

INTRODUCTION

- Literature on the neuroscience of happiness and positive neuroplasticity frequently cite the importance of adopting a gratitude practice as a fundamental tool to impact mood, improve wellbeing and reverse the brains negativity bias. ^{1,2}
- Engaging in a conscious gratitude exercise has been proven to produce multiple benefits including elevating mood, increasing satisfaction with life and building overall resilience. ^{3,4}
- But could this gentle practice also have a deeper impact on our level of consciousness and connection with the Divine and act as a catalyst for spiritual awakening?

BACKGROUND

- Gratitude became part of my life six years ago in response to coping with a challenging set of personal circumstances.
- Over three months I felt calmer, energy levels rose, sleep improved and overall feelings of wellbeing and happiness increased.
- Unexpectedly I also experienced a heightened sensitivity to beauty, prolonged periods of tearful positive emotion and an increased connection to others.
- Intrigued by this shift of state of mind and Being, I pondered:

"What would the world be like if everyone practiced Gratitude"?

METHOD

- In February 2017 I partnered with Australian company 'Shine Global' and created the '60 Day Gratitude Challenge' (60DGC), enrolling 300 participants from over 12 countries
- Participants received the e-book "How 60 Days of Gratitude Can Transform Your Life"⁵, gained access to a Facebook group and met online once a week for a coaching call comprising a meditation, interviews with experts on gratitude and group sharing.
- The challenge had two main intentions:
- 1. To engage as many people as possible in a conscious gratitude practice
- 2. To test the hypothesis that gratitude can serve as a gateway to spiritual awakening
- Qualitative interviews were conducted with 9 participants from the challenge to assess the impact of the '60 Day Gratitude Challenge' experience on emotional and spiritual health.

Gratitude as a Catalyst for Spiritual Awakening

RESULTS

The experience of spiritual awakening through a gratitude practice was reported by participants across four key areas: Heart Opening, Greater Self-awareness, Experience of Oneness and an increase in Self-Responsibility.

HEART OPENING

"My heart has been profoundly opened, and I'm unafraid to be myself, which is an offering of my authentic self. I don't think that can be separated from Gratitude. You are expressing yourself as the Divine. I am the Divine." Lydia

"A deep love and sense of connecting with others became a strong feeling through the challenge. One day I couldn't stop crying with the realisation that life was so beautiful. I wondered how I was going to now function in the world being so open. It was quite overwhelming." Tamara

"I was able to release, let go and become more open. Through the practice I was able to access that divine feeling that it's ok if things are not going my way and to accept what is." Eleni

"Gratitude and giving thanks for it all opens us up to wonder and awe for all that surrounds us. And then wonder at the wonder!" Roy

"Gratitude really connects you to your Being, and it's so easy to forget your Being. Gratitude brings you back in touch and takes you into your heart. You can't be grateful without being in your heart." Athena

"I was able to tap into my true nature and core being of Love. My commitment to myself became deeper, more sensitive and I started taking better care of myself." Keira

GREATER SELF-AWARENESS

"Gratitude is a wonderful tool to be able to see internal patterns that were previously hidden. I have so much more self-awareness than before." Keira

"I developed an appreciation for my negative emotions – what are they trying to tell me? My level of discernment was enhanced and ability to self-reflect improved." Margaret

"Embarking on a challenge like this you move into a new time-line Without realising it awareness is expanded, sensitivity increases and understanding deepens." Lydia

'Gratitude brought me a deeper connection with the Divine and when accessing that space you don't even question deservedness it just is. The 60DGC allowed feelings of unworthiness to just fall away." Lydia

"Moments of not feeling Grateful stood out more. I developed a deeper sensitivity in my body, mind and self-talk." Keira

"I had an illusion that I can control – but the more I practiced Gratitude, the less I held on. I let go. I felt a sacred grace to accept that there's a wisdom greater than me. The 60DGC started everything!" Linda

"Spiritual awakening refers to a shift in consciousness, an apperception of reality which had been previously unrealized. The culmination of such realizations is in the recognition of oneness with all of existence."



"My overall connection to other people was enhanced. It felt like I was 'holding a bridge across the planet. I realised that we're all One and not separate bodies.'" Athena

"I remember feeling more open to everyone and everything in my life and becoming more compassionate. I began really looking at everything and one day felt a deep connection with a bird I was observing and knew that that bird and my soul were the same." -

"I became more aware of how everyone else can impact me, and that we all have a place in this world. The more I looked at and noticed other people, when I looked in their eyes I could see their soul." Linda

"Being grateful for people made it easier to see the Divine and beautiful in others. I was able to draw on that recognition of being connected and my experience of Oneness grew from just glimpses to minutes and hours. And as my practice deepened there was a sense of less separation." Keira

"I developed a deep understanding of who I was intrinsically – a child of the Universe." Lydia

"I knew in my head before the challenge that we are all one soul, but through this practice I could feel the Universe calling us together and really experience it. When my heart now communicates with another heart, it's beautiful and real." Linda

SELF-RESPONSIBILITY

"Gratitude gives a tool to shift a negative mindset – noticing, pivoting, choosing to have different thoughts. I used to wonder how people with tough situations were happy – now l know I can do that and take care of myself better." Keira

"What did change was seeing things more positively, with more ease and I didn't stay in negative patterns. I could change perspectives and choose to think differently." Tamara

"The challenge triggered some negative emotions for me but I was able to accept that that's life and that we're all in it together. If you remember your Being during challenging times then you have a 'life raft' and can have a choice about how you respond. Gratitude is my life raft." Athena

"I learned not to be a victim you can't do that so much when practicing Gratitude. I developed a deeper awareness that I can choose how I want to respond."

"I was able to reframe challenges and my ability to ask for help improved. I stopped comparing myself with others and asked 'can I be happy with what I have right now?'" Margaret

"I've trained myself to look for the good every day. It's now easier and faster to catch myself in unconscious moments or when I'm challenged and I can say 'Stop. Look at what I have'. The 60DGC will stay with me as a very positive experience in my life." Tamara

CONCLUSION

- The practice of gratitude during the '60 Day Gratitude Challenge' expanded the heart and soul and acted as a gateway to spiritual transcendence and awakening.
- Moments of grace, unconditional love and acceptance were realised by the group, resulting in an expansion of awareness and a deepening of compassion to oneself and others.
- The 60DGC demonstrated that gratitude has the ability to awaken us to our true nature. Gratitude facilitates access to the field of open loving presence and provides a vehicle to connect more deeply to the truth of our Being, making it an essential and fundamental pillar of spiritual practice.
- Gratitude attunes us to the sacredness of life and opens our eyes to wonder, awe and the inevitable conclusion that we are all One.

"It is through gratitude for the present moment that the spiritual dimension of life opens up"

~ Eckhart Tolle

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