

Daily Meditation 12-08-25

More on Science, Spirituality and Gratitude

Good morning. In our Saturday daily meditation, and in this morning's, we're talking about gratitude.

And I promised that I would offer you a video that goes more deeply into the scientific study on gratitude that I allude to in both of these essays, and that Thom Hartmann employed in our essay on Saturday.

Now the scientific organization I'm dealing with here is called the American Brain Foundation....the American Brain Foundation. And they are in league with the American Academy of Neurology...the American Academy of Neurology. And the American Brain Foundation has been in business for 30 years.

They have funded research across a broad spectrum of brain and nervous system diseases and disorders in the pursuit of improved treatments, prevention and cures. They focus on the full spectrum of brain diseases and disorders because they believe that "when we cure one disease, we will cure many."

And over these 30 years, they have given away \$47 million to researchers. So this is not exactly a fly-by-night organization. And they have funded scholarships for researchers, over 300 scholarships, and they tell us that "98% of our researchers have gone on to secure funding from the NIH and other national funders."

Of course, I don't know what's going to happen under the Trump regime, which, of course, is cutting back substantially from scientific research.

And currently, 26 scientists are actively undertaking innovative studies on their behalf. They say, "We bring together the most respected researchers, brain disease organizations and individual donors to achieve our shared goals."

So these are the people who are providing the information that I'm sharing with you, and that Thom Hartmann summarized very nicely, and I in turn summarized his work in the Saturday daily meditation.

But again, the title of their article is, "Does Gratitude Rewire Your Brain?" And I offered the link to this article in the Saturday meditation.

They begin answering their question this way:

Gratitude is a positive emotional response that we experience when we feel appreciation for or from others. But it's also more than that. Gratitude triggers the brain's reward system, releasing hormones and neurotransmitters that have tangible, physical and mental health benefits. Taking the time to focus on gratitude every day helps to improve our ability to manage stress, to develop a more positive perspective on life by restructuring neural signaling pathways.

Now, needless to say, as a spiritual theologian, he talks about the four paths, and I've always emphasized that the via positiva is absolutely primal. We must continually return to it like a camel returns to an oasis to fill up with water. We, especially in hard times, need to return to the via positiva and drink from that oasis, biophilia, love of life.

Erich Fromm said that "necrophilia grows when biophilia is stunted." And we are living in a time of tremendous necrophilia, when one man, the richest man in the world, Elon Musk, can kill 660,000 Africans with the sweep of his pen, which has happened this year under the encouragement of the current presidential administration.

You know, we are living in a time of necrophilia, but Erich Fromm is telling us, you've got to counterbalance that necrophilia with biophilia. And what that means, obviously, is to spend more time, or at least deeper time, with biophilia, the love of life, and those things that move us to joy, to delight, to reverence and to gratitude.

They say regarding the brain science of gratitude:

Gratitude is a feeling, but it's also the deliberate act of acknowledging an external source for something you value, whether that source is another person, a community, a deity or spiritual concept. Psychologically speaking, expressing and receiving thanks can be enormously validating, and your brain rewards you for it by releasing neurotransmitters, organic chemicals for transmitting signals to the nervous system that simply make you feel happier.

So gratitude builds on gratitude, builds on gratitude. They go on:

Gratitude could be thought of as a way for the brain to encourage kindness toward others and motivate individuals to engage in socially conscious behavior. But biologically, there's much more going on than that. So what science can offer us is a biological substrate, not just a psychological promise. When it comes to gratitude, it's not just about feel-good chemicals. It activates physiological changes in many different regions of the brain. When we feel grateful, neurotransmitters trigger activity in the medial prefrontal cortex, the anterior cingulate cortex, the ventral striatum and the insula. These brain regions are involved in cognitive functions like higher order thinking, decision making, emotional awareness and motivation.

Gratitude also affects the brain's limbic system, including the hypothalamus and this boosts the neurotransmitter serotonin that signals the brainstem to produce dopamine. Dopamine enhances feelings of contentment and encourages repeated expressions of gratitude and in addition, the amygdala activates the parasympathetic nervous system, which counteracts the fight or flight system response of the sympathetic nervous system.

In other words, the reptilian brain, it affects the reptilian brain and gets us beyond just fight and flight, beyond the survival mode, especially in times of stress.

The parasympathetic nervous system, PNS, activates and reduces levels of the stress hormone cortisol, leading to a sense of relaxation. It also supports bodily functions like digestion, immune response and sleep...better sleep. All of these can be compromised under stress.

There is a cognitive rewiring, a biological foundation in that the brain reorganizes signaling pathways between the neurons. People experiencing higher levels of gratitude developed an increased volume of brain matter, brain

tissue associated with processing, sensation, voluntary movement, perception, learning, speech and a wide variety of cognitive tasks.

So to focus on or meditate on what you're thankful for, causes effects that promote well being, psychological and physical benefits.

And then they have a whole list of these benefits. How gratitude reduces stress, it filters out negative ruminations such as resentment or envy or jealousy. It reduces anxiety, it reduces depression, because gratitude reduces stress hormones and manages autonomic nervous system functions. It can help to significantly reduce depression symptoms. With gratitude, these neurotransmitters cause an increase in activity in the prefrontal cortex that manages negative emotions like guilt and shame. This activity reduces the power of these emotions. This is beneficial for treating depression and anxiety, which are characterized by reduced motivation.

In other words, people don't have energy to do things.

Gratitude helps amplify the desire to pursue fulfilling activities and take active steps toward healing and growth. Gratitude improves emotional resilience. It improves focus. It improves immunity, because it triggers the release of hormones that regulate the immune system. It improves sleep, because it triggers a hypothalamus which helps regulate sleep, and this in turn, strengthens immune functions and resilience. It helps with social bonding, helps to build and strengthen community and cooperation.

So these are some of the examples of how gratitude helps.

And I also recommend reading the mystics about the via positiva and getting in touch with your own mysticism and vehicle positiva.

But also this gratitude is traditionally the essence of the Sabbath. It's the essence of worship to say thanks... to say thanks, as Aquinas says, the number one thing we say thanks for is creation itself. Existence itself.

So there's a lot going on, spiritually, physiologically, psychologically, with gratitude. Thank you.

That is my gratitude for the day. You too.