Appreciation Enriches Our Lives

Research shows that expressing gratitude enriches your life both mentally and physically. A study by professors Robert Emmons and Michael McCullough revealed the positive impact of gratitude based on observations of three groups that kept weekly journals. The first group focused on recording things they were grateful for, the second noted events (good or bad) that affected them, while the third indicated hassles and complaints.

After 10 weeks, researchers observed that, compared to the other two groups, people in the first group were more optimistic, and felt better about their lives and their relationships with others.

Though many studies affirm the benefits of living with appreciation, life’s challenges often keep us from living each day with gratitude. So how do we develop a sense of appreciation, especially in the midst of difficulties?

Change Starts in Our Hearts

When grappling with problems, it can be hard to appreciate the things we have or the challenges we face. And we can easily become disgruntled, complacent or full of complaint, driving us into further misery.

Nichiren Daishonin teaches that the key to breaking this inertia and transforming our circumstances begins in our hearts.

Each of us, he taught, inherently possesses an enlightened nature with unlimited courage, compassion and wisdom. And he established the chanting of Nam-myoho-RENge-kyo to the Gohonzon so that anyone, no matter their background or circumstances, can access their Buddha nature and attain an unshakable, indestructible inner state of happiness.

Referring to our lives as mirrors, Nichiren instructs: “Arouse deep faith, and diligently polish your mirror day and night. How should you polish it? Only by chanting Nam-myoho-RENge-kyo” (“On Attaining Buddhahood in This Lifetime,” The Writings of Nichiren Daishonin, vol. 1, p. 4).

By chanting “diligently” and “day and night,” determined to break the cycle of misery and negativity, we can strengthen our vast and inherent power, and effectively move our lives in the best direction. As our inner resolve strengthens, so too will our appreciation for our circumstances and those around us.

Everything begins with determined prayer. And our prayer must be accompanied with resolute action.

Start by Saying “Thank You”

To live with more gratitude in their lives, some people start by keeping a journal or a running mental list of things they appreciate each day. SGI President Ikeda suggests that the simple act of saying “Thank you” is a wonderful way to express and develop appreciation.

He says: “Thank you” is a miraculous expression. It energizes us when we say it to others, and encourages us when we hear it said to us . . . and each time we say those words, our hearts sparkle and life force wells up within us.”

On the other hand, “When we cannot say thank you,” he says, “our personal growth has stopped. When we are growing, we can see how wonderful others are too. When we stop growing, all we see are other people’s faults” (The Wisdom for Creating Happiness and Peace, Part 2, p. 198).

President Ikeda once relayed a story of a youth who planned to take his own life, but was urged to first write a letter of appreciation to each person he felt indebted to. Thinking of everyone he would write to, he realized how many people were supporting him and the desire to go on living welled up inside him.

Commenting on this, President Ikeda explains that being able to acknowledge the rare and noble act of receiving support from others “produces in our hearts a feeling of pride and self-esteem: ‘I am worthy of receiving such goodness.’ It provides us with spiritual support to go on living.” (Learning From the Gosho: The Eternal Teachings of Nichiren Daishonin, p. 28).

Expressing appreciation to those around us can immediately impact our inner state of life. And the more we express our gratitude, the more we break away from the cycle of negativity and strengthen the cycle of appreciation, joy and happiness in our lives.

Practicing Buddhism Filled With Gratitude

The key is to continue praying each day and taking action for our own happiness and the happiness of those around us.

“If . . . we engage in our Buddhist practice with a spirit of goodwill toward others and a desire to praise and support everyone,” President Ikeda says, “we will experience a deep sense of joy and appreciation. Everything in life will seem rewarding and enjoyable. In fact, this is proof of our human revolution and the true embodiment of happiness” (The New Human Revolution, vol. 26, p. 301).

By basing our lives on our Buddhist practice, we can transform any suffering into joy and appreciation, and live with abundance and richness of heart. This is the way to establish lives of the greatest happiness and fortune.