

## *A Meditation on Gratitude and Joy*

*Buddhist monks begin each day with a chant of gratitude for the blessings of their life. Native American elders begin each ceremony with grateful prayers to mother earth and father sky, to the four directions, to the animal, plant, and mineral brothers and sisters who share our earth and support our life. In Tibet, the monks and nuns even offer prayers of gratitude for the suffering they have been given: "Grant that I might have enough suffering to awaken in me the deepest possible compassion and wisdom." The aim of spiritual life is to awaken a joyful freedom, a benevolent and compassionate heart in spite of everything.*

*Gratitude is a gracious acknowledgment of all that sustains us, a bow to our blessings, great and small, an appreciation of the moments of good fortune that sustain our life every day. We have so much to be grateful for. Gratitude is confidence in life itself. In it, we feel how the same force that pushes grass through cracks in the sidewalk invigorates our own life. Gratitude gladdens the heart. It is not sentimental, not jealous, nor judgmental. Gratitude does not envy or compare. Gratitude receives in wonder the myriad offerings of the rain and the earth, the care that supports every single life. As gratitude grows it gives rise to joy. We experience the courage to rejoice in our own good fortune and in the good fortune of others.*

*Joy is natural to an open heart. In it, we are not afraid of pleasure. We do not mistakenly believe it is disloyal to the suffering of the world to honor the happiness we have been given. Like gratitude, joy gladdens the heart. We can be joyful for people we love, for moments of goodness, for sunlight and trees, and for the breath within our breast. And as our joy grows we finally discover a happiness without cause. Like an innocent child who does not have to do anything to be happy, we can rejoice in life itself, in being alive.*

*Let yourself sit quietly and at ease. Allow your body to be relaxed and open, your breath natural, your heart easy. Begin the practice of gratitude by feeling how year after year you have cared for your own life. Now let yourself begin to acknowledge all that has supported you in this care:*

*With gratitude I remember the people, animals, plants, insects, creatures of the sky and sea, air and water, fire and earth, all whose joyful exertion blesses my life every day. With gratitude I*

*remember the care and labor of a thousand generations if elders and ancestors who came before me. I offer my gratitude for the safety and well-being I have been given. I offer my gratitude for the blessings of this earth I have been given. I offer my gratitude for the measure of health I have been given. I offer my gratitude for the family and friends I have been given. I offer my gratitude for the community I have been given. I offer my gratitude for the teachings and lessons I have been given. I offer my gratitude for the life I have been given.*

*Just as we are grateful for our blessings, so we can be grateful for the blessings of others. Continue to breathe gently. Bring to mind someone you care about, someone it is easy to rejoice for. Picture them and feel the natural joy you have for their well-being, for their happiness and success. With each breath, offer them your grateful, heartfelt wishes:  
May you be joyful. May your happiness increase. May you not be separated from great happiness. May your good fortune and the causes for your joy and happiness increase. Sense the sympathetic joy and caring in each phrase. When you feel some degree of natural gratitude for the happiness of this loved one, extend this practice to another person you care about. Recite the same simple phrases that express your heart's intention. Then gradually open the meditation to include neutral people, difficult people, and even enemies - until you extend sympathetic joy to all beings everywhere, young and old, near and far.*

*From "Forgiveness, Lovingkindness, and Peace" by Jack Kornfield*