

One Simple Way to Recognize if Someone is Living a Life of Truth

Small, seemingly trivial events, can be impactful. Some years ago, we moved our household from one suburban community to another about 15 miles away. Soon after the move, I was rushing out the front door to put an envelope in the hands of the mail carrier. As I introduced myself, the mail carrier smiled and said, "I know who you are. I was your mailman five years ago back at Slade Lane." Over time and out of context, he remembered me. I had not remembered him. To him I had been something more than a nameless face on his route. I had been unaware of his kindness.

This incident was a huge learning moment for me. In that moment, my gaze was altered. "Gratitude is a way of seeing that alters our gaze," writes psychology professor and gratitude expert Robert Emmons in his book [*The Little Book of Gratitude*](#). On a visceral level, I felt appreciation for the vast and mostly unseen forces around me that made possible my quality of life.

A moment of experience revealed a larger issue to me. How often am I fast to complain and even hold a grievance and yet, slow to feel grateful? Perhaps you can recall an occasion when you were poorly served and responded with indignation. How often do we see with equal vigor the many men and women, mostly behind the scenes, who support our modern way of life? We are not self-sufficient, and our lives depend upon the efforts others make on our behalf. Emmons observes,

"Grateful living is possible only when we realize that other people and agents do things for us that we cannot do for ourselves. Gratitude emerges from two stages of information

processing – affirmation and recognition. We affirm the good and credit others with bringing it about. In gratitude, we recognize that the source of goodness is outside of ourselves.”

Gratitude, writes Emmons, is more than “a nice sentiment, a warm fuzzy feeling, or a strategy or tactic for being happier or healthier.” He adds, “We did not create or fashion ourselves, and we did not get to where we are in life by ourselves. So living in gratitude is living in truth.” Living out of ingratitude is living a lie.

Notice how often we turn to negativity and ingratitude. Emmons describes this common state of mind:

“Left to their own devices, our minds tend to hijack each and every opportunity for happiness. Negativity, entitlement, resentment, forgetfulness, ungratefulness all clamor for our attention. Whether stemming from our own thoughts or the daily news headlines, we are exposed to a constant drip of negativity. Doom and gloom are on the horizon as financial fears, relational turmoil, global conflicts, and health challenges threaten us.”

Instead of shortcomings, we can see good will in others who work on our behalf. I’m not just writing about the physical goods and services that support our quality of life. We have felt overwhelmed, defeated, dispirited. “At times our own light goes out,” wrote humanitarian Albert Schweitzer, “and is rekindled by a spark from another person. Each of us has cause to think with deep gratitude of those who have lighted the flame within us.”

Gratitude, writes Emmons, “is the thread that stitches us together.” He then cautions, “Each act of gratitude contributes to the overall patchwork, but these threads are frail. Ingratitude, forgetfulness, resentment, entitlement are

forces that weaken and can ultimately unravel the fabric.”

Awareness of Goodness Should Start Early

If the threads of gratitude are fragile, what can we do? Famed educator Maria Montessori believed we must cultivate in the very young an awareness of goodness that surrounds us. [She wrote](#),

“What is necessary is that the individual from the earliest years should be placed in relation with humanity. There is no love in our hearts for the human beings from whom we have received, and are receiving so much in bread and clothing, and numerous inventions for our benefit. We take and enjoy all that is done for us without gratitude...”

Young or old, we can place ourselves in relation to humanity. Montessori reminds us,

“We write and read, and the child can be taught who invented writing and the instruments wherewith we write, how printing came and books became so numerous. Every achievement has come by the sacrifice of someone now dead. Every map speaks eloquently of the work of explorers and pioneers, who underwent hardships and trials to find new places, rivers and lakes, and to make the world greater and richer for our dwelling.”

Montessori had no use for politically correct notions of brotherhood. Like Emmons, she calls to us to alter our gaze and lead the young to do the same:

“Let us in education always call the attention of children to the hosts of men and women who are hidden from the light of fame, so kindling a love of humanity; not the vague and anaemic sentiment preached today as brotherhood, nor the political sentiment that the working classes should be

redeemed and uplifted. What is most wanted is no patronizing charity for humanity, but a reverent consciousness of its dignity and worth."

As adults, with intention, we can alter our gaze to see the goodness all around us. Emmons advises asking the self-reflective questions of Naikan therapy: "What have I received? What have I given? How have I caused difficulty for others?"

Emmons offers, "Reflection upon these questions promotes insight, a sense of indebtedness, the emergence of gratitude, and a consequential decision to shift from a focus on the self to a deeper attentiveness and sensitivity towards others."

Consider this: When you are angry with your partner, observe what dominates your attention. Is it their "infraction" or the richness they bring to your life?

Our mindset shifts in a moment when we set our intention to truthfully notice all that we receive as opposed to what we are not getting. "Gratitude shines a light on goodness," writes Emmons.

Thanksgiving is an opportunity to reflect and experience gratitude. And just as one day of exercise a year cannot keep us fit, we can make a daily practice of gratitude. Placing ourselves in relation to humanity we recognize sources of goodness outside of ourselves; and so doing, we live in truth.

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[Image Credit: [Max Pixel](#)]