

## Opening to Grace through Awareness and Gratitude (The Role of Rituals)

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In November, the cooler weather draws us inside with an invitation to focus inward. As I tell the children at the beginning of *The Inside-Out Blessing Game* recording,

Come inside, come inside.  
Inside your house, inside your room, inside your heart.

Due to the Thanksgiving holiday, most of us associate the month of November with gratitude and grace. Grace infuses the entire meaning of thankfulness, and yet it is even more. Try as I might to describe it, I find words to be woefully inadequate. As mothers, we experience grace when we hear the sweet, angelic sound of children singing—and find our hearts overflowing with pure love while our eyes well over with tears. Or when we watch a baby reach for something with wide eyes full of wonder, and are momentarily able to see the world anew. We may experience grace when we are immersed in nature: awe-struck by a beautiful sunset, the vastness of the ocean, or the majesty of mountains. Beautiful music, dancing, or works of art can also open our hearts to its ecstasy. When we open to grace we experience a connection to the life force of the universe. During these moments we are likely to find ourselves sighing as we soften into our bodies, reveling in joy and gratitude at the sheer splendor of life itself.

Like children ever-wise, don't lose those sparkling eyes  
Babies and lullabies fill our lives with love

Babies and toddlers exist in a perpetual state of grace. They are immersed in each moment and exude a magical sense of ease, freedom, wonder, and joy. But little by little, many children lose their carefree, joyful way of being as a feeling of entitlement displaces gratitude and grace. It's certainly understandable how this can happen in a society that all too often equates happiness with having money, possessions, power, and beauty. Oftentimes, children pick up society's refrain of entitlement—they begin to ask for, or worse yet *demand*, more, newer, and better *things*. But of course this inevitably leads to more dissatisfaction, as each new toy or piece of clothing becomes old and they continually want, or actually feel they *need*, something else that is better and newer.

In order for children to be thankful for their many blessings, they must first be made aware of them. The most basic and yet profound blessings, such as the food we eat and the water we drink, are often not even recognized—let alone acknowledged or appreciated. As we rush about, meals are often eaten mindlessly without a thought, let alone a ceremony of appreciation. No matter what your religion, taking a moment to 'give thanks' will help foster appreciation and gratitude. And by slowing down the pace of our lives, children will have more opportunities to enjoy and appreciate the world in all its splendor.

The gentle art of making a home involves choosing rituals that bring us together with the members of our family, sometimes one on one, and other times as a family unit. A mundane routine becomes a ritual when it is done mindfully, or with awareness. Some rituals, such as the family dinner, are celebrations of the ordinary. While ordinary, they can have a big impact on children, connecting families with a legacy of love.

While some of our rituals are performed daily, others, such as the Thanksgiving dinner, are annual events. Thanksgiving has retained many elements from the first Thanksgiving that was celebrated more than three centuries ago. It's still a time to reconnect and share food with family and friends, to pray, and give thanks.

## TIME OUT WITH PATTI TEEL

DREAM THE DREAM AND STEP INTO IT

For those of you who are suffering

There have been difficult times in my own life when I could not muster up gratitude. I hope that I don't seem insensitive to those of you whose families are dealing with a serious problem or a catastrophic illness. If you are in the midst of despair, you may not be able to honestly feel grateful. I've found that while you may not be able to eliminate pain, there will be times when you can prevent it from becoming suffering by focusing on the here and now. And I mean this very moment. As much as possible, don't dwell on the past or worry about the future. And when you've done all that is humanly possible—surrender to a higher power. Faith can help us to get through the difficult times. Always remember, "We are spiritual beings having a human experience." There is more to life than meets the eye, and as humans, our spiritual understanding may be too narrow to accurately see the bigger picture.

Ways to Encourage Gratitude:

- Prayers of gratitude at mealtime, bedtime, or anytime in between.
- Encourage children to keep gratitude journals on a regular basis. Non-readers can draw pictures of things that they are thankful for.
- At bedtime, take a few minutes to share the good things that happened during the day and have your child do the same. They don't need to be major events. It could be a hug, words of love, the sounds of the birds in the morning, or a beautiful sunset.
- Help others. The ability to help others creates a sense of purpose and gratitude that is often lacking today. As a family, you may wish to find opportunities to help others.
- Encourage children to give and receive graciously.
- As a parent, be a role model and express your gratitude to everyone you interact with during the day, including your children. Remember to say thank you when someone performs an act of kindness. Acknowledge what you have, rather than what you lack.
- Spend time in nature. Celebrate the seasons with family rituals.
- Teach children to be giving with their thoughts. Even young children can understand the concept of sending loving thoughts.
- Remind your child that you are grateful to be his parent and that you love him.

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Dubbed "The Dream Maker" by People magazine, Patti Teel is a former teacher and the creator of an award winning relaxation audio series for children. Her book, *The Floppy Sleep Game*, gives parents techniques to help their children relax, deal with stress and fall asleep. She is a popular speaker and presents innovative workshops for parents, children, and health professionals. Get R&R tips and sign up for her newsletter at [www.pattiteel.com](http://www.pattiteel.com). You can listen to her online radio show at [www.timeoutwithpattiteel.com](http://www.timeoutwithpattiteel.com).