

questions & answers

dr john demartini

Dr John Demartini, author of *The Gratitude Effect*, talks to Francesca Newby about the power of gratitude to change our lives and help us live more fully in the present moment.



Q. What is the gratitude effect?

Gratitude is like a key that opens up the gateway of the heart. Inside the heart is love, waiting to radiate out and when that occurs the mind becomes clear, it becomes certain and it becomes present. When we have a balanced mind and a balanced heart then we're open to the here and now and therefore to the real opportunities that are around us. Without gratitude we cannot achieve that state of balance or feel that pure love.

If you're in a state of ingratitude, dwelling on the pain or the dreams from your past then you're not really able to be productive or present because you are distracted. Living in the future, in a state of infatuation, has the same negative effect. When we are living in the past or the future, we know in our hearts we're distracted from our lives and with that there is guilt. The energy consumed by the distraction and the guilt is detracted from the quality of the life we're living now. Feeling gratitude for our present life and freeing ourselves from ingratitude allows us to prosper. Only by living in the present can we achieve balance.

I believe that based on our hierarchic values we filter our reality. For example, because a mother places a higher value on the idea of children, she'll see around

her things related to children. Our values filter our reality and allow us to see, or not see, the things that relate to our values. When we're grateful and free from resentment or infatuation we see opportunities and we can access them.

Q. In what ways can dwelling on the past or being distracted by the future lead to a sense of imbalance?

Hurts and dreams from the past that still possess us in the present happen when we're unresolved about the outcome and usually nursing old resentments. Resentment springs from a fear of being inferior, or having felt inferior to someone, or rejected by them, and that resentment consumes space and time in the mind and stops us from being empowered and true to ourselves.

On the other hand, infatuation distracts us by creating a constant sense of anticipation about what the future might bring, taking our attention away from the opportunities that are actually in our grasp. Infatuation also creates imbalance because we accord so much importance to a person that you can subsume yourself to their values, goals and needs. It can breed resentment when we realise we've subordinated ourselves. We can lose our own drive and forget what our own truths or morals

are. A clear sign is when you move into 'should' mode. If you're telling yourself that you should be this, or more like that, because that's what you see in them, then it is big signal that you've subsumed yourself in the relationship.

Q. How do we know when we're trapped by our past, or our future, rather than living in the here and now?

We each have our own set of values, of priorities, of what's most or least important to us. Anything that represents our highest values we become attracted to; anything that challenges our values can repel us. Both situations have the potential to distract us from ourselves. When we're in a state of infatuation we see only what we have in common; only the values we believe we share. When we're mired in resentment we see only the negative in the other. If we can recognise that we have swung to either extreme, to a place without complexity or moderation, then we can recognise that we're trapped and start to free ourselves. The ancient Greeks said that when there is balance between similarity and resentment then we have love. Love is the most important thing; it's what liberates us from disease, from baggage, from resentment and from infatuation. Emotions are transient at best; true love

is constant. The heart always knows that balance and is seeking it; that's why we must listen keenly to our hearts and what they tell us.

Q. How do you lift yourself out of a place where you're distracted by old hurts or what might be?

If you dwell on a memory, an infatuation or a fear, I suggest you try to counterbalance it by asking what were the opposites. For me, if I'm dwelling on a fantasy of the past, I ask: 'What were the downsides?'. To liberate myself into the reality of now and achieve balance in the present, I need to achieve balance in my attitude to my fantasies or fears.

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The quality of our lives is based on the quality of the questions that we ask – it's the questions that can liberate us. Our intuition is masterful at trying to wake the conscious mind up to this – it's trying to reveal these things to us to help move the brain and mind back into equilibrium. When our emotions become stuck in either a virtuous or vicious cycle, our intuition is the key trying to liberate us from the trap.

Q. How do you remain balanced and optimistic about your life when times feel so threatening, as with the current economic crisis?

Fear is an assumption about what you're about to experience in the future; an anticipation of either pain or pleasure, of loss or gain. Any time you enter an

imbalanced state, your fear is a feedback mechanism; it's letting you know you have dropped your focus on the present and allowed it to drift elsewhere. In a true threat situation, it can actually save your life, but in a situation that's not truly to be feared, it can trap you. The solution is not to swing to the opposite and simply assume it will all be good. Whether you find yourself trapped in fantasy or a nightmare, you will suffer equally and deep down you'll yearn to regain your balance and be free of the fear and anticipation.

When we truly inhabit the present we live in a world of transformation, of true change – not the transitory illusions

of gain and loss. Fear distracts us with its focus on the potential either to gain or to lose because it casts them as mutually exclusive, as all encompassing. Life has ups and downs, but as soon as we see a loss, wisdom lies in asking what is the gain. When we're faced with a drawback, we must ask: 'What is the upside?'. Any time we see a crisis, there's always a blessing because the wise know there are always two sides to any pole. We sometimes overlook that in our everyday life – that there are two poles. Every event is actually neutral until we elevate one pole over the other. Every situation where we seek one pole, we're still trapped in our infatuations and regrets. We're only wise when we approach it as a whole, embracing both poles and thereby restoring balance.

Q. Does the path to gratitude and balance require us to hold ourselves separate from others in order to avoid resentment or infatuation?

Schopenhauer, the philosopher, believed we only become our true and most magnificent self when we embrace in ourselves what we see in others around us. We have to embrace the saint and the sinner, the true and the false, each human trait in whoever it is found. I have found within myself, by probing, every human trait – including kindness and cruelty, honesty and dishonesty, serenity and rage. The same is true of all others. Imbalance lies not in another person, but in our vision of them and our attitude towards our own self. It's not about becoming disconnected from humanity, but seeking the balance within.

If we had only 24 hours to live, the vast majority of us would find a way to say thank you to those we love and have loved. I've asked millions of people around the world, and that's the biggest answer every time. That's because love and gratitude are the highest state you can achieve and connection is a vital part of both emotions.

My message is not just for the individual, it's for every individual. No matter what you've done, or not done, you are worthy of love. That's my message for everybody. It's what we can give to ourselves and to others. You deserve to be loved and to live in a state of gratitude and balance. ■

Dr. John Demartini is a behavioural expert, speaker and author at the forefront of the personal and professional development industry. Further information about his methods and his book *The Gratitude Effect* (Burman Books, 2007) can be found on his website www.drdemartini.com.