increases in gratitude than did the weekly journaling in the first study. But the results showed another benefit: Participants in the gratitude group also reported offering others more emotional support or help with personal problems, indicating that the gratitude exercise increased their goodwill towards others, or more technically, their "pro-social" motivation.

Another study focused on adults with congenital and adult-onset neuromuscular disorders (NMDs), with the majority having post-polio syndrome (PPS). Compared to those who were not jotting down their blessings nightly, participants in the gratitude group reported more hours of sleep each night, and feeling more refreshed upon awakening. The gratitude group also reported more satisfaction with their lives as a whole, felt more optimism about the upcoming week, and felt considerably more connected with others than did participants in the control group.

Perhaps most tellingly, the positive changes were markedly noticeable to others. According to the researchers, "Spouses of the participants in the gratitude group reported that the participants appeared to have higher subjective well-being than did the spouses of the participants in the control group."

There's an old saying that if you've forgotten the language of gratitude, you'll never be on speaking

terms with happiness. It turns out this isn't just a fluffy idea. Several studies have shown depression to be inversely correlated to gratitude. It seems that the more grateful a person is, the less depressed they are. Philip Watkins, a clinical psychologist at Eastern Washington University, found that clinically depressed individuals showed significantly lower gratitude (nearly 50 percent less) than non-depressed controls.

Apparently, positive vibes aren't just for hippies. If you want in on the fun, here are some simple things you can do to build positive momentum toward a more happy and fulfilling life:

1. Keep a daily journal of three things you are thankful for. This works well first thing in the morning, or just before you go to bed.
2. Make it a practice to tell a spouse, partner or friend something you appreciate about them every day.
3. Look in the mirror when you are brushing your teeth, and think about something you have done well recently or something you like about yourself.

Sure, this world gives us plenty of reasons to despair. But when we get off the fast track to morbidity, and cultivate instead an attitude of gratitude, things don't just look better—they actually get better. Thankfulness feels good, it's good for you, and it's a blessing for the people around you, too. It's such a win-win-win that I'd say we have cause for gratitude.



^[1]Source: Yes! Magazine, Feb 2012. www.yesmagazine.org. This work is licensed under a [Creative Commons License](#).

About Ocean Robbins

Ocean Robbins is an author, speaker, facilitator, movement builder and father. His website is www.oceanrobbins.com. Ocean adapted this article for YES! Magazine, a national, nonprofit media organization that fuses powerful ideas with practical actions.





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