



Living the teachings

yoga's everyday spiritual meanings

Gratitude:

The quality of being thankful; readiness to show appreciation for, and to return kindness.

The ability to regularly practice gratitude is one of the 10 habits that resilient people have, and this character strength is something that can be enhanced in all of us through awareness and practice. It is something that we can easily incorporate into our yoga practice and lives and can really help to improve our general well-being.

Science tells us that there are many benefits to be gained from practising gratitude, not only can it make us more resilient when facing life's ups and downs, it can also help us towards better sleep, it can strengthen our relationships and reduce anxiety and depression. It can also improve self-esteem, increase empathy and reduce aggression. Science tells us that when humans feel gratitude, the brain produces **oxytocin**, a hormone important to bonding, thus helping to strengthen our relationships. Neuroscience tells us that regular practice can literally rewire our brains to be happier.

It is said that gratitude turns what we already have into enough. This really is something to reflect upon in our lives today where expectations have changed and gratitude has largely diminished. In our modern fast paced lives, possessions in particular are often something that we take for granted rather than consider a personal 'blessing'.

Next time you are in savasana or preparing to go to sleep, think of 5 things that you are grateful for. Most of us will head straight to the major things in our lives, our loved ones, our health, our home and income. In our practice however, we are also encouraged to remember the little things that may have made our day a little better, a smile from a stranger or a friendly cashier, a special cup of coffee, freshly laundered sheets, a good book. The real challenge comes on the not so good days or the really bad days, can we still practice gratitude then? If we can it results in significant benefits to our mental well-being and it is here that we can see the difference between those with resilience and those who are less resilient. A resilient person will continue to appreciate the good things even when lots of bad things are happening around them. In the same way practising gratitude before we drop off to sleep can help us towards a better night's sleep and increases the likelihood of waking up feeling optimistic about the forthcoming day. This is because we have programmed our minds before sleep to focus on positive not negative things.

There are several ways to practise gratitude from keeping a journal, to verbally expressing your gratitude to others. The easiest way it is to think of 5 different things that you are grateful for, not the same set of answers each time. Practice gratitude every day, when you first wake up, before you go to sleep and when you are on your yoga mat. Being grateful could make you healthier and happier.

