

Chapter Two: Owning Your Gifts

Owning your gifts is the most powerful joyfulness-booster there is. Often known as “counting your blessings,” it simply means taking an inventory of things for which you are grateful or appreciative, and then focusing in on one or more to really savor. (For the sake of the Full-Spectrum Joyfulness program, it’s called “Owning Your Gifts” so that it has the same initial letter as the color Orange. In case you were wondering.)

We are so focused, as a species, as a culture, on what’s wrong, what needs to be solved. Media bombard us with stories and images of conflict, because—being primates, after all—we are fascinated with clashes and competition. Advertising and popular culture tell us there’s something wrong with us that needs to be fixed, and if we buy or subscribe or pursue or achieve or work or enroll in what’s being sold, we’ll be okay.

The result is that far too many of us carry around a heavy, invisible burden of feeling just plain wrong somehow. Packaged along with this wrong feeling is a perpetual consciousness of lack and scarcity. Don’t even get me started on guilt.

Owning Your Gifts, or gratitude, is a powerful and subversive antidote to these messages. Gratitude makes you feel rich, peaceful, and harmonious.

If you have a relationship with the Divine, gratitude can be an especially meaningful subject for prayer: “Thank You, Friend, for this tree!”

If you’re more on the agnostic end of the scale, you might find it more helpful to simply direct your appreciation toward the person or thing: “Thank you, tree!”

If this feels sort of hokey to you, if you encounter the “yes, but” Joy-Squelcher, do it anyway. The “but” will fade away as you start having fun.

Mortality, finitude, the knowledge that this life is going to come to an end, can put a damper on gratitude. This knowledge is one of those big “yes, buts.” The biggest. As in:

“I’m so grateful for how beautiful the apple blossoms are this spring.”

“Yes, but they won’t be around for long.”

These thoughts will recur. Don’t fight them. Let them drift on by, and play another joyfulness game. You’ll find yourself engaged in something much more interesting in no time at all.

Another reason this is called “Owning Your Gifts” is that through gratitude and appreciation, you *take full possession* of your place in this world. And maybe it will start to dawn on you that the world is grateful for you, too.

Questions for Yourself

When you start thinking about gratitude, do any obstacles or stumbling blocks come along? What do those stumbling blocks look like? Can you draw one?
Can you be grateful even if you're having a hard time? Why or why not?

Does whatever you are grateful for have to be perfect?

What happens when you express appreciation for each thing, person, or relationship in your life?

Is this practice interesting to you? If not, what would make it more interesting?



Meditation for

Owning your Gifts

I'm relaxing deeply and softly into my heart right now. Letting my breathing take me deeper into quietness. Checking in lovingly with all parts of myself, then drifting on into a quieter and deeper place.

I'm inviting into my awareness the color orange. The juiciness of a mandarin orange. The warm orange of the harvest moon as it rises over the horizon. The pale orange/tan of a manila envelope bearing good news. The bouncy orange of a basketball. I'm breathing in the warm, jazzy, sassy color of orange.

Now I'm taking a leisurely mental tour of my whole life as it is in this moment. Starting with my body. Considering and sending gratitude to all the parts that work. Thinking of how far this amazing body has carried me. Thanking each part as it comes into my awareness.

Moving on to my mind. My emotions. Giving wholehearted thanks for each thing that comes into my awareness.

Moving on to my relationships. Pets, plants, family, friends, associates. Resting in gratitude for each one, as each relationship comes into my mind's eye. Being wholehearted in my appreciation, letting each critical or doubting thought drift away like mist, and returning to gratitude.

Moving on, full of gratitude, to my possessions. My bed, my home and the things in it, my car or other conveyance that gets me from place to place, my favorite familiar books and gadgets.

Expanding the field of my gratitude. Animals, mountains, oceans, landscapes, gravity, air, the region in which I live, the stars and moon, life itself—being as specific as I possibly can as I praise and express my appreciation for each thing.

And when I'm done for now, I drift gently back to myself and rest in gratitude.

Journaling

Make a Gratitude Map. Put yourself at the center. Sketch in everything that you are grateful for. Everything. Leave space around the edges so you can add to it as you keep practicing.

Joyfulness Games To Try: Owing Your Gifts

- As you go through your day, try to find, notice, and appreciate beauty in even the most mundane places. Perhaps you will focus on finding colors or shapes or textures that appeal to you.
- Try to top your previous record of things you are grateful for in any given day.
- Set aside one day a week to practice gratitude. (How about Mondays?)
- Be a detective of things to be grateful for. Lavish gratitude on some specific thing for which probably no one in the history of the world has ever bothered being grateful—some anonymous leaf on an obscure tree, the shape of a cloud you're looking at right now.

- Try lighting a candle and doing a 5-minute gratitude meditation every morning for a week. If you find yourself swept away by thoughts of a particular thing or person for which you are especially grateful, permit yourself to be carried away by that gratitude and love; don't worry about getting through a long list!
- Make a nightly practice, as you turn out your light and settle in for sleep, of identifying the moment of your day that was the most holy, joyful, or life-giving. Rest in gratitude for that moment.
- Write a note, send an email, or make a phone call of gratitude and appreciation to someone. See what the results feel like for you.
- Find a theme for your day—for instance, birds, or trees, or water—and practice noticing and feeling grateful for all the examples of that theme that you encounter during your day.

- For one day, be on the lookout for the color orange. Every time you see something orange, take a moment to mentally list three things for which you are grateful right at that moment. Try to make the list different each time.

- Notice—*really* notice—one of the people you see every day—whether a family member, a shop clerk or a co-worker. Observe this person closely and detect something specific in her or him for which you are grateful. Tell him or her, if you can.
- Look at your Gratitude Map with a soft, gentle gaze. Does one item on the map have a special glow or vibration for you right now? If so, can you greet this as an invitation to lavish gratitude in that particular area today?

Covenant for Owning Your Gifts

I hereby covenant with myself to practice owning my gifts by experiencing and expressing gratitude and appreciation.

I will start by trying the following practice or attitude:

Signed: _____ Date: _____