

Living in Gratitude



*A Journey That Will
Change Your Life*

Angeles Arrien

Foreword by Marianne Williamson

What would happen if you made gratitude your focal point for one full year? With *Living in Gratitude*, Angeles Arrien invites you to find out. Integrating the latest teachings from social science with stories, prayers, and practices from cultures and traditions spanning the globe, she presents a 12-month plan for making gratitude your foundation for daily living.

Opening with themes such as “Beginning Anew” and “The Power of Equanimity” and progressing to “Letting Be and Letting Go,” “The Mystic Heart,” and more, readers will steep themselves in “the parent of all virtues,” exploring:

- How to overcome habitual tendencies toward envy, comparison, and narcissism
- Blessings, learnings, mercies, and protections—the four portals to the grateful heart, and how to cultivate these key entryways in our work, relationships, health, finances, and personal growth
- Journaling and reflection exercises, perennial and indigenous wisdoms, and universal practices for every season and situation

“The practice of gratitude bestows many benefits,” writes Angeles Arrien. “Anger, arrogance, and jealousy melt in its embrace. Fear and defensiveness dissolve. Gratitude diminishes barriers to love and evokes happiness, keeping alive what has meaning for us.” *Living in Gratitude* is a dependable resource for making this cherished virtue your guiding light along life’s journey.

{ November }





November Prayer

Thanksgiving Prayer of the Haudenosaunee Nation

*We return thanks to our mother, the earth,
Which sustains us.*

*We return thanks to the rivers and streams,
Which supply us with water.*

*We return thanks to all herbs,
Which furnish medicines for the cure of our diseases.*

*We return thanks to the moon and the stars,
Which have given us their light*

When the sun was gone.

*We return thanks to the sun,
That has looked upon the earth with a beneficent eye.*

*Lastly; we return thanks to the Great Spirit,
In Whom is embodied all goodness,*

*And Who directs all things
for the good of Her children.*

ADAPTED FROM FIRST NATION'S PRAYER

Grateful Seeing

*List your blessings and you will walk through
those gates of thanksgiving and into the fields of joy.*

GARRISON KEILLOR

IN NOVEMBER WE continue to honor the beauty and bounty of autumn. Americans long ago dedicated a day during this month for the sole purpose of inviting and expressing gratitude. We know this day by its traditional name, Thanksgiving. For those of us consciously choosing to live in gratitude, this month presents a unique opportunity to not only deepen our own experience of thankfulness, but to share it explicitly with those around us. What a gift it is that we are annually invited—even urged—to answer the simple yet powerful question, “What are you thankful for today?”

Though Thanksgiving itself is but a single day, gratitude occupies our thoughts frequently this month as we anticipate the arrival of the holiday. Family members make

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arrangements to travel. Cooks plan menus, shop, and prepare to receive guests. These are some of the rituals of our modern Thanksgiving, and they offer frequent reminders of the reason we are celebrating: because our lives are bountiful. If we are blessed with plenty at this time, our holiday may take the form of a large gathering and a generous feast. If our means are more modest, the day may involve a simple meal with a friend after a long nature walk. Or we may choose to spend an afternoon at a community center feeding those who have little. The holiday is what we make of it, but it always holds the promise of renewed awareness of all our blessings, large and small.

Reflecting on Fruition

Thanksgiving is a time to harvest, appreciate, and celebrate those things that have come to fruition in our lives during the year, in both external and internal ways. Perhaps a valued relationship has deepened. We may have seen a project through from idea to reality, become confident in a new skill, or noticed that we have integrated an important experience that has made us wiser. As we answer the question “What are you thankful for today?” it is important to appreciate the work we have done to bring us to this point in our journey. This is a time to celebrate our sustained intention and efforts, for they have borne fruit.

When Mother Teresa was asked about the fruit of her work, she often responded by listing the six fruits of life she was most grateful for:

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*The fruit of silence is prayer,
The fruit of prayer is faith,
The fruit of faith is love,
The fruit of love is service,
The fruit of service is peace.*

The internal fruits of silence and prayer cultivated and strengthened Mother Teresa's love and faith and provided her the courage to extend these qualities to the dying poor in India. Her external efforts were recognized when she received the Nobel Peace Prize for her work and, after her death, was beatified by the Catholic Church.

Like Mother Teresa, others such as Gandhi, Golda Meir, and Martin Luther King, Jr. were moved by the internal fruits of faith, prayer, and compassion to manifest the external fruits of their work in the world and their place in history. What internal fruits are motivating the external work that you love in the world at this time?

The role of silence in the progression Mother Teresa spoke of cannot be underestimated—there is great power in it. When we spend time in silence and deeply listen to the guidance given, our actions in the outer world align with what has heart and meaning for us.

Cross-Cultural Traditions

Every culture of the world has its own harvest rituals and ways of sharing its bounty, as well as releasing what is not needed or giving it away. Our Thanksgiving tradition, for

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example, is rooted in the story of how Native Americans helped the Pilgrims survive and taught them to give thanks for Earth's abundance. Many traditional peoples of this continent have considered fall the best season for extending generosity of spirit, and they have done so by giving gratitude and thanksgiving for the abundance in their lives. Some have done this through the practice of "the giveaway": offering to others things that are deeply valued, or giving away that which is not being used to those who are in greater need.

In some native cultures of the Pacific Northwest, the giveaway takes the form of the potlatch, a celebration during which tangible things such as food and decorative items are offered, as are intangible gifts such as songs or dances. These acts are ways of expressing and cultivating generosity of spirit. Island peoples of the world have daily rituals, songs of praise, and prayers for giving thanks for the bounty received from the sea, for food provided by the land, and for each other.

November is the month of letting go of what is no longer needed or has fulfilled its purpose, just as trees now release the last season's leaves. In China, an old proverb speaks to this: "Give away, throw away or move twenty-seven items for nine days and your life will change!" The practice of letting go teaches us about nonattachment. The process of releasing or emptying provides room for new possibilities, opportunities, and blessings to enter our lives.

The Mirror of the Breath

The harvesting and releasing rituals practiced by world cultures are mirrored in each of us through the breath. Breathing is a practice in releasing, opening, and receiving the blessing of life. In his book *Forgive for Good*, Fred Luskin offers the Breath of Thanks exercise, which we can do on a daily basis as a gratitude and letting-go practice:

1. Two or three times every day when you are not fully occupied, slow down and bring your attention to your breathing.
2. Notice how your breath flows in and out without your having to do anything. . . .
3. Continue breathing this way for about three to five slow, deep breaths.
4. For each of the next five to eight inhalations, say the words *thank you* silently to remind yourself of the gift of your breath and how lucky you are to be alive.

Luskin suggests practicing this exercise at least three times a week; it is a good reminder that gratitude begins with the basics. Embodying gratitude in this way is a practice that is available to us all, regardless of our current circumstances. At Thanksgiving time, it is important to give thanks for the great gift of life itself that is carried along by the breath. We can also appreciate the breath as a unifying force; each time we inhale and exhale, we share a universal experience and are thereby joined with the rest of humanity and with all the other species of the world.

A Shift in Perspective: Grateful Seeing

In November we can readily see how much we have to be thankful for compared to our troubles and dissatisfactions. As we extend gratitude for the bounty and goodness that are present in our lives, any pockets of ingratitude that once seemed large in our imaginations become dwarfed—nearly nonexistent. It is important to remember that whatever we need to rectify in our lives is often small in proportion to all the benefits we have extended toward and received from others. All the good intentions, prayers, good deeds, and kind words we have offered others are still with us: they cannot be taken away, and this is a great source of encouragement.

Emmet Fox, a scientist, philosopher, and spiritual teacher, reminds us that “Errors of thought, word, and deed are worked out and satisfied under the Law, but the good goes on forever, unchanged and undimmed by time.” Dacher Keltner, a researcher at the University of California, Berkeley, and author of *Born to Be Good: The Science of a Meaningful Life*, demonstrates that the intrinsic value that lies within the human spirit is not only to be a good human being, but to foster more goodness and well-being for others in meaningful ways. His research also indicates that the good that occurs in our lives, whether we have extended it or received it, is far more valued and remembered in our hearts than our errors or mistakes.

November offers us a time to honor and be thankful for all the goodness that life, loved ones, and important strangers have extended to us. What goodness are you known for

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at this time in your life? Make it a point to see and appreciate the fruits of goodness in your colleagues, your friends, and your family. When we see more fruits than errors, we have developed grateful seeing.

Grateful seeing is the ability to look first for what is good and working in our lives without minimizing or denying the hardships or challenges that are also present. Many traditional societies hold the perspective, or world view, that what has been given to us ultimately ignites growth and strengthens us. Individuals who are viewed as seers in indigenous societies are highly respected, honored, and valued for their gifts of insight, vision, and grateful seeing. The Maasai of East Africa, for example, call their seers *diviners*, ones who perceive in the seen and unseen worlds that which is divine and good. We, too, can learn to be seers—seers of the blessings, learnings, mercies, and protections that are ever present.

Focusing on the benefits and goodness that are all around us leads to feelings of gratitude, and this creates a multiplier effect: the experience of gratitude generates a sense of well-being, and the better we feel, the more good we will do. Gratitude and the actions it stimulates also build and strengthen social bonds and friendships. This practice of grateful seeing, looking for the good, allows us to see the gift of love—given and received—that is present in our lives.



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One definition of a miracle is a change in perspective; therefore our focus on grateful seeing in November can make it a month of miracles. Looking for the bounty and good in our lives creates a disposition for gratitude and allows us to see that some of the challenges we face may be blessings in disguise. Look for the areas of your life where your efforts have borne fruit. Be grateful for the works you have created, within and without. Acknowledge the gifts you have received and the thoughts, prayers, and kindnesses you have extended to others. Shift your perspective from looking first to what is not working in your life to looking first at what is. Dedicate this month to giving thanks, and this will strengthen your capacity for grateful seeing.

NOVEMBER BENEFIT OF GRATITUDE-PRACTICE



Did you know that empirical studies show that gratitude engenders behaviors typically endorsed as moral and good? Gratitude increases our inclinations to be more caring, compassionate, just, honest, and respectful towards others. Such behaviors reinforce the inherent sense of goodness within human beings. People who extend or are recipients of these behaviors experience a sense of connection and appreciation for the goodness given and received. When we begin to look for the good in our lives and shift our perspective to see what *is* working, our experience

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of grateful seeing and our expression of gratitude increase significantly.

Reflections

Yesterday is history. Tomorrow is a mystery. Today is a gift!

ANONYMOUS

In contemplative practices of any kind, questions provoke inquiry, reflection, and conscious awareness of what we are learning or what is being revealed to us about our own current inner and outer work.

Notice which of the following questions capture your attention and which are less evocative or interesting to you at this time. Select two or three of the most meaningful questions for you and explore them more deeply.

- What are you thankful for today?
- In what ways do you express your gratitude? How do others know that you are grateful?
- What family rituals and expressions of gratitude have been passed on to you? Which ones have you continued? What new ones have you originated?
- As the year begins to wind to a close, reflect every day of this month upon the blessings, opportunities, fruits, and harvests that have come into your life this year. To whom or what are you especially grateful for in your life?

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- In what ways are you shifting your perspective from looking at what is not working to developing “grateful seeing”—looking first for what is working and what is good in your life?
- Whom have you helped this year? What circumstances have ignited your generosity and gratitude?
- What positive changes have occurred in your life that you can directly attribute to your gratitude practices this year?

Practices

Practices are essential for integrating what we are learning. Select two or three of the following practices that most specifically apply to your current experience and would help you the most at this time.

- Practice generosity of spirit by giving to the needy or offering anonymous acts of kindness. Clear out what you are not using or do not need and give it away to those who could use it. Go back to the month of March and review your choices about compassionate service. How has your compassion increased since then?
- Write letters, call, or send gifts of gratitude to those who have provided blessings in your life.
- Practice looking for the goodness and fruits of generosity and love in your life. As Emmet Fox says, “good goes

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on forever, unchanged, and undimmed.” Notice what changes as a result of changing your perspective from what is not working to what is working.

- Each morning, take a moment to pay attention to your breath and to give thanks for life (regardless of how your life feels at the moment). Use Fred Luskin’s Breath of Thanks exercise at least three times a week this month.
- Practice appreciating the gift of each day. Remember the philosophy of being present to the blessings and learnings each day offers—“Yesterday is history. Tomorrow is a mystery. Today is a gift.”
- Spend at least fifteen minutes a day in silence and deep listening. Take time to rebalance, rest, and come back to your center or ground of being—that grace-filled sanctuary of quiet, stillness, and peace that Mother Teresa and others drew from in order to do their good works in the world.
- Write your own poem, prayer, or story for Thanksgiving.

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Review and Integration

Gratitude in the Four Quadrants of Life



Notice what you are grateful for in the four quadrants of your life:

- Work/creative service
- Relationships: friends, colleagues, and family
- Finances and right livelihood
- Health and well-being

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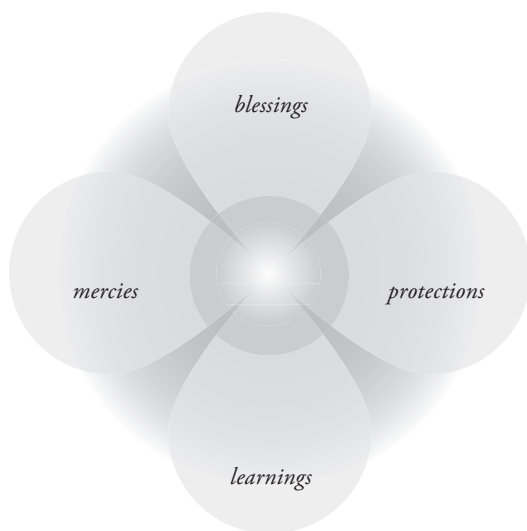
The center of the four quadrants represents the place of *developing character* and connecting to your own *spiritual growth* and development. The center is influenced, impacted, and informed by all four quadrants. To help you discover the sources of your gratitude, answer the following tracking questions and see which quadrant or quadrants are emphasized more for you this month.

In looking at the illustration of the Four Quadrants of Life, consider the following questions:

- What are you seeing that is similar to last month's work? What is different, or significantly changing? Review the four quadrants of your life. What is being most activated in either your work, relationships, finances, or health?
- What internal insights and discoveries are you making that have strengthened your character and fostered spiritual growth this month?
- What are you noticing that is new, expanded, or being released in each quadrant of your life this month?
- What are you grateful for in each of your life's quadrants, and how are you expressing your thankfulness?

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Blessings, Learnings, Mercies, and Protections



Express your gratitude by reflecting upon:

- The major *Blessings* you have given and received during November.
- The major *Learnings* you have given and received during November.
- The major *Mercies* you have given and received during November.
- The major *Protections* you have given and received during November.

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The following questions can help you go deeper in your exploration of these four portals to gratitude.

External Questions

- Who or what has inspired you?
- Who or what is challenging you?
- Who or what is surprising you?
- Who or what is touching or moving you?

Internal Questions

- What is strengthening within my nature?
- What is softening within my nature?
- What is opening within my nature?
- What is deepening within my nature?