Gratitude

2022 has arrived. A new year. We still have the message “happy new year!” ringing in our ears, the idea that things will suddenly change as the calendar flips over, that this year will be ‘better’ somehow. At tricky times it can be difficult to feel anything other than uncertainty and wonder about how the coming year will pan out. It’s easy to feel negative and fearful in response. I’m guessing that many of us feel this at times, and some of us more often or more consistently than others.

Whilst I was researching something else (isn’t it so often the way?), I found several interesting articles looking at how gratitude might help us shift some of our habitual thoughts, and it felt like this time of year which can feel gloomy or anti-climatic, I thought it would be good to share some of the ideas I found.

It also feels important to say that very often just the act of being honest with ourselves about how we are really feeling are more liberating and helpful than trying to ‘do’ something to change how we feel! So the words below are just for perusal and digestion, not necessarily for advice…

I liked this description of gratitude from Psychology Today (link below): “Gratitude is an emotion expressing appreciation for what one has—as opposed to, say, a consumer-oriented emphasis on what one wants or needs… Studies show that gratitude not only can be deliberately cultivated but can increase levels of well-being and happiness among those who do cultivate it. In addition, grateful thinking—and especially expression of it to others—is associated with increased levels of energy, optimism, and empathy.”

Scientific studies show that by focusing our mind on feeling grateful we can feel happier; people who practice gratitude spend less time thinking negative thoughts or replaying worries and anxiety in their heads. Gratitude can also help ease stress levels, make sleeping easier, and allow us to be in healthier relationships.

Things don’t suddenly change though. It can take some time to practice and for our thoughts to shift, but once shifted the changes are long term. There are various ways to practice gratitude, from keeping a journal to listening to mindfulness podcasts. It’s important that you find the way that suits you best, and helps you practice regularly. A simple way to start (and perhaps a bit less intimidating that a blank journal page) is to simply respond to some simple questions about what you have noticed, what is in your world, or what small things make you feel a bit happier.

So, here are some of my favourite gratitude inspiring questions. Why not try one each day for a little while and see if you notice anything shifting in you...

• What smell are you grateful for?

• What colour lifts your mood?

• What piece of technology helps you live your life better? Why is it important to you?

• What is your favourite food?

• List the 3 best things you’ve eaten this week

• What sound makes you happy?

• Name something in nature that lifts your spirit

• What memory from recent times makes you smile?

• Describe an event in childhood that you feel grateful for

• What is your favourite book? Why?

• Where is your favourite place near your home?

• What taste gives you most pleasure?

• Where and when was your best holiday? What was special about it?

• What is an ability or skill you have?

• What do you see around you that brings joy?

• Which is your favourite season? What is it about this season that you enjoy?

• What is the most important piece of knowledge you have acquired?

• Which piece of art do you enjoy looking at?

• What is your favourite weather?

• Who do you value in your life? Why?

• Which song or piece of music makes your heart sing?

• What was your favourite childhood story?

• Which tradition holds most meaning for you?

• What challenge you have faced has given you most satisfaction?

• What small thing you use daily is most valuable to you?

• What moment this week has lifted you?

• Who is the person, or people, you glad to have in my life? What is it about them that is special?

• What is your guilty pleasure?

• Where is your favourite place in the world?

• Name something that gives you comfort

• What is your favourite part of the day?

• Name something or someone you’re proud of? Why?

• What beautiful thing can you see – either in your room or outside the window?

• Name someone who has been kind to you this week?

• What is something weird or random that brings you joy?

• What beautiful thing have you noticed today?

• What is the item you treasure most?

• What has made you smile today?

• What is a freedom that you value in your life?

• Which TV show lets you escape or makes you laugh?

• What is your favourite film? Why?

• What is your best personality trait?

• Which celebrity you admire and why?

• What is something important to you that money can’t buy?

• What would your perfect day be like?

• Have you inherited anything that brings you pleasure or happy memories?

References

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