

Occupying Appreciation

Sitting here in the early morning before the sun comes up; I realize that I don't need to give a thought to whether that will happen. It's expected because it's in the nature of life on this planet. A thought for it isn't required - and yet, the whole of life depends on it.

Actually there are many things of life that I could just expect to be there for me – the heat coming on in my house, the electricity that runs the place, my car starting in the morning, the seasons changing on time, the flowers I love blooming in season, having contact with my children and grandchildren – I could go on because there is a world full of what fills our lives every day. And because all of it is a regular part of life and expected, I can easily fall into an attitude of ho-hum – that sense that it's just there or even in the background.

I use to experience my life that way. With it I waited for something exciting to come around or I sought excitement in things and experiences. Bottom line was that I wanted to feel alive, to feel vibrant and energized and maybe to just feel. Then during a period in my life when I faced how disconnected I felt to everything around me, I was given the gift of the proverbial hit upside the head. I woke up on a bright sunny morning sitting on a porch looking toward the sun and I realized that the source of my aliveness was inside of me. I didn't have to wait for something to excite me; I didn't have to go in search of exhilaration. I could create it in a moment – a simple shift within me **out of ho-hum to becoming sensitively aware** of what is before me. I could appreciate what I had been taking for granted and with that I felt alive, vibrant, and my energy rose to fill my whole body. I felt the treasure inside of me and the fortunate life I was in charge of creating. I learned I could **occupy appreciation**, I could **embody appreciation** and I could choose to do this at any moment and the more I chose this

option, the more alive and present and connected I feel.

While this is a simple move it's not always an easy one. It takes some practice and some effort to establish appreciation as the background tone of life. However it is an effort that delivers big benefits. The Institute of Heartmath in California has done substantial research on the effect of appreciation on lives. They found that *just 5 minutes of focused attention on appreciating* lowers blood pressure and cortisol (the stress hormone), boosts immune system function and elevates serotonin (a feel good chemical) in the brain for up to 10 hours. These are pretty powerful findings given that millions of dollars are spent in researching drugs to do all of these actions and the drugs in turn cost a great deal of money. The simple act of practicing appreciation can activate our own inner pharmacy at no cost and for a big return!

Many other researchers and practitioners have found that appreciation generates creativity, joy, connection, resilience, and inner peace. That's what I discovered on that porch over 20 years ago and it is available to everyone.

There are just a few requirements in the practice. **Paying and giving attention to a specific choice** is the first one. When we bring attention to something we're given a chance to discover something new. Energy follows attention and so what we put our attention on expands and what we pay attention to becomes the reality we experience. Think about this for a moment. It's important. It's at the base of taking charge of our lives. If what we pay attention to **becomes the reality** we experience, it is very important **what we occupy** in terms of our attention and to **what we orient** ourselves.

If I focus on frustration in being caught in a traffic slowdown, I expand my frustration- heart rate increase, blood pressure spikes, stress hormones wash over my bodymind and I start

having angry and judgmental thoughts about other drivers, the road, why I have to take this route to where I need to be. (Our thoughts do get a wee bit ridiculous!). We have a choice in any and every moment however. In the same experience I could focus on deep breathing to calm my bodymind, turn on some pleasant music or lecture of interest, and send thoughts of love and appreciation out to my loved ones, or even the people around me who are all in the same situation I'm in. We can choose between the ho-hum-ness of life or worse – living in fear and dread – or we can wake up to recognize the preciousness of anything around us and the learning available to us.

This takes us to the second requirement – **Leading with Appreciation.** We don't have to wait to receive something we like or find pleasant to generate appreciation. Sometimes those might be in short supply. We can become producers of it and we then discover that there is an unlimited supply. This commodity comes in unending abundance because we are producing it and anything can be appreciated – even what is difficult because the challenges of life become the doors through which we discover the depths of our spirit, of our possibilities, and potentials.

The third and last is **Practice.** “What we live with we learn, what we learn we practice, **what we practice we become.**” I learned this many years ago from teachers in recovery from addictions. It goes hand and hand with “what we put our attention on expands”. Regular practice helps us develop and expand the bodymind tone of ease and peace that naturally comes with appreciation. It helps us connect with ourselves and others, with feeling alive and vibrant, and boosts our health and energy. As that old ad for Life cereal said, “Try it, you'll like it.”

So here's a simple practice that will put your attention on anything you want to expand.

Sit down with a pen and pad and write down 10 things to appreciate about your life right now even if there are lots of reasons not to (maybe especially if there are a lot of reasons not to). Make it a frequent practice. Notice what happens to your mood, to your energy, your attitude, your thoughts, and notice what starts showing up in your life.

Occupying appreciation is one of the significant aspects of creating a fortunate life. Begin it today. Your fortunate life is waiting.