



Gratitude: More Than Just an Attitude

By Kelly Berg

It's NOVEMBER and THANKSGIVING is upon us, which means it's the season where people suddenly start sharing what they are GRATEFUL for! This year there is even a social media GRATITUDE CHALLENGE that specifies a specific category in which you must post about what you're grateful, down to TEXTURE and SMELLS! What??! Okay, maybe it's not as hard as one might think...surely we all have something in those categories we can be grateful for, right? But why should we focus on them, and why bother sharing them with the world?

What holiday is upon us? THANKSGIVING

What happens around this time of year? PEOPLE SUDDENLY START SHARING WHAT THEY ARE GRATEFUL FOR

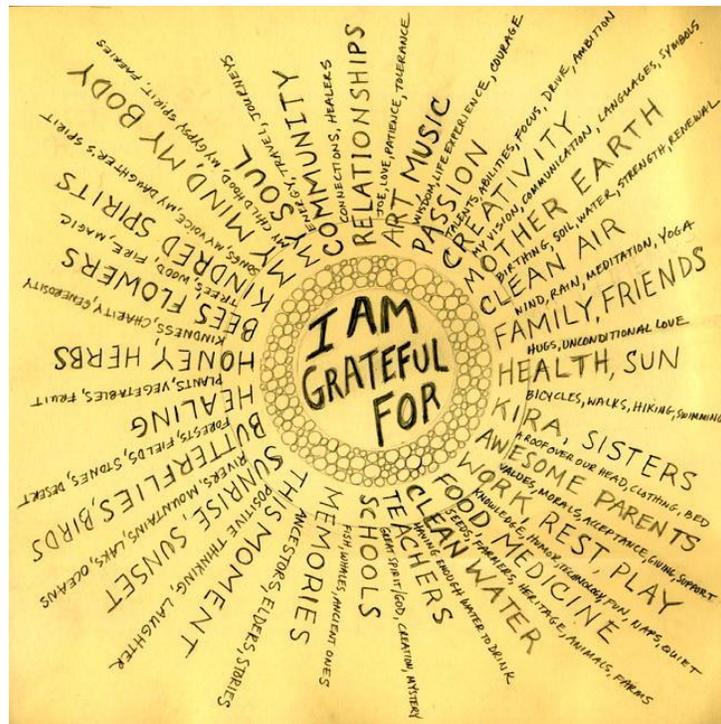
This year there is even a _____ that specifies a specific category in which you must post about what you're grateful. GRATITUDE CHALLENGE

Name one of the categories of gratitude mentioned. TEXTURE, SMELL

Name one form of social media.

What is a texture that you are grateful for?

What is a smell that you are grateful for?



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VAKT: Touch the center of the picture where it says “I am grateful for”.

As it turns out, PRACTICING GRATITUDE is actually really, really good for us as humans! One reason is that practicing gratitude actually has the capacity to change and strengthen our BRAINS in positive ways! How on earth does that work? Well, apparently when the brain feels gratitude, parts of the brain that are involved in feelings of REWARD, INTERPERSONAL BONDING, and POSITIVE SOCIAL INTERACTIONS, like the VENTRAL and DORSAL MEDIAL PREFRONTAL CORTEX are activated. In addition to that, important NEUROCHEMICALS are increased by gratitude. When your thinking shifts to positive from negative, you’ll have a surge of those feel-good chemicals like OXYTOCIN, DOPAMINE, AND SEROTONIN. And what happens next? Feelings of happiness, connection, and closeness, that’s what!

As it turns out, _____ is actually really, really good for us as humans!

PRACTICING GRATITUDE

What is one reason that practicing gratitude is good for us? IT ACTUALLY HAS THE CAPACITY TO CHANGE AND STRENGTHEN OUR BRAINS IN POSITIVE WAYS

Parts of the brain involved in what are activated? REWARD, INTERPERSONAL BONDING, POSITIVE SOCIAL INTERACTIONS

Name one of these parts of the brain. THE VENTRAL AND DORSAL MEDIAL PREFRONTAL CORTEX

Important _____ are increased by gratitude. NEUROCHEMICALS

What happens to your feel-good chemicals when your thinking shifts to positive from negative? YOU WILL HAVE A SURGE

Name on feel-good chemical. OXYTOCIN, DOPAMINE, SEROTONIN

What are your thoughts on gratitude being good for us as humans?

What also turns out to be important is CONSISTENCY, so maybe those 30-days of gratitude posters are on the right track! The more that one practices gratitude, the more the brain will tune in to those POSITIVE things in the world. Let’s face it, 2020 has been a rough year, and we have all had enough NEGATIVE in our lives, so a return to the positive through gratitude may be just what we need, teaching our brain to focus more time on those things that make us feel good, versus focusing on the things that weigh us down.

What is also important? CONSISTENCY

What will happen the more that one practices gratitude? THE MORE THE BRAIN WILL TUNE IN TO THOSE POSITIVE THINGS IN THE WORLD

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What can we teach our brain? TO FOCUS MORE TIME ON THOSE THINGS THAT MAKE US FEEL GOOD, VERSUS FOCUSING ON THE THINGS THAT WEIGH US DOWN

Name a part of the brain.

What else would you like to practice with consistency?

What is one word you would use to describe 2020?

Our brains are actually primed to find the negatives, so we have to teach it not only to tune into the positive, but we also have to hold on to the positive things for long enough for it to actually have an effect on the way our brains work. DR. RICK HANSON, a PSYCHOLOGIST, has found that focusing on an experience for 20 SECONDS is long enough for positive structural changes to occur in the brain. Having gratitude gives the opportunity for the positive experience to expand, so we can “RE-EXPERIENCE” it, rather than just moving on quickly from it.

Our brains are actually _____ to find the negatives. PRIMED

We have to teach it not only to tune into the positive, but also to do what? HOLD ON TO THE POSITIVE THINGS FOR LONG ENOUGH FOR IT TO ACTUALLY HAVE AN EFFECT ON THE WAY OUR BRAINS WORK.

Dr. Rick Hanson’s is a what? PSYCHOLOGIST

What has he discovered? FOCUSING ON AN EXPERIENCE FOR 20 SECONDS IS LONG ENOUGH FOR POSITIVE STRUCTURAL CHANGES TO OCCUR IN THE BRAIN

Having gratitude gives the opportunity for the positive experience to expand, so we can do what with it? RE-EXPERIENCE IT

What is something you would like to re-experience?

VAKT: Let’s do a 5-minute gratitude meditation. Search “ Gratitude Meditation (Strengthen Happiness)” on YouTube or click the link below.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Uhf8vLesRRc>

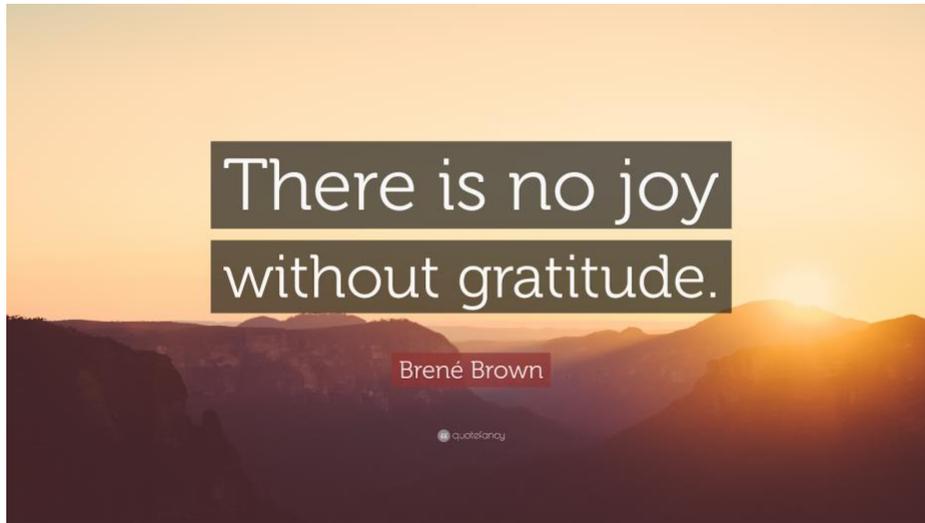
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But let's see what research professor BRENÉ BROWN has to say on the subject. Brown says, "The relationship between joy and gratitude was one of the most important things I found in my research. I wasn't expecting it. In my 12 YEARS of research on 11,000 pieces of data, I did not interview one person who had described themselves as joyful, who also did not actively practice gratitude. For me it was very COUNTERINTUITIVE because I went into the research thinking that the relationship between joy and gratitude was: if you are joyful, you should be grateful. But it wasn't that way at all."

Who is the research professor we are talking about now? BRENÉ BROWN

Brown says that one of the most important things she found in her research was what?

THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN JOY AND GRATITUDE

How long did she research the subject? 12 YEARS

She did not interview one person who had what? DESCRIBED THEMSELVES AS JOYFUL, WHO ALSO DID NOT ACTIVELY PRACTICE GRATITUDE

Are you surprised by the relationship between joy and gratitude? Why or why not?

Brown says *actually practicing* gratitude ends up inviting joy into our lives. "It's not joy that makes us grateful, it's gratitude that makes us joyful." Not just "the-attitude-of-gratitude" or feeling grateful...she emphasizes that this is INSUFFICIENT to cultivate joy unless it translates to a BEHAVIOR. It means actually PRACTICING gratitude. It's about a TANGIBLE gratitude practice. That could be a gratitude JOURNAL, it could be picking a time every day to say something out loud that you are grateful for in your life, or even going around the table nightly and taking turns expressing something that makes you feel grateful.

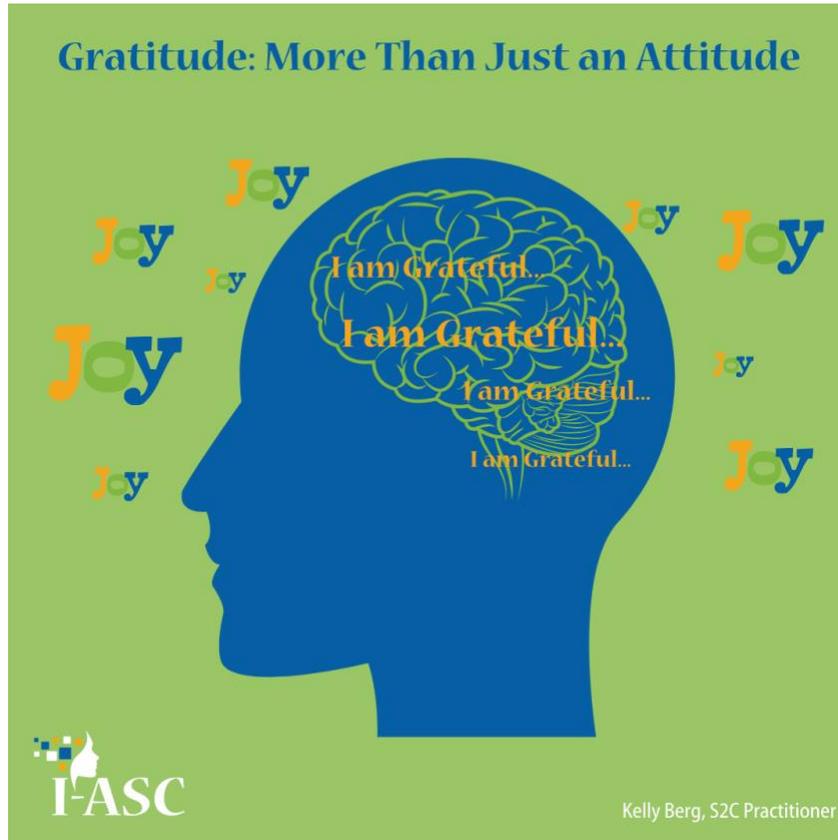
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Brown says *actually practicing* gratitude ends up doing what? INVITING JOY INTO OUR LIVES

She says “It’s not joy that makes us grateful, it’s....” GRATITUDE THAT MAKES US JOYFUL
She emphasizes that this is _____ to cultivate joy unless it translates to a _____. INSUFFICIENT, BEHAVIOR

What is one way one could practice gratitude? A GRATITUDE JOURNAL, PICKING A TIME EVERY DAY TO SAY SOMETHING OUT LOUD THAT YOU ARE GRATEFUL FOR IN YOUR LIFE, GOING AROUND THE TABLE NIGHTLY AND TAKING TURNS EXPRESSING SOMETHING THAT MAKES YOU FEEL GRATEFUL

What is another way that one could practice gratitude?

There are lots of different ways to practice gratitude, but it should be done not only with CONSISTENCY, but with NOVELTY as well. Our brains LOVE novelty, and quickly adapt to anything that stays the same. Ever had something bring you joy but quickly lose its SHIMMER? Our brains adapt, and then they go looking for the next special thing, but gratitude can change this. We need to constantly give our brains something new and positive to focus on, practicing gratitude for different things, and not the same thing day

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after day. We can be grateful for the same things every day, but it won't have the same effect on the brain as it will if we find a new and positive thing each time!

Practicing gratitude should be done with consistency and what else? NOVELTY

Why should it be practiced with novelty? OUR BRAINS LOVE NOVELTY, AND QUICKLY ADAPT TO ANYTHING THAT STAYS THE SAME

Our brains adapt, and then they do what? GO LOOKING FOR THE NEXT SPECIAL THING

How can gratitude change this? WE CAN CONSTANTLY GIVE OUR BRAINS SOMETHING NEW AND POSITIVE TO FOCUS ON, PRACTICING GRATITUDE FOR DIFFERENT THINGS

What will happen if we are grateful for the same things day after day? IT WON'T HAVE THE SAME EFFECT ON THE BRAIN

VAKT: Let's give yourself a hug, and be thankful for YOU in this Knees-to-Chest (Apanasana) pose.



Get into it: Lying down, draw your knees into your chest and wrap your arms around your shins.

Feel: Take a moment to feel gratitude for yourself. Hug yourself and accept who and where you are.

Need some more convincing? Research has shown that gratitude has the ability to increase RESILIENCE, improve our general well-being, strengthen our SOCIAL RELATIONSHIPS, and reduce STRESS and DEPRESSION. On top of that, we'll have stronger immune systems, lower blood pressure, and be able to sleep and wake with more ease. Gratitude leads to being more alert, more generous, more compassionate, and just being happier. And who among us doesn't want to have a greater capacity for joy and positive emotions? Especially in 2020!

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What has research shown that gratitude also has the ability to do? INCREASE RESILIENCE, IMPROVE OUR GENERAL WELL-BEING, STRENGTHEN OUR SOCIAL RELATIONSHIPS, REDUCE STRESS AND DEPRESSION

Practicing gratitude will lead to a stronger what? IMMUNE SYSTEM

What is another system in our body?

What is another health benefit one might have? LOWER BLOOD PRESSURE, BE ABLE TO SLEEP AND WAKE WITH MORE EASE.

Gratitude leads to being more what? ALERT, GENEROUS, COMPASSIONATE

Gratitude can simply make us _____. HAPPIER

Would you be interested in starting a gratitude practice? Why or why not?

Creative Writing:

Outline your plans for starting a gratitude practice, if you should choose to begin. How will you express gratitude on a daily basis?

30 Day Gratitude Challenge! November may be more than halfway over, but it's never too late to start! Take the challenge below, with specific categories to get you started!

30 Day Gratitude Challenge - Come up with something you are grateful for in each of the 30 categories below!

Home

Nature

Something I see every day

Something I do every day

Transportation

Hobbies

Work

Family/Friends

Technology

Quiet

Noise

Texture

Smells

Color

Music

Something that makes me laugh

Something that makes me smile

Something that fills me with hope

Something that fills me with love

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Something that I accomplished today

Passion

Purpose

Peace

Intention

Movement

Stillness

Kindness

Letting Go

Self-care

Myself

Resources:

<https://www.doyou.com/bowing-down-7-yoga-poses-embodiment-gratitude-35413/>

<https://globalleadership.org/articles/leading-yourself/brene-brown-on-joy-and-gratitude/>

<https://www.heysigmund.com/the-science-of-gratitude/>

<https://brenebrown.com/about/>



[Kelly Berg](#) is an S2C Practitioner at Growing Kids Therapy Center and a member of the I-ASC Leadership Cadre living in Herndon, Virginia. She can always find something to be grateful for, and has a long list of COVID silver linings.

The mission of I-ASC is to advance communication access for nonspeaking individuals globally through [training](#), [education](#), [advocacy](#) and [research](#). I-ASC supports all forms of augmentative and alternative communication (AAC) with a focus on methods of spelling and typing. I-ASC currently offers [Practitioner training in Spelling to Communicate \(S2C\)](#) with the hope that other methods of AAC using spelling or typing will join our association

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