

The Waldorf school curriculum is rich with wonderful hidden treasures; for instance, in fourth grade the children study animals. The teacher guides the children to discover that animals have specialized features that allowed them to be one with their environment. The beaver has a wonderful tail that allows it to swim under water and strong jaws and teeth that allow it to cut down trees for its dam. The eagle has piercing eyes so that from high in the sky it can spot its prey, unnoticed by its soon-to-be-meal. The giraffe with its long neck can reach its food in trees high above the ground. The children classify these special gifts of the animals and conclude by comparing animals to the human being. What they discover is that what makes the human being unique is not only its ability to think, but its ability to stand erect to use its hands. Other animals have more specialized paws to dig holes or burrow under the earth, but humans can design a shovel and then use it. We design and build airplanes to fly in the sky like birds, and boats to travel through the water like fish. Our hands are our tools, and we use them to build things we need and to do good deeds, but we can also use them to destroy and hurt others. The human being has the ability to make a choice about how to use its body as an instrument, whereas other animals use their specialized bodies in instinctive ways. Through the curriculum the children come to appreciate the uniqueness of being human and the wonderful gifts we receive by experiencing life in human form.

Indeed, our minds and our hands are great gifts from the universe. Our whole body is composed as an instrument that houses our spirit and soul. It allows us to engage in the world and experience life. Each of us is a unique individual, and our individuality is a gift given to us so that we can give it back to the world. Our hearts should overflow with gratitude when we contemplate the grandeur of this gift. If we are grateful for our unique gifts, these gifts flow from us with ease and without resistance, and we share in procreation with others as well as the divine.

There is a saying in macrobiotics that from one grain, ten thousand grains may grow. Think about it. If you plant one grain, one seed of rice, it produces a plant that yields many, many more grains of rice. The idea behind “one grain, ten thousand grains” is that when we receive a gift, we recognize it and then share it

with others. In sharing our gift and our unique expression of that gift, we are placing our gratitude for that gift into a deed from which others may benefit.

If we are conscious and present to our every deed, and fill every deed we do, every word we say, every thought we think with pure light and goodness, then we become imbued with human spirit. The gift of being human is an incredible gift that should fill our hearts with gratitude every moment of the day; it should fill our hearts with endless appreciation. Rudolf Steiner wrote about our need to “... develop the feeling of gratitude for all that we receive. We should know that our very existence is the gift from the whole universe. How much is necessary for human beings to receive and sustain their existence! We owe so much to nature and to other people. Grateful thoughts such as these must become second nature ... If we do not give ourselves fully to such thoughts, we shall never develop the all-embracing love we need ...”<sup>1</sup>

***There are only two ways to live your life. One is as though nothing is a miracle. The other is as though everything is a miracle.***

***~ Albert Einstein***

There is a parable about Jesus walking with his disciples along a narrow street in an old city. They come across a dog that has been dead for some days. It is mangy and rotting, and the stench from the decaying dog's body fills the air. It is told that each of the disciples walks past the dog, holding up the hems of his robe, pinching his noses, and complaining about the condition of the dog. Jesus however, kneels down and looks caringly upon the dog, and after some time stands up and praises God for the creature's beautiful teeth.

It is very easy to feel good about the positive things and events in our lives. It is easy to feel gratitude for them. It is not so easy to feel gratitude for those things that we do not really desire to have in our lives. This parable challenges us to look beyond our gratitude for the “good” and “beautiful” and to be gracious for the “bad” and “ugly.” There are lots of things in our lives that not only don't make sense and

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<sup>1</sup> Steiner, Rudolf. How to Know Higher Worlds, pg. 102.

greet us with a certain resistance; our lives are full of obstacles—conflicts with a co-worker, discontentment in family life, financial struggles, upkeep of a house, or worse—hunger, illness, or death of a loved one. Life brings upon us many trials throughout. How do we meet these obstacles? Can we bring gratitude for them?

“Even when we are sick, we are healthy if we are aware that we are the cause of our own illness, thankful for the opportunity to learn, and surrender our destiny to nature in the spirit of endless appreciation.”<sup>2</sup> During my journey with breast cancer I went through many ups and downs as I experienced physical and emotional pain and suffering. Through what I could clearly say was the darkest part of my life, a new feeling began to take over me. I saw the cancer as a great teacher, one that challenged me in ways I had never been challenged before, and, as a result, I found a richer love and gratitude for the things and people in my life. The cancer inspired me to look at myself in a new way. It helped me to recognize the things in my life to which I clung and grasped, to dissolve them, and find gratitude for them. Through this process of true self-analysis, I began to find an inner peace I had never felt before in my life, and my soul began to heal. I am grateful to the cancer; it brought to me a new inner life, and as a result a new outer manifestation of life. My relationships with those I love shifted and changed. My heart expanded like the Grinch’s and I was filled with love, joy, and a gratitude I had never felt before.

By developing a greater feeling for gratitude we change the way in which we experience and interact with the world. We become aware of the fact that all experiences in life are gifts, not only because “every cloud has a silver lining,” or that we are able to learn something from our experience, but rather because every experience is an experience that we would not have had if we were not conscious, sentient living human beings, and for that we can be grateful.

The more we are able to develop our sense of gratitude, the closer we move toward the realization of living each moment with full consciousness and filled with endless appreciation. Gratitude connects us together as one being; it forms us into one universe. It has the power to change our lives, and the lives of others. So in this

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<sup>2</sup> Kushi, Michio. The Book of Macrobiotics, pg. 163.

season of harvest and thanksgiving, may we recognize the gifts in our lives and strive to share these gifts with others; may we find gratitude in everything that life brings to us. May the world be filled with seekers of gratitude.