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## **The Power of Acceptance and Gratitude**

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M.J. Ryan, author of *Attitudes of Gratitude* shares this moving story about her father: “When my father was dying of emphysema, he lay in hospital bed barely able to breathe and unable to move. But, when I asked him about how he felt, he answered, ‘Life is good. Some days it is easier to breathe than others. I love watching the ball game on TV, and I love reading comics.’” (Cited with permission)

WOW! Look at the power of the mind over the matter this man had!

Regardless of the circumstances, all of us can enhance our ability to control our emotions and transform the negative emotions into positive ones.

M.J. Ryan’s father could well have been a yoga practitioner. He might not have done any or the physical exercises of yoga postures ever in his lifetime, much less in the hospital bed, but he had certainly mastered the psychological-emotional component of yoga without deliberately practicing yoga.

The nurse at my rehabilitation clinic always smiles. She is always ready to help and looking for ways to cheer us up. She once asked me if yoga helped me to be so calm and positive. After giving the credit where it was due I said, “You are always so encouraging and supportive of everybody. What helped you to be who you are today?” Her answer was quick and succinct, “It’s a choice!”

“It’s a choice.” In these three words, she said it all. Usually, when we are grumpy or snappy, we tend to offer excuses. We would perhaps say something to the effect, “I couldn’t help it. I was so...(tired, upset, sick, etc.)” That is a cop out. We always have the option to act otherwise.

M.J. Ryan’s father had every reason to feel miserable, depressed or bitter, but he exercised his ability to choose the positive option. He chose to focus on the times when he experienced some relief from almost-never-ending breathing discomfort. Someone else might focus on feeling miserable for missing out on all the outdoor fun activities that s/he

once so thoroughly enjoyed but now could no longer do them. MJ Ryan's father chose to focus and enjoy watching the ball game and reading comics, that is, focused on the things that he could do rather than the ones he could not.

Should my rehab nurse choose to be cynical and long faced, she sure could find plenty of excuses related to her job, marriage, children, housework, mortgage and the like. But when she comes in the morning she chooses to set aside her personal disappointments and frustrations and focuses on helping others and making a difference in their day.

We all have our share of problems. But some people never seem to stop resenting people and focus on their own misfortunes. How come some people are always smiling, taking interest in others and constantly looking for ways to help others? The answer lies in the kinds of personal habits we form over the years. Some form the habit of choosing positive emotions and responses and others do the opposite.

We have the power to choose even during extreme challenges and horrible illnesses. We can always choose the positive over the negative. We can forgive and let go of our resentment. We can experience gratitude for what's still there in our lives in spite of what's gone.

Are you wondering what is actually there in your life that you can consider as "gift?" Psychologist and author of *365 Ways to Give Thanks* Brenda Shoshanna says, "...the real gifts in life are our friends and family, our cat, our plants, the sun, an apple, a smile, a caring touch, our five senses, our ability to walk and talk..."

Why should we choose gratitude? Because gratitude enhances our ability to love ourselves and others and that in turn would set off many other positive changes.

Have you noticed happy people tend to be more grateful? Happiness results from a sustained attitude of gratitude in face of adversities and from habitually choosing such positive emotions as the gratitude, kindness, compassion, forgiveness, love, tranquility, humor and cheerfulness. Happiness may be called as a by-product of positive emotions.

Guess what! All the positive emotions mentioned above have a positive influence on breathing, stress management, health and healing. Therefore, in spite of the pains and illness flares of this day, let's focus on the *gifts* we have received in our lives.

## **A Heart and Breathing "Exercise"**

Here is a 3-step yoga-style heart and breathing exercise which can bring positive emotions in focus and hopefully also help you to calm your heart and breathing:

**Step 1: Bring relaxed attention to your heart area** (the area between the two nipples). Try to maintain relaxed attention even if your heart is racing and/or breathing is accelerated. By the term "trying" I mean simply think or imagine that your heartbeat and breathing is calming down and becoming relaxed.

When you experience calming down of the breath, go to the next step.

**Step 2: Breathe in and out from the heart area.** Once the breathing is slower and calmer, imagine you are breathing in and out from the heart area. Maintain the attention at the heart area as you breathe.

When you experience relaxed breathing in the heart area, move to the next step.

**Step 3: Feel a positive emotion “spreading out’ from the heart area.** Create a positive emotion of your choice such as the feeling of joy, gratitude, compassion or love. By the term “creating” I mean either recall the time when you vividly experienced that positive emotion or imagine a situation which would generate that specific emotion. For example, think of a place, time and people you would like to be. Experience it vividly as if it was happening right now. How would you feel and act while experiencing your chosen positive emotion? Visualize and experience those feelings in your heart and then let them spread out into the outer world. Send those feelings out to the intended recipients of your feelings.

It is quite possible that with this brief exercise of 10 to 15 minutes you may experience a positive change in your physical, mental and spiritual state.

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#### Warning / Disclaimer

This column is for general information and education related to yoga and should not be construed as advice or recommendation to an individual reader. Not all exercises are suitable for everyone. Depending on your health and general condition, certain exercises may cause a negative effect or result in injury. Consult your doctor before starting any of these exercises. To reduce the risk of injury, never force or strain. Always work in moderation.

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