

## Body Appreciation and Gratitude for Life

adapted from Maya Davila, James McKee, and Mingtong Gu

Living life with an attitude of gratitude, we become more and more aware of the miracle of life. The simple act of breathing is a huge miracle we often forget to feel grateful for. The fact that breathing was “invented” about 4 billion years ago by blue-green algae is indeed an amazing miracle. As I become aware of the incredible miracles of the Earth, the Universe, and Life, I find it much easier to feel gratitude for things I often take for granted.

Miracles of Life happen around us all the time. A miracle doesn't have to be something unusual, like Jesus walking on water. Imagine this: every moment your body performs trillions of miracles.

Each one of us is so amazing. Right now you have in you one quadrillion cells. That's 100 trillion times 1000. About 900 trillion of those cells are not human. They're virus, bacteria, and microorganisms. What makes us human, ironically, is not human. If they were not there we would rot like a piece of fruit in a few days. So be grateful for those free riders. Every second in our bodies, one septillion things are happening. That's a one with 24 zeros. Another way to imagine one septillion is it's ten times more than all the stars and planets in the known universe. Can you feel it? Seriously. One septillion interactions. It's called life. You can feel it. Except we talk and we get busy and we ignore that feeling.

-- Paul Hawken

Life is full of ordinary miracles:

- Our vocal cords vibrate to make sound. That sound moves through space and touches eardrums, connecting us to the world outside ourselves. And we can arrange these sounds in such a way that they create beautiful music.
- Our hearts beat every second, whether we are aware of it or not, without us having to think about it or make it happen. It pumps life-giving blood throughout our bodies – day in and day out, no matter what.
- Every day the sun rises and sets in an awesome cycle that contributes to ongoing life.

All miracles – all provided to us by the universe.

I recently asked my teacher, Thomas Huebl, “How can I make peace with the world when there is so much pain and suffering in it?” He told me that is a story I tell myself and it keeps me stuck in a painful world. He suggested I live with this statement for a while: “The world is sacred; it does not need to be improved. That does not mean it is not developing.” I take that to mean that I am not expected to just sit back and say, “Okay, everything is fine in the world and I have to accept it as it is.” No – the world is developing – and I am called to help it develop in a way that creates more peace and harmony. I must do that with love and a sense of basic goodness, rather than being angry at the world and at God, and fighting to make things better. I want to love a new world into being, not try to fight for it. Fighting will only keep creating a world of disharmony and strife. Since I have been living with this ‘mantra’ – “the world is sacred; it does not need to be improved,” I have noticed something interesting. Nothing in my life or the world has changed, but suddenly I notice I feel joyful for no reason – not always, but it arises sometimes in ways it never has before. Kind of a joy for no reason.

Your most intimate connection to Life is through your own body. What is your relationship with your body? Do you appreciate the daily miracles it performs for you? It is easy to become distracted by ideas we have about the body: what it should look like, what it should be able to do, and the belief that it should never cause us pain. Please use the following meditation to practice “being with” your body without judgment. To be without judgment means to accept and appreciate your body, not by trying to force yourself to think of it as “good” or “beautiful” or “healthy” but simply by being present with whatever sensations and feelings are arising in your body in the moment.

Acceptance means that you are embracing all experience internally, externally, unconditionally, beyond your stories, beyond concepts such as good or bad, should or shouldn't - beyond whatever projections or judgments you may hold. It also means you are letting go of the resistance, resistance to any experience, to life. It doesn't mean that you will never again take an aspirin, or that you won't take care of your ailments. It just means that for right now, for the duration of this meditation, you will put aside your pleasures and irritations, your hopes and fears concerning your body and just be ok with whatever IS.

## Body Acceptance Meditation

This meditation is adapted from a guided meditation recorded on the Winter Feast website by Mingtong Gu. Mingtong would speak a few sentences and then leave a pause of several minutes. To do this meditation on your own, please cover up the page with another sheet of paper. Uncover one paragraph at a time, read it, and then continue meditating. Each line with three hyphens ( --- ) indicates a pause of several minutes.

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Let's begin with the posture. You may engage in this meditation in the most comfortable position, whether sitting or lying down. If sitting, allow yourself gently to adjust your spine - shift your low back forward - gently straightening your spine - tucking your chin toward the back of your neck - lifting the top of your head, extending upward. Now gently locate your shoulders - open your armpits - relax your hands naturally - deeply, gently relaxing your body - continuously allowing your mind and spirit to come back to this body, this home.

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...simply, gently embracing all sensation and experiences inside of you - acknowledging, embracing all sensations of your brain with a gentle intention of accepting unconditionally all experience within you...

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...continuously embracing, acknowledging, and accepting all sensations, feelings, and experience of your shoulders, arms, hands, fingers...

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...continuously embracing, unconditionally acknowledging, all sensations and feelings of your chest...

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...deeply, continuously embracing, acknowledging, and gently accepting all sensation, feelings, and experience inside of your stomach - your low abdomen...

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...continuously relaxing inwardly, feeling inwardly, embracing all sensations, feelings, and experience of your spine - upper back - middle back - low back...

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...continuously embracing, acknowledging, and accepting all sensations, feelings, and experience of your hips - the internal pelvis - thighs, knees, legs, feet...

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...simply allowing yourself to continuously embrace all sensations, feelings and experience inside your entire body - embracing the most tangible and even painful, uncomfortable, intense sensations and feelings as well as the most subtle energetic feelings of aliveness, openness, and deep inner peace...

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...continuously allowing yourself to rest in meditative silence with a gentle intention of embracing this body as your home...as your spiritual home...as wholeness...

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...and deeply accepting all sensations, feelings, experience inside of you as they arise without any judgment, any concept, any story. Simply accepting whatever arises in this continuous unfolding of life inside of you...

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...continuously embracing all sensations, feelings, and experience of life inside of you...and slowly placing your hands on top of your navel, deeply centering, deeply integrating...

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together we are connecting with all the practitioners in the Winter Feast, dedicating our amazing practice for the well-being of self and others, and the healing of planet earth.