

## #1 Appreciation

When you bestow a compliment to someone, their frequent response is, "No one has ever complimented me in that way before." The act of appreciation is a nurturing form of feedback and encouragement, expressing your care for another. Fortunately for the world, there is no shortage of people who deserve to be recognized and acknowledged for their virtues, great and small.

### **Appreciation is too good to keep inside.**

What you appreciate tends to grow and expand. The first beneficiary is you ... but the ripple effects don't stop there. The acknowledgement that you give yourself for who you are, what you do and your affect on the world extends out, in ways you cannot predict or manage. One of the initial benefits is that you are less likely to pressure others for attention when you appreciate yourself for doing your best. Self-appreciation leads to greater self-confidence, better boundaries and a happier mindset. Rippling out beyond self-appreciation is acknowledgement and appreciation of others for their strengths, their contributions and their unique approach to life.

## Friends and Appreciation

Research has repeatedly shown that appreciation is a vital ingredient to successful, long-term relationships. We tend to seek out those who appreciate us for who we are, and the reverse is equally true. A simple expression of gratitude alters the energy of the relationship. As people grow older, there is an increased awareness of the value of friendships.

### **The investments that we make in friendship enrich our lives.**

So often we acknowledge friends only on special occasions, yet our lives are continuously affected by them. Deep friends are treasures on the path, because they remind us to keep opening up and reaching out. Practice acknowledging your friends any time, any day, for their parts in these glorious relationships that so sustain you.

Acknowledgement and gratitude are too seldom expressed. Take a moment to transmit a message of thanks to those who have been your friends. Send a **thank you** note to let people know how much you appreciate their **virtues**. Say thanks just because you are friends, any and every day of the year.

## The Magic of Appreciation

You have the power to transform a person's life just by honoring what they have done. Being acknowledged can make pain disappear and smiles emerge. Acknowledgement and appreciation invite someone to the center of attention for one moment. That moment can change a life.

“When I am appreciated, I am being bathed in sparkles! The glow lasts a lifetime and I draw comfort from it during my bleak moments. I have this friend who, by the way she looks at me, makes me feel loved. There are no words to describe the energy in her eyes as she beams at me. Recalling her face from memory gives me pleasure. When I cherish a friend who appreciates me for who I am, I feel good inside.”

I learned the magic of appreciation early, in college, where I majored in sociology. Two of my professors were older, single women who had spent their entire adult lives studying and teaching at the University of Cincinnati. For some unknown reason, they criticized me in class. Maybe it was because I looked like a wild man with my long hair and beard ... who knows? Maybe they thought I was unfit for their profession. Whatever the reason, these two teachers made it difficult for me to pass their classes, which I needed to graduate.

I wondered if anyone had ever been kind to them. I decided to try an experiment: when they were critical of me, I would shower them with appreciation.

They shared a dank basement office. Once I convinced the maintenance man to open their door on a Friday after they had left for the weekend. I filled the room with flowers that I had gathered and left a note thanking them for all the years that they had devoted to their profession, signed, “Love, Bob.”

Monday morning as I walked across campus with my friends, we spotted the two professors. As soon as they saw me, they waved and called out hellos. My friends were perplexed by the girlish smiles I received as the professors passed.

### **Appreciation is a quick magic trick that anyone can perform.**

Have you recently thanked someone for his or her support, or for helping you see the brighter side of life? It’s fun to find out how people like to be appreciated. One may prefer being honored privately, while another loves a public acknowledgement. How you set up the situation can be as important as the appreciation itself. Take time to plan so that the recipient is at their maximum receptivity. Prepare your thoughts in such a way that what you say is a detailed compliment, and include the positive effect the person had on you.

### **One Rose**

On my 50th birthday, I had the privilege of being the keynote speaker for a group of health professionals at a conference in a fancy hotel in Chicago. The presenter before me was awarded a dozen red roses by the association for the outstanding work she had done. Afterward, she gave me one of her roses in appreciation for my presentation.

Later, as I was packing up my stuff in the hotel room, a maid entered. She was an older woman who I supposed had worked at the hotel her whole life. As she moved closer I

could tell by the way she walked that life had been hard on her body. She was tired but her spirit was bright. As I watched her I had the image of a grandma who cherished each of her many grandchildren. As she cleaned the table in front of me, our eyes met and I saw one of the most beautiful smiles I have ever seen.

“Hello! I would like to present this rose to you in appreciation of your smile,” I said. Her eyes and smile went on high beams as I extended the rose. “Bless you,” she said and gave me a joyous hug.

### **Letters of Appreciation**

Once, while teaching a course on self-esteem to grade school teachers, I was asked for suggestions on how to better involve the parents in esteeming their kids. I suggested that they send the kids home on Friday with a note asking parents to help with a special homework assignment. The kids asked their parents to write a letter on what they most appreciated about their respective child. On Monday, the kids read their letters aloud to the class. These students were surprised and thrilled by the appreciation expressed for them in these letters. Many teachers reported that this was the best day of their careers. Ask your parents, or any adult who was close to you while growing up, to write a letter of appreciation for you and see what comes up.

### **A Gift of Love**

I have a beautiful jade green, circular stone with a hole in the center. A silk cord is strung through it so it can be worn around the neck. Maggie and I take turns giving the necklace back and forth as a gift. It serves as a reminder of our love and appreciation. We may exchange the gift once a day, or one of us may wear it for a month.

When I am feeling especially close to Maggie, I bestow the necklace on her as if it were an orchid lei. Another time, when I feel distant and want to signal my desire to strengthen our connection, I present it to her formally. We trade the necklace back and forth, its exchange symbolizing our in-to-me-see; the intimacy to look into my center. That necklace is now the only jewelry I wear.

Start a similar ritual exchange with a special friend. Each time the gift is given, treat it with honor. The gift is a symbol of the love and growth you share. It has value only because your friendship has value.

### **The Mountain**

To bow in appreciation is a beautiful custom in many cultures. A simple nod of the head to a full upper body is a gracefully gesture of respect.

Some years ago, I registered to participate in a meditation retreat at a Zen center in northern California. Arriving early, I decided to hike up majestic Mt. Shasta. I wanted solitude, so I made my way up to an isolated ridge. I had climbed about 100 feet up a

steep incline when a falling rock the size of a softball struck me on the head. Dizzy, blood dribbling into my eyes, I clung to the mountainside. Had I passed out, I would have fallen. I was barely able to inch my way over to a ledge and rest until I could climb down safely.

Later that day, I arrived at the Zen center with a bandage on my head. I was greeted by monks in black robes with shaved heads. It was a silent retreat center, so I was handed an instruction pamphlet and shown to my room. I read that our meditation retreat would focus on two practices: being aware in every moment and honoring all things with a bow.

At breakfast we were seated at a long table. Our place setting consisted of a cup and silverware perched on a metal plate, covered by a paper napkin. I watched the monks silently remove their cup and utensils. Then, as the food was passed from one person to the next, the person receiving the food bowed with one hand touching their forehead as their other hand grasped the food. There was only one serving, so you had to take just the right amount to last you until the next meal. I thought I was doing pretty well with the bowing and passing of food until, as I bowed, my elbow hit the corner of my metal plate, which flipped and landed with a loud CLANK! There were tiny smiles and silent laughter among the monks.

During our many periods of meditation, we began with three bows: one to our fellow students, one to our teacher and finally to our cushions. After a couple of days of this routine, I noticed I was developing a deep appreciation for my soft cushion. This bowing extended into the chores we were assigned each day. I especially liked to bow to my bed at the end of a long day. The quiet time gave me the opportunity to reflect on being alive.

When the retreat was over, I felt a need to return to the mountain. The full moon lit my way as I walked up its flank. At last I sat in meditation at the edge of a rock field where I focused my gaze on a particular rock about the size of the one that had hit me days earlier. At the end of my meditation, I bowed in thanks to the mountain and then to the rock.

I walked over and picked up the rock. I held it, feeling its weight as I rolled it in my hands. Then I saw the symbol for OM was etched into it and I roared with laughter. My laughter echoed about the mountainside in a chorus. It seemed that the mountain was laughing with me as it gave me this unexpected gift.

Bowing in appreciation has stayed with me. Sometimes I nod my head in subtle, internal acknowledgement. I feel that this practice has helped me better appreciate the small things that others do for me every day.

Bow each time you notice something for which you are thankful. It can be a simple nod of the head or a full, deep bow with hands together in a posture of prayer. Soon you will notice how naturally bowing comes to you and how often.

## **Show You Care**

Since we all like to be acknowledged and thrive on love in the form of appreciation, I often wonder why we don't do it more often. There is no shortage of ways that appreciation can be expressed yet we miss so many opportunities. Words of praise are precious.

Are you receiving the appreciation you deserve and desire? If the answer is no, which is true for most people, there are reasons why that is so. Look for the answers. Begin by being receptive and reflect on those times when you received the gift of appreciation. If needed, educate your friends about how you like to be acknowledged.

Observe how others show appreciation and then review your own skill at bestowing it. Perhaps it's a good idea to keep a record of compliments you have given and received each day.

Do you go to sleep at night with the satisfaction that you have expressed your love for those you matter in your life?

Remember all of the special things you did with your friends. None of these precious moments would have happened without them. You create friends and the fun you have together. There are many simple joys that await you when you reach out in friendship. Being receptive and trusting create resonance.

Our friends touch our lives in many meaningful ways that we cherish. There are events and people that could be removed from our life stories and not missed, but there is not one friendship we would want erased. We want these moments of love and friendship to be longer and more frequent. Our loved ones fill our life with wonderful memories and meaning.

Breathe slowly. Inhale, fill your lungs, exhale and empty. Repeat until relaxed. Allow a bubble to float up to the quiet surface of your mind. The name of a good friend from your past is inside the bubble. When it pops, the name is a surprise. Say this name aloud. Feel it pass over your lips on the exhale. Recall a time and place when you were together. See this person's face smiling at you. Hear him or her say your name in greeting. It is so good to see him or her again! Welcome this person for a visit. Will you shake hands or hug each other tightly?

Feel how this memory is stored everywhere in your body. Images appear in your mind, sensations are felt in different parts of your body and your spirit lights up. Though the memory is old, the experience of your friend is new. Thank him or her for being your friend.

At the end of a week, reflect on the time you spent with your friends and how you will make an even better investment in these people next week. What can you do now to create the memories you want?

Remember a friend who:

Took the time to know who you were;

Taught you a new way to play;

Helped you move into your new apartment in the rain;

Loves to travel with you;

Believed in you until you learned to believe in yourself;

Noticed you were sad and asked what you needed;

Held you and just listened;

Helped you bounce like a trampoline rather than hitting bottom;

Called during your "day from hell," inviting you over for dinner;

Got you to laugh at yourself;

Found you the perfect job;

Checked on you during your illness;

Called you during emergencies and offered to help;

Supported you financially;

Helped you to celebrate the good times in style;

Offered you encouragement at a critical time;

Remained at your side during the collapse of your love life;

Welcomed you into his or her life;

Told you the truth while others were just being nice;

Comforted you during a time of loss;

Noticed your efforts and praised you;

Celebrated your birthday with a surprise visit;

Sent you letters to keep the connection going;

Went on silent walks with you;

Changed your life;

Died yet his or her spirit lives on;

Invited you to practice being your loving self;

Introduced you to a new kindred spirit.