

The Gift of Humility by Colette Lafia

The cherry blossoms have arrived, and it feels like nature has handed us a beautiful gift. At the Japanese Tea Garden, here in San Francisco, I lean into a low hanging blossom and inhale the delicate sweet scent. The wet pink petals touch my nose, and once again, I am reminded of the generosity of nature, year after year. From the air we breathe, to the body we each inhabit, we are living a profound gift, and yet, we can struggle to see and relate to life as a gift.

In his seminal book, *Gratefulness, the Heart of Prayer*, Brother David Steindl-Rast poses a question worth pondering: “Why is it so difficult to acknowledge a gift as a gift?”

He believes that admitting something as a gift is also admitting our dependence on the giver. And we don’t like or want to be dependent on anyone or anything. We can find it difficult to allow ourselves to be what he calls “freely dependent.” However, as we all know, to see ourselves as completely independent beings is an illusion, since we are all living inter-dependent lives. Brother David reminds us that “gratefulness always goes beyond myself. For what makes something a gift is precisely that it is given. And the receiver depends on the giver. This is true humility.” (1)

The relationship between humility and gratitude is essential. It allows us to receive both the big things, as well as the simple things as gifts; and ultimately, to see everything as connected. “The moment I acknowledge the gift as gift and so acknowledge my dependence, I am free—free to go forward into full gratefulness,” Brother David teaches.

Humility is a portal to deeper and more abiding gratitude. And yet, humility is not a word most of us are fully comfortable with, if we attach to the concept that we are, or must remain, in control. Humility is rooted in the relationship of both giver and receiver. As Angeles Arrien wrote in her book, *Living In Gratitude*, “Humility is a blessing, as it allows us to reach beyond ourselves and appreciate the gifts others bring to the world, a natural source of gratitude.”

So how do we live humility in the acts of gratefulness? I have noticed that gratitude comes to life when it is expressed because speaking something brings it to life. I might say “Thank you” to my students in the library for being patient and listening, “Thank you” to my husband for cooking dinner, “Thank you” to myself for taking time to swim to care for my body, “Thank you” to Creation for the beauty of the blue sky. The practice of saying thank you genuinely throughout the day encourages true humility within and around us. It cultivates grateful living.

A few years ago, after noticing a tension building up in our marriage, and both of us not feeling fully appreciated, my husband and I decided to cultivate a gratitude practice between us. Now, we say “Thank you” more often to each other, and what a difference

that makes! “Thank you” for taking the car in for an oil change; “Thank you” for picking up groceries; “Thank you” for setting me a bath; “Thank you” for working so hard; and “Thank you” for the encouragement, the patience, and the love! Gratitude has brought more of a togetherness into our hearts and into our homes.

Humility and gratitude are about acknowledging a togetherness we all live in-with each other, with nature, and with the Sacred. We are invited to take our place with grace, in great and growing gratitude. I offer you this gratitude practice:

Practice

In the quiet of your heart, say to yourself, in a loving and kind way, “Thank you” for all you are and all you do.

In your journal, write a thank-you note for something in your life or to someone in your life.

Gratitude is an energy. Start saying thank you more in your life, and notice the energy it creates in you and around you. You might be surprised!