

There are, if you think about it, many different ways to express what has popularly become known as an ‘attitude of gratitude.’ We can say “thank you” and call it thankfulness. We can say we “appreciate” something or that we are ‘indebted’ to someone for a kindness. We might use metaphors, like saying we “treasure” someone or something. And we can show this feeling in many different ways, as well. We can use words to express it; we can give gifts to demonstrate it; we can show it with affectionate gestures like hugs and handshakes. Really, gratitude or appreciation are things that we experience and express almost daily. Or, at least if we’ve learned anything at all from the example of King Midas, we are expressing it daily.

But are all expressions of this feeling the same? Are they all equal?

Today, our topic comes from a request for a service on the difference between “appreciation” and “gratitude.” And for me, there really *are* many *md*ifferent ways to feel and express thankfulness. Certainly, feeling ‘indebted’ to someone for a kindness is different than simply feeling grateful, right?

So, being an ex-English teacher, I of course started with word origins. What, I asked, is the etymology of these two words? And I found something interesting, that kind of matches the way these two words make me *feel*.

The word “gratitude” comes from the Latin word “gratus” which means ‘pleasing.’ It is loosely related to the same root as the word “grace” and has an implication of beauty or enjoyment. Its oldest roots go back to a word in Proto-Indo-European languages that mean something like ‘to greet’ or ‘to praise.’ In other words, the basic core of the word ‘gratitude’ translates something like: ‘hello you beautiful thing.’ It’s a sort of proclamation.

The word “appreciation” has a different core, however. It comes from the Latin verb “appretiare” which means to set a value or a price on something. It has a more active feel to it—rather than just *noticing* the beauty in something, it is actively appraising or assessing the value of that beauty or praiseworthiness. Isn’t that interesting? And isn’t it interesting how many of these words have monetary meanings? Like ‘worth’ and ‘value’ and even ‘appreciate’—which means to grow or increase in value?

So gratitude and appreciation, though they are cousins and are commonly used now interchangeably, have different core meanings. To me, the shape of the words, the way they feel on my tongue, actually mimics the difference in their origins.

“Gratitude” or “grateful”—because of that “oooo” sound at their ends, they feel sort of round and well, full.

“Appreciation” or “appreciative” feels different. To be “appreciative” feels like the word “active.”

In fact, think about the word ‘grateful’ for a minute: according to some sources, grateful is the only word in our language which is “full” of something that doesn’t really exist. It is ‘ful’ of... ‘grate.’ Think about it: “worshipful” means full of worship; “helpful” means full of help; “plentiful” means full of plenty. But grateful doesn’t mean full of grate at all. And yet it purposefully conveys that feeling of ‘fulness.’ How many of you associate the word “grateful” with Thanksgiving? And if that isn’t a day that’s about feeling “full,” I don’t know what is! We use that word to suggest a feeling of completion, of wholeness, of doneness. It is something that we do once: we give thanks. Then, it’s complete.

But appreciation is different; it’s more active. We are “appreciative” for more than just a moment; to be appreciative is a more on-going, active state of being. When we say “thank you” we are saying, “I now give you this gift of my thanks in exchange for your act of kindness.” But when we say “I appreciate you” we are generally implying a more on-going way of relating to someone or something. It means we are in the process, the steady action, of appraising, or valuing the worth of something. Even our use of this word in money terms is active: an asset only ‘appreciates’ when it is in the process of growing.

Contemporary spiritual teacher Esther Hicks talks about it this way, explaining how appreciation is a state of mind or heart that cultivates openness and receptivity.

}She says, “*love and appreciation are identical vibrations...{appreciation} is the absence of doubt and fear. It is the absence of self-denial or hatred to others. It’s the absence of everything that feels bad and the presence of everything that feels good.*”

In other words, to be in a state of appreciation is to be in a state of openness, positivity, and perpetual receptivity.

She contrasts this with “gratitude” which often has a connotation of being the completion of a struggle overcome. We are grateful when the storm is over, when the difficulty has passed, when the problem is solved. But, in this framework, we are appreciative of the new possibilities coming to us, and have appreciation that things have opened up.

Now perhaps this is a semantic distinction that doesn’t hold true for you, or for how *you* use these words. They have, in many ways, become synonymous. But this subtle distinction in their origins *does* point to different ways of experiencing that ‘attitude of gratitude.’ We can be grateful in a way that says, “Whew! That’s over. Now I can go on about my business as usual.” Or we can be changed by whatever it is that has invited our gratitude. We can become *actively* engaged in a state of perpetual appreciation, a state of consciously choosing to be open to the beauty and possibility that surround us at all times.

How do we cultivate a state like that, a state of *perpetual* appreciation? This is a state that, according to Esther Hicks, means cultivating the absence of many things that would otherwise keep our attention: doubt, fear, self-denial, or excessive self-indulgence, hatred of self or others, resistance, anger, judgement. As she puts it, it is the ‘absence of anything that feels bad.’ What do we think of that?

Can we cultivate an openness so wide that nothing can feel ‘bad’ in its presence? How would that look, or feel to you?

For me, I feel *grateful* for a moment. It is a relatively easy feeling to call up: I give thanks for my children, for my partner, for my food, for my home. I give thanks for this congregation, and for my community. But I tend to do this in moments: before the meal, when the service starts, when I say hello or goodbye. These are moments meant to call up the feeling of gratefulness. But cultivating appreciation—the growing awareness of possibility, or increasing value or good—that is more difficult.

Of course, moments of gratefulness *help* when one is attempting to develop this appreciation, what we have recently come to think of as an “attitude” or on-going state of gratitude. If we can string enough moments of gratitude together, we will have something that looks like a perpetually appreciative state. But it’s not quite the same.

For me, that state of perpetual openness, receptivity, and feeling...well, I’m going to use that southern word here... *blessed*—for me, that state of appreciation is riskier and scarier. It means looking away from what’s not working, towards what *is* working, and more importantly towards what is possible. It means rawness and vulnerability, because it means keeping my heart and mind open when they really want to close down.

Perhaps, then, for me gratitude is something that comes naturally when things are going well. But appreciation is something I must cultivate when things are hard, when they are not going well, in order to grow and evolve and change.

One of the phrases that comes to me often when I think of the many faces of thankfulness is this line from 13<sup>th</sup> century Persian poet and Sufi master, Jalal ad-Din Muhammad Rumi: “there are hundreds of ways to kneel and kiss the ground.”

That line feels pretty straightforward and simple, but the whole poem gives us something much more raw, much more complex, and much more like what I've been calling 'appreciation.'

### **Spring Giddiness**

**Today, like every other day, we wake up empty  
and frightened. Don't open the door to the study  
and begin reading. Take down a musical instrument.  
Let the beauty we love be what we do.  
There are hundreds of ways to kneel and kiss the ground.**

**The breeze at dawn has secrets to tell you.  
Don't go back to sleep.  
You must ask for what you really want.  
Don't go back to sleep.  
People are going back and forth across the doorsill  
where the two worlds touch.  
The door is round and open.  
Don't go back to sleep.**

**I would love to kiss you.  
The price of kissing is your life.  
Now my loving is running toward my life shouting,  
What a bargain, let's buy it.**

**Daylight, full of small dancing particles  
and the one great turning, our souls  
are dancing with you, without feet, they dance.  
Can you see them when I whisper in your ear?**

**All day and night, music,  
a quiet, bright  
reedsong. If it  
fades, we fade.**

If that passion fades, we fade.  
Let us be raw to the day, then. Let us greet the wailing world hugs and kisses. Let us be fearless in the face of great risk, and brilliantly awake in a world that loves slumber. Let us insist upon beauty where others see only ugliness, and let us sing, dance, play music, and share with one another in ways that broadcast to the world our openness to appreciation—our willingness to see things get better and

better, our confidence that the very act of cultivating such a state will give birth to miracles and joys we have not yet imagined.

And, like Rumi, may we find hundreds of different ways to kneel and give thanks.

May it be so, Ashe! Amen and Namaste.