

November 15, 2020- Thanksgiving

Dear Friends,

I know I have addressed this topic before, and I am certain I will many times again, but with Thanksgiving arriving next week, I could not think of a better thing to reflect upon than just that: thanksgiving. “Thanking others, thanking ourselves, Mother Nature, or the Almighty – gratitude in any form can enlighten the mind and make us feel happier. It has a healing effect on us.” (Russell and Fosha, 2008).

I have not experienced anything more healing and grounding, nor anything as immediate in it’s ability to help me feel better than the feeling of gratitude. Nor have I witnessed anything more effective in the healing of grief for others. The scientific data is in as well. Gratitude can literally change brain chemistry. Many studies over the past decade have found that people who consciously count their blessings tend to be happier and less depressed. When I recall all the loss and suffering my mother went through,- losing her husband at age 50, followed by her daughter, granddaughter and grandson, I find it remarkable how she survived all that. But I do remember her personal refrain or mantra, that she shared with all of us, was always, “Don’t forget to count your blessings.” I took that to heart as a young child and it has become an organic part of my ability to deal with grief, hardship, and sorrow. (Thanks Mom!) So, when I read the studies and I hear person after person share how gratitude has helped them to feel better, it does not surprise me in the least.

Why is being thankful so helpful in grief? Gratitude unshackles us from toxic emotions. We can quickly and easily become imprisoned by negativity in the throes of grief, and in the current pandemic situation, which only makes it more difficult. Negative thoughts and emotions, when not balanced with positive ones, can become a toxic stew in which we swim in circles getting nowhere. Gratitude has lasting effects on the brain. As I’ve mentioned, studies have clearly shown that when we shift our thoughts from the negative to the positive emotion of gratefulness, that dopamine and serotonin are secreted by the brain. These crucial chemicals that may possibly have not been released for quite a time are given permission to flow into our blood stream to make us feel better. Also, there is an overwhelming connection between gratitude and

good health, as it can reduce stress and improve our sleep. “By consciously practicing gratitude everyday, we can help these neural pathways to strengthen themselves and ultimately create a permanent grateful and positive nature within ourselves.” (PositivePsychology.com)

I understand how we can be hesitant to even try to start a gratitude journal or to simply sit and try to think of one or two things for which to be thankful each day. Grief can quite effectively convince us that we have absolutely nothing to be grateful for. But grief is a liar and a jerk. Don't listen to your grief. Listen to what the research is saying, to what the studies are saying, to what fellow group members are sharing, and to me of course LOL. If I knew of a medicine that would help someone to feel better, be assured I would tell that person. And so I have. Gratitude is good medicine. Of course, the work of gratitude is up to you.

If you haven't done so already, consider starting with one simple thing to be grateful for and take it from there. Particular to those who are grieving, I think it is important to be mindful of what Tennyson was trying to convey when he said, “Tis better to have loved and lost than never to have loved at all.”

Is it? Only you can answer that for yourself.

I wish you all a Thanksgiving filled with thanksgiving.

Peace and Serenity, Kevin

***“Enjoy the little things. For one day you may look back and realize they were the big things.”***

Robert Brault