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JOYFUL MUSINGS

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An Attitude of Gratitude

I bet that many of you, like I do, remember being told to eat all the food on your plate so the poor children of somewhere-on-earth would not starve. While we've long since figured out that stuffing our own bellies didn't do much to help all those starving children, we may have missed the real message behind that admonition which was to be grateful for what we have. Many of us routinely celebrate Thanksgiving, whether in October or November, as an annual time to enjoy a big meal with family and friends, and perhaps give thanks on that one day for the bounty before us. How many of us, however, take time to express gratitude on a daily basis for the bounty of blessings in our daily lives?

It's an amazing fact: whatever you focus on grows bigger. Pay attention to all those things you don't have or can't do, and your life will feel very empty. You'll soon suffer from a pitiful ailment I call PLUM disease: Poor Little Unfortunate Me. Pay attention to what you have, however, and it magically grows bigger and more valuable.

Melodie Beattie in *The Language of Letting Go* says, "Gratitude unlocks the fullness of life. It turns what we have into enough, and more. It can turn a meal into a feast, a house into a home, a stranger into a friend. It turns problems into gifts, failures into successes, the unexpected into perfect timing, and mistakes into important events. Gratitude makes things right. There is no situation or circumstance so small or large that it is not susceptible to gratitude's power. We can start with who we are and what we have *today*, apply gratitude, then let it work its magic."

Gratitude is more than just a nice idea. Recent research studies have shown gratitude to have real and measureable results:

- People who describe themselves as feeling grateful tend to have more optimism and higher vitality, suffer less stress, and experience less depression than the population as a whole.
- Grateful people tend to be less focused on the accumulation of material wealth. They have less anxiety about status or acquiring possessions and are more likely to describe themselves as happy or satisfied in life.
- In an experiment with college students, those who kept a "gratitude journal," a weekly record of things they feel grateful for, achieved better physical health, were more optimistic, exercised more regularly, and described themselves as happier than a control group of students who kept

no journals but had the same overall measures of health, optimism, and exercise when the experiment began.

There are many simple ways you can bring more gratitude into your life. Here's a few ideas:

- Make a point of saying thank you to others throughout your day. You'll be surprised how many special things people have said or done when you take time to really notice them.
- Take the time to write thank-you notes in response to gifts you've received, events you've enjoyed, or anything else that brought a smile to your face recently.
- Give the Universe a quick thank you throughout the day for anything that gives you joy.
- Each evening, take an inventory of the blessings of that particular day. If you like, keep a written list and see how long it grows over time.

It won't take long before you learn the magical lesson that being grateful for what you have turns it into more.

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