

GRATITUDE

There are many lessons that come from years of providing transformational learning to thousands of people. Among them, the one that comes out as the most consistent and the one with the widest impact: the transformational power of gratitude. I have been keenly aware of the power of emotional learning as much as I have been aware that in our traditional ways of learning it has been left to chance, but I never imagined that the emergence of gratitude in our lives would have such an amazing impact.

The first indication of this came with many letters that I received from participants in our programs. Consistently, they indicated that bringing gratitude to their lives had been one of the most powerful learnings in their program. The other indication was the recurrent experience of having conversations with participants who were dealing with the absence of joy in their lives, to discover that lasting joy can't show up if gratitude is missing. Those who live in entitlement were clearly away from gratitude and definitely away from joy.

Different emotions predispose us to different kind of actions. What are we predisposed to in the presence of gratitude? I played with that question for a while, and I realized that, in order to answer the question, it was helpful to make a distinction between gratitude and thankfulness. I understand the latter as the emotion that is triggered by a successful exchange while the former does not require any exchange. It is a choice.

When we experience thankfulness, we are predisposed to be of service, to accept requests coming from the person with whom we have had some exchange. It can be that someone fulfilled a promise made to us or just gave us something out of no other commitment than caring or loving us.

When we experience gratitude, we are predisposed to be a gift to others, to the world. We are not asking life to give us any thing, we hold life as the most precious gift in itself, and we are just in awe of its mystery, its beauty. There has been no exchange; there is no *me* and *it*. I am part of the mystery itself. I am grateful for my son's little hand holding mine, for the sunset, the mountains, the infinity of space, the eyes of a loved one, the fresh air, the trees, the colorful insect.

I am not saying that thankfulness is not an important emotion. I am just making a distinction that allows me to find a family of emotions that come with gratitude: wonder and joy to begin with. It also shows me that resentment is on the other emotional side of gratitude, where we are taken by a big complaint: life has not given me what I deserve, what I am entitled to.

Another extraordinary impact of gratitude is in our ways about learning. It breaks our consumerist approach of learning as accumulation of information, abilities and titles. In gratitude, learning is held as a personal enhancement to serve. Therefore, gratitude is a gate to wisdom, while you can be knowledgeable in resentment. Wisdom is about meaning and good living, while knowledge without gratitude can be simply a means to aggrandize yourself.

Can we learn gratitude? Yes, no doubt about it. Learning gratitude requires the discovery of it, the ability to choose and the power of a community where it's available. The limbic system does not learn by command; it learns by immersion, by example, by choice.

And there is more: gratitude is the emotion that makes accessing higher levels of consciousness possible. Humankind has been centered in fear, and its main servant greed, since the beginning of time. The changes that are needed will come with a profound emotional shift that will allow for new levels of consciousness to arise.

This essay on gratitude was written by my dear friend and teacher, Julio Ollala. For more information on his work visit www.newfieldnetwork.com

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