

Gratitude enriches our spiritual happiness

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Some of the happiest times of our lives occur when we experience feelings of gratitude. By gratitude, I mean thoughts of appreciation and well-being. There are times when one senses that all is right with the world, that living is good, and that there are reasons to be optimistic. In many lives, as in my own, such happy times may be all too brief and not as frequent as we might hope. Nonetheless, the infrequency of these moments of joy can make them even more precious. Religious believers might call these highest moments of life, spiritual experiences. When such moments of gratitude occur, believers may express their thankfulness to a creator God. Believers may look upon these occasions as brief, but precious, religious experiences.

Even if we are not religiously inclined, we may also call such brief, but precious moments, spiritual experiences. In this case, the term spiritual lends itself to a wide variety of meanings both inside and outside religious circles. Such moments of spiritual gratitude may be defined as feelings of awe and wonder and of over-whelming well-being. Abraham Maslow described these occurrences as peak-experiences. Others may refer to them as arousal jags or eureka moments. Whatever terms we choose they are likely to fall short of being adequate to express these blissful experiences.

Sometimes, I hesitate to describe, or analyze, the spiritual quality of such experiences for fear of obfuscating their meaning and value. Yet, in an effort to be clearer, I can at least comment on what precipitates, or enables, such feelings of gratitude. Following, are some attitudes that are necessary, though not always sufficient to engender such inspirational moments: I am happy for my own existence. When one considers the mathematical improbabilities of the "I", who presently "exists", the chances seem infinitesimally small. To be the exact person that I am, and even that I exist at all, makes me feel as if I had somehow won an improbable lottery of life for which I am most grateful. This is not a boastful statement. It is one that can be made by all my readers.

I am grateful, too, for the supportive love of family and friends. They make me feel that I am not alone. More than that, they help me realize that, if they can give me support, I too, can give others the same kind of love and help. I can enrich the lives of others as they do mine.

When one has sufficiently good health to become an octogenarian, and still enjoy life without pain or distress, it is cause for feelings of well-being. It also makes me feel grateful to have the stamina and will to give support to family and friends whose age is approximately the same as my own.

If one experiences "at-one-ness", or in religious terms, "atonement", with nature, or even with the universe, this, too, can engender spiritual enrichment. It provides the kind of setting that becomes supportive of a fulfilling experience of profound gratitude. Perhaps music, art, or other creative endeavors, can also help to bring people closer to such feelings of belonging in the universe.

It helps also, when one experiences the joy of accomplishing tasks, even when the achievements are modest. Each day that we can say, "Today I was able to complete this or that task", gives one cause for celebration. It helps us to be at peace with ourselves and to face each day with confidence and gratitude.

Those who try to take a joyful approach to life are likely to be more tranquil in their lives. They are likely to experience the world with less fear and more security. They will feel more complete and conduct their lives with greater confidence and serenity.

Having said all this, I do not think that we can directly latch onto spiritual gratitude. It will come to us, when the conditions are right. When we are in harmony with our surroundings, at peace with our selves, and at one with the universe, we will have paved the way for the best we can be. We will be the most receptive to the deepest enriching spiritual experiences.