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Lighting Your Way

Savor the Sweetness

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Table of Contents

Savor the Sweetness	2
Appreciation.....	2
Rainy Day Magic/The Way You Look at Things	3
Your Spiritual Toolbox – Five Senses of Appreciation.....	4
Soul Glimpses	4
Your Spiritual Toolbox – Commune with the Woods	6
Live Your Dream Today	6
Your Spiritual Toolbox – Saying, “Thank you”	7
Are You Working Too Hard?	7
Your Spiritual Toolbox – Appreciate This Moment.....	8
Gratitude	9
Feeling Grateful.....	10
Your Spiritual Toolbox - Keep Gratitude in Your Pocket.....	10
Gratitude Opens the Door to Allowing	11
Your Spiritual Toolbox – Asking for Guidance.....	12
Love Invested	13
Spiritual Toolbox - Surround Yourself with What You Love.....	13
Feeling Grateful Even When You Don’t	14
Your Spiritual Toolbox - Make a Gratitude List	15
Choosing Happiness	15
Your Inner Pollyanna.....	16
Your Spiritual Toolbox - Choose Thoughts That Support You.....	17
Give Yourself the Power to Choose	17
Your Spiritual Toolbox – Look for the Positive	19
The Magic of Inspiration	20
Your Spiritual Toolbox – What Inspires You Today?	21
The Universe Will Support You	21
Your Spiritual Toolbox – Nurture Yourself with Your Thoughts.....	23
Conclusion.....	23

Savor the Sweetness

Light your way by savoring the sweetness.

Take the time to **appreciate** the sweet moments that fill your day. Each moment has within it the possibility of **magic** if you slow down and seek it out. These are the sweet moments that become a sweet day, a sweet month, a sweet year, a sweet lifetime, and all beginning in the sweetness of this moment right now.

Choosing to feel **gratitude** in your daily life. As you do so you'll create the attitudinal change that makes whatever you are doing today a good thing to be invested with love. You'll learn that you can surround yourself with what supports you, and that you can **choose happiness** in each moment.

This is a compilation of posts from the SoulDoors blog, *Savor the Sweetness*. You'll notice the original posts were written at different times of the year and may refer to various seasons.

Here, the posts are arranged under three topic areas – Appreciation, Gratitude and Choosing Happiness. At the end of each post is a Spiritual Toolbox exercise with suggestions to support you to bring the teachings more fully into your daily life.

May you find joy on your journey!

Appreciation

How would your day be different if you took the time to appreciate the sweet moments that happen today?

Our days are filled with sweet moments often overlooked in the daily rush of work and to-do lists. Moments like enjoying a summer breeze, redolent with the fragrance of new-mown grass. Or, the joy of your dignified yellow Lab, playing in puppyish delight with the dog from next door. Or perhaps, awaking on a Saturday morning and listening to the homey sounds of your early rising spouse who is brewing coffee in the kitchen, while you remain nested in the warm coziness of your bed.

What would happen if you took the time, just a minute or so, to savor each of these moments in your day? You'd find they have within them the possibility of magic, if you are willing to slow down and seek it out. Magic that can transform any day from humdrum to inspired; and all it takes is a moment.

Rainy Day Magic/The Way You Look at Things

“Rain,

aren't you my soul's joyful tears,

only longing for the sky to be happy?”

-Munia Khan

It is a rainy morning, cool for August. I can hear the rain dribbling down through the downspout to empty on the thirsty ground, hard from days of drying in the sun. A chickadee and nuthatches welcome the morning, bright and nasal voices blending. The rain picks up its pace, drops and splashes on roof and gutter getting louder. Rain on the leaves in the trees surrounding the porch is a constant shushing sound now. The birds chatter on, not seeming to mind the wet.

I can hear the garbage truck out front now, making its way around the circle at the end of Ravenswood Lane, crashing and clanking as the robotic arm picks up trash cans and dumps them into the back. It is like some huge-shelled crab making its way about, lifting food into its maw with great claws. Only this crab has a set feeding schedule and it is right on time this morning. Later on, it's sister crab will be around to gather the recycling to take back to her nest.

Perhaps it is the rain and wet that fills my head with seashore fantasies. It is pouring down now, straight and true. It's life-giving moisture feeding the plants, trees and grass. Our birds are singing loudly in praise. They know how much we need the rain.

The air is sweet and moist. The light dim and grayed by a sky filled with clouds. Thunder rumbles in the distance, and the morning is alive, everything present, here and now.

There is magic in this moment. It is subtle and so easily missed. It comes when I focus deeply into my senses, hear the train whistle in the distance and the constancy of the rain pouring now through the downspout. It comes when I feel the moisture cooled air drifting over my arms, kissing my cheeks. It comes when the light changes from gray to white, reflecting off the deep, wet green of trees and grass.

If I stayed inside listening to the latest news updates, worrying over who is and who will be president, or thinking about what jobs I should get done today, or taking a shower and getting ready for the day ahead, I would have missed this magic.

How many mornings have I rushed along forgetting to embrace this gift, not even realizing that it is all around me?

The rain has slowed now, drip, drip, dripping in the down spout. The air lightens, and the birds move away still singing in the distance. The day feels as if it's ready to get started, the magic moving onward, and so must I. But I'll remember this another morning, early and bright. I'll remember the magic.

Your Spiritual Toolbox – Five Senses of Appreciation

Our bodies with our five senses are the key to opening to the magic.

Our bodies are always right here, right now. They can be nowhere else. Not like the mind, so often in the future planning what is to come, or in the past, worrying over what has happened, our bodies are here, now, in the present.

Always in this present moment, where the magic is.

The next time you feel the need for a little magic, sit and quiet yourself. Take several deep long breaths and pull your awareness into your body. Leave all the thoughts of your day, thoughts of past or future, outside your awareness for the time being. You can always pick them up later if you feel the need. For now, bring all your attention into the present.

What sensations do you feel on your skin? What do you feel inside your body?

Close your eyes and listen. What do you hear?

Open your eyes now and look around you, what do you see? What color is the light that you see? How would you describe your surroundings?

Take a breath through your nose. What do you smell?

If you have a drink or food, take a sip or bite, really taste what you are putting into your mouth. How would you describe it?

If you have time, write your perceptions. Describe in detail what you feel, hear, see, smell, taste.

The magic of the moment is right here waiting for you. You have only to open yourself and appreciate.

Soul Glimpses

“The soul is like a wild animal—tough, resilient, savvy, self-sufficient and yet exceedingly shy. If we want to see a wild animal, the last thing we should do is to go crashing through the woods, shouting for the creature to come out. But if we are willing to walk quietly into the woods and sit silently for an hour or two at the base of a tree, the creature we are waiting for may well emerge, and out of the corner of an eye we will catch a glimpse of the precious wildness we seek.”

— Parker J. Palmer, *A Hidden Wholeness: The Journey Toward an Undivided Life*

Perhaps it is this that makes the sight of Nature’s wild one’s so special. Perhaps it is like getting a glimpse of our own Soul. Join me now, for a peek.

“Peter!” I said, in an urgent whisper. “Come see this!”

My husband, Peter, was in the kitchen and looked up quickly, knowing from the tone of my voice that it would be some kind of wildlife out in our back yard.

I sat at the dining table gazing out the window into the back yard, my breakfast sitting forgotten on the table before me. I always got excited about what showed up out there, and we had seen some interesting animals and birds since we'd moved in.

Peter scanned the yard through the patio doors but could see nothing. He stepped quietly around the L-shaped counter separating the kitchen and dining area and moved to where he could see what I pointed at.

The early morning sun slanted across the warm brown back and head of a white tail deer as she bent to pluck the last of the green fall grasses. Her tail twitched back and forth, showing the white underfur for which her kind are named.

The doe lifted her head, beautiful, dark, liquid eyes alertly scanning the back of the house. Long, tufted ears pinpointed the source of the movement she must have heard. She stared intently at Peter as he stood, now motionless before the window, studying him for any signs of danger. Then she relaxed, ears and tail flicking about and resumed grazing.

Frequently she lifted her head and looked around the yard and back towards the woods, alert for anything that might be threatening. Then she continued, cautious and deliberate, moving about the back yard searching out the grasses she liked best.

I studied the doe avidly. Peter backed off quietly and reached into the voluminous pocket of his fuzzy grey bathrobe for his phone. He thumbed it on to camera so he could take a picture of me looking out the window at the deer. He managed to get both of us into the frame and took the picture. Then he crept closer to the window and got a good shot of the deer as she looked up at him.

We had seen deer in the yard before but never had one stayed so long as this. We had seen coyote crossing the yard as well, and turkey. When we first moved in, a huge, black rat snake had visited, as if welcoming us to the neighborhood. It waited, shining black scales covering its thick body, stretched out beneath the bird feeder. Perhaps it hoped for an unwary squirrel. We estimated that it was at least five or six feet long. I was thrilled.

I continued to study the deer as she made her way over to the shade garden under the big oak trees.

"Are you going to eat my Hosta now?" I asked her.

Not responding, the doe moved about at the far edge of the garden not attempting the Hosta which grew on the side of the garden closest to the house. Then she turned and ambled off, moving into the woods at the back of the yard. The last we saw of were her long, graceful legs as she crossed a patch of sunlight and disappeared into the woods.

I looked over at Peter grinning, "I am so grateful we moved here."

"Yup," Peter agreed, smiling back at me.

Your Spiritual Toolbox – Commune with the Woods

Take Dr. Palmer's advice and give yourself an hour to walk quietly into the woods. Sit silently at the base of a tree. Feel the tree at your back, the ground supporting your body, the breeze wafting around you. Breathe deeply of the fresh air.

Give gratitude to Mother Earth for what pleases you.

Watch and wait.

Allow yourself to merge fully with the moment. Still yourself inside as you still yourself outside. Be the tree, the woods, the Earth.

See who or what makes itself known to you and what it has to tell you. You may even hear the precious voice of your Soul.

Live Your Dream Today

"You are so lucky to have every day."

-Shoshona Ortalia Aurora Rogers

I've been reading a romance novel (my not so secret pleasure) set in rural Ireland. It is about a woman whose heart's desire was to be a writer. She gave up her city life and moved to a small village in Ireland to pursue her dream. The description of walks over emerald, green hills in the mornings, then the delight she felt as she sat at her table, steaming cup of tea at hand, and wrote in the afternoons, all touched a chord deep within me. The more I brought up that feeling within me, the more I realized that she described my dream, and despite the difference in location I was stunned to realize I am living my dream.

The author of the trilogy writes so poignantly of her character's life because she writes with love of what she loves. Why is it that we forget to see with the eyes of love in our everyday lives? My dream is all around me and yet all I saw was the mundane and the repetition of every day. I guess even the bright shine of a dream dims with daily familiarity. Or perhaps I changed into it so gradually I took it all for granted, writing, woods walks with my dog, my family who are my friends and my friends who are my family, my spiritual community. I am living my dream. How did I lose track of that?

Living your dream isn't really about the physical aspects despite what we may think, it is about the feeling, paying attention to and expressing love in your every day life. The physical aspects of whatever it is you dream of may provide a vehicle for moving into that love, but it is the love and the expressing of love that creates happiness.

“A happy life is just a string of happy moments. But most people don’t get the happy moments because they’re so busy trying to get a happy life.”

-Abraham-Hicks

Appreciating each thing about every day that you can is an expression of love in your life. It creates happiness and it creates the energy for you to attract more of what you want, more of what you love into your daily experience.

You don’t have to wait until you’ve achieved your dream, whatever that may look like on the outside. For dreams change and shift even as we do. You can focus your attention upon appreciating the elements of today that are your dream, those bits and pieces of your day that you love. As you do so you open up to allow more and more of your dream into your every day.

Your Spiritual Toolbox – Saying, “Thank you”

Appreciation of your everyday life is the fast track to living your dream. When you wake in the morning align yourself with the attitude of appreciation by saying a short prayer of gratitude for the new day ahead. Use whichever prayer feels right to you or make up one of your own. Here is one possibility -

“My God, Goddess, my Angels and Guides, thank you for today. May I be ever in gratitude for the love which fills this day and every day. Amen.”

During the day take the time to appreciate and give thanks for those bits of today which please, support and nurture you. Just noticing what you love and saying a quiet, “Thank you,” is enough. Do this as often as you think of it throughout the day, for you are living today’s dream. And as you do so with love, you build your dream of tomorrow.

Are You Working Too Hard?

“Let go of the idea that life is hard work and see that it is soft. You are just surrendering and allowing.”

-Red Feather

Why is it that life often just feels like hard work? Why do we make it so? Does life have to be hard work?

We can be grateful for our hard work because it goes hand in hand with a sense of accomplishment. It is that for which we strive not the hard work itself. It is so that we can look back and say, “This is what I did.” It feels good, and in the process we learn valuable spiritual lessons. There is purpose in this path.

It is not the only path however. For it is possible to grow through play. How else do children learn so well and so easily? It is only when learning becomes hard work for them that they bog down and struggle, just like adults.

What's the difference? The difference is that sense of 'have to', 'should', 'must'. The difference is the element of fear around whatever it is not getting done. "If I don't do this, I won't get paid. If I don't do this, I won't be able to pay my bills. If I don't do this my house won't be clean and what will my guests think? If I don't do this, I'm not a good parent, employee, person."

There are so many ways that fear can enter into why we choose to do or not do. Yet fear creates that sense of struggle and hard work. In contrast, anything done from love, with love, becomes ease and flow. Either way we learn, we grow. It is just a matter of choosing how we want to go about it.

This brings up the question, how will we ever get anything done if we just do what we want?

The truth is that we do what we want anyway. We just like to complain about it, to ourselves and to others. We want to clean the house because we want to feel good, or we want others to think well of us, or whatever other reason we have. We want to work to pay our bills, because we want to get paid, we want to live in our homes, we want to eat and buy things. We are doing what we want. It just feels like hard work.

Now what would it look like if we flipped the switch, like changing the voltage of our electrical current from 110 to 220? What would it look like if we raised our vibration enough so that we do what we do guided by thoughts of love and appreciation?

Then it would look like this, "I really appreciate this ability I have to earn a living." "I'm glad I have this vacuum cleaner that makes cleaning the mess on my floor easier." "I am grateful for the people I love in my life." "I so appreciate the blue sky, the wind, the sun on my face."

The more we can do this, finding something to appreciate about whatever we are doing, whatever circumstances we find ourselves involved in, the more and more we will have to appreciate in our lives. Circumstances around us will change and become more and more pleasing.

Even finding the littlest things to appreciate matters and makes the difference because it is the attitude of appreciation, that love expressed, that will make the difference. We become motivated by love rather than fear. We are expressing love rather than fear into our lives. The Universe will respond by reflecting that love back to us, in small ways and in large. Life will no longer feel like such hard work. A life filled with an attitude of appreciation is a life filled with grace and with flow. Even finding the littlest things to appreciate matters and makes the difference, because it is the attitude of appreciation and the love expressed that will make the difference.

Your Spiritual Toolbox – Appreciate This Moment

Just for today, surrender your ideas about what you think you'd rather have or rather be doing.

Let go of your ideas of how hard you are working. The work will still be there, but for today, you can let go of the thought of struggle, discomfort and complaint.

Now allow yourself to find something to appreciate about what life has brought you in this moment.

If you find your thoughts returning to struggle, discomfort and complaints in the next moment, find something else to appreciate.

Don't try to change anything else. Just let go of what you think you'd prefer and appreciate something about what is.

It doesn't matter what it is that you find to appreciate. "I'm grateful for this job that pays my bills." "I appreciate these clothes that keep me warm." "I'm glad for this comfortable chair so I don't have to stand all day." "I'm grateful for the blue sky I see out the window." It can be anything at all.

What is important is the feeling of appreciation itself. Keep this up until you really do feel appreciation as well as think it.

Feeling is the language of the subconscious, and it is the subconscious that will communicate these new directives of appreciation through your superconscious and out into the Universe. When it does, the Universe can reflect back to you more and more and more to appreciate.

Gratitude

As you focus your attention on appreciation and gratitude something magical happens – happiness. It is the gold created by the alchemical reaction of expressing love into your daily life through appreciation and gratitude.

For so many of us our daily lives feel leaden, filled with negative, fearful thoughts, judgments, and self-criticism. This negative thinking can transform the golden possibilities of each day into lead.

Happiness is a moment by moment choice. Now, this is the most important part – you choose over and over again, with each thought that you think. In each moment that arises, every day, you make the choice. Do you choose to think a thought that supports you? Is it a thought based in love? Is it a thought that feels good?

Be doggedly persistent in monitoring your thoughts. Thought by thought, ask yourself, "Is this thought motivated by love? Or is this thought motivated by fear?" You'll know the answer because thoughts motivated by love feel good. Thought motivated by fear, don't feel good. It is that simple.

As you choose thoughts that feel good, those thoughts that are motivated by love, you feel happier. As you do so over and over again, you form the habit of happiness.

You can be the alchemical magician. You can transform leaden thoughts into the gold of happiness with each thought that you think.

Feeling Grateful

“Lord, let the details in life take my attention today...”

May these things inspire me to praise and bring a clear moment of sight.

Now I see how amazing the world truly is and soak in Your goodness and light.”

-Author Unknown

A cool, river of water splashed from the garden hose I held in my hand into the dark, plastic interior of the garbage can. I leaned in and scrubbed vigorously with my long-handled scrub brush and listened to the cars whizzing by on the street in front of my home. I felt grateful. Grateful that I wasn't rushing off somewhere on this perfect Fall morning. Grateful that I was outside, breathing air smelling fresh with early morning. Grateful that my bare feet tingled with the cool of the long, wet grass. Grateful that I had time for so lowly a chore, the kind of job that is generally put off in favor of more important things. I wondered if the drivers of those cars envied me puttering in my yard. More likely, they felt grateful that they had somewhere to go and could put off chores like washing garbage cans indefinitely!

I hope they feel grateful for what they are doing this morning. For it is not a matter of whether we are washing garbage cans on a beautiful morning, or whizzing along in our cars, it is how we perceive what we are doing that matters. It is how we feel about the things that we spend our time on that determines the experience we have.

Your Spiritual Toolbox - Keep Gratitude in Your Pocket

Keep a pocket-sized notebook and pen in your pocket. Note things for which you are grateful as they happen or as they occur to you throughout the day. At the end of the day, just before sleep, read over your notes and allow yourself to experience that feeling of gratitude again. If you enjoy this activity continue it, noting different things every day. Even if you are grateful for the same person or thing, note different aspects about that person or thing for which you are grateful.

Gratitude Opens the Door to Allowing

“When you feel gratitude, you are the closest to the natural state you were born to live in.”

-Abraham-Hicks

How do we make inspired, guided choices in our lives in full alignment with our higher-selves?
How best do we answer the questions in our lives, big and small?

These are the questions I have been asking myself for several days now. I wanted a specific formula, a structure to work with for asking and getting answers from my Higher-Self and from my Spiritual Support Team.

I knew that it began with asking the question. I knew the next step was to take it into meditation and wait for the answer. This is where I bogged down. My mind would keep worrying at the question, even as I tried to meditate. I'd see a fleeting visual image and wonder, *is that my answer?* Then I'd bring myself back to quiet and have a thought about something unrelated. *Maybe that's my answer*, I'd think, and so on. Letting go and allowing was hard work.

The answers are all there for us, accompanied by such love. You have only to ask and allow. But how do we allow?

Today, I began again. I asked my question out loud to focus my subconscious on my intention. I closed my eyes and quieted my mind, thinking, *allow*.

But, how do I allow? Came the plaintive cry from within.

Then a feeling of deep gratitude welled up from inside. Gratitude for the love of Spirit. Gratitude for the asking and the answering. Gratitude for connection. I breathed deeply of that feeling of gratitude and said internally, *Thank you. Thank you. Thank you*. Love filled me tingling right down my legs, tears filling my eyes. *Thank you. Thank you. Thank you*. Breathing in gratitude and love. *Thank you. Thank you. Thank you*.

I got it. That was my answer. Gratitude opens the door to allowing. Gratitude is the magic, the path opener. Gratitude opens the floodgates of inspiration.

Your Higher-Self and your Spiritual Support Team are as delighted to communicate with you as you are to communicate with them.

Imagine an enormous spiral, a vortex of loving energy with the tip surrounding your whole body, and the wider part extending high above your head stretching upward into the heavens. This is you, in alignment with your Higher-Self.

As you allow, through gratitude, the energy, knowledge, inspiration and guidance from your Higher Self, funnels downward to and through you, allowing you to live in clarity, inspired action and the daily joy of gratitude.

Gratitude opens the door to allowing and guidance because it raises your vibration, to the level where you are able to connect with the energy of your Higher-Self and your Spiritual Support Team. They cannot come down in energy to you, you must raise your energy to meet theirs to receive guidance and the answers to your questions.

Your Higher-Self and Spiritual Support Team are always with you, offering support and guidance, but as much as we want answers when we are feeling sad, angry, hurt, depressed or any of the negative emotions, the energy with which we are vibrating when we are feeling that way closes the door to receiving communication from loving Spirit.

We must raise our energy first, and one way to do that is through gratitude. Gratitude for even the simplest things is a place to start. Then work your way up from there. Gratitude tunes your radio dial to receive guidance from loving Spirit and your Higher-Self.

Your Spiritual Toolbox – Asking for Guidance

Here's the formula. Choose a quiet place and time in which you will not be disturbed.

Write out your questions. This serves three purposes. It gives your mind a job to do. It clears the clutter of your thoughts allowing you to calm your mind. It communicates your conscious questions with your subconscious mind.

Choose the question that is foremost in your mind. This is the question that feels most important or urgent, the one that is right in your face at this moment.

Ask your question out loud. By doing so you are communicating your intention to receive an answer to this particular question at this time, with your subconscious mind.

Close your eyes and calm your mind, preparing yourself to open the door to guidance.

Focus upon gratitude, say out loud, "Thank you for guidance." Think and feel and breathe the mantra, "Thank you. Thank you. Thank you." This opens the door to allowing your answers to come. As you breathe in mentally say, "Thank you." As you breathe out mentally say, "Thank you." Feel gratitude for guidance. Feel gratitude for your Higher Self and for Spirit. Feel gratitude for connection and inspiration. Keep repeating and breathing the inner mantra of, "Thank you," and allowing yourself to feel gratitude.

Your answer will come in the language and timing of your Higher-Self. The answer may come immediately or it may come later on. It may come as a visual image accompanied by an understanding of what this means. Or, you may need to ask what this image means and open yourself through gratitude for the answer. Your answer may come as a feeling. Your answer may come in a dream as you sleep at night. Your answer may come in symbols that you see or hear throughout the day.

Stay focused on gratitude. Your answer will come. If you sense an answer but do not understand the symbolism ask for clarity, then again focus upon gratitude. "Thank you for giving me clarity about the answer to my question. Thank you. Thank you. Thank you."

This formula may also be used on the fly. Ask your question, out loud if possible. Then focus fully upon gratitude for guidance using your mantra, "Thank you. Thank you. Thank you," allowing your answer to come.

Love Invested

Surround yourself with what you love and allow it to feed you.

A few years back, my husband and I had just finished replacing the old mailbox and post that sat out at the front of our yard gradually falling apart. It was no surprise that it looked much better. We painted the post grey and bought a dark green mailbox, so that it matched the grey of our Victorian farmhouse and the green of the shutters. I found myself looking for excuses to drive by the house or gaze out the window, just so I could admire the mailbox.

It reminds me of when I bought a new teakettle. I wanted one that looked old-fashioned to fit the look of our home. I wanted one without that annoying whistle that so many of the newer models have, and I wanted it to be stainless steel so I wouldn't be scrubbing off its painted surface every time I cleaned it. I took the time to go to several stores and finally found the perfect tea kettle, stainless steel, no whistle, with a gracefully curved spout and shape. After I brought it home and placed it on the stove, I would walk through the kitchen, ostensibly on some other errand and glance casually at the stove. There would be the tea kettle, shining in the sun coming in our South facing windows, sitting ready for duty on the back burner. When I heated water for tea, I would sit enthralled by the steam wafting up from the shiny spout in curling, white tendrils.

Lest you think I have several screws loose as I soliloquize about mail boxes and teapots, I believe there is a deeper meaning to the pleasure these bits and pieces of our lives give us. That is, these small pieces of our homes add up to become the whole, just as the small moments of our lives add up to become our whole life. They are in fact, a microcosm of the macrocosm, each bit being representative of the whole. Love invested in these bits and pieces is returned, over and over again whether those bits are a mailbox, a teapot or this moment right now in which we find ourselves.

How important is a mailbox or a teapot? How important is one moment of our lives? Is it worth putting the love, the focus and attention into this moment to make it the best it can be? This moment is fleeting, why bother? Because the love invested stays, though the moment passes by, and the love is harvested over and over. Love invested never stops giving back.

Spiritual Toolbox - Surround Yourself with What You Love

Surround yourself with what you love in your home and allow your home to support you energetically. We become so used to our homes and the things in them that we don't really see them anymore as we go about our daily activities. Yet, we respond to what we see subconsciously, and it either supports us or drains us.

Walk through your home and one room at a time take note of the things you love, those you feel neutral about and those you actively dislike.

Do you love the lamp that you found at a second-hand shop while on vacation last year? Does it remind you of the fun you had? Do you love the shape and color of it? That love returns to you each time you see that lamp. It supports you energetically.

Do you dislike that picture on the wall given to you by your aunt? Do you keep it around because it was a gift and you don't want to displease her? Does it remind you of unpleasant experiences? Let it go, now. That energy does not support you. It drains you.

How about those plain gray pot-holders hanging in the kitchen? Do you love them or do they feel neutral? Do they serve a purpose? Then they serve you but do not really support you. Keep them until you can replace them with one's you love.

Make it your goal to surround yourself with what you love and feel supported by your home energetically.

Feeling Grateful Even When You Don't

"Despite my extreme skepticism, practicing gratitude changed my life. It didn't turn me into some happy-go-lucky person I was never meant to be (or, frankly, wanted to be). But I developed a fundamentally different way of thinking and moving through life, one in which I stopped taking for granted all the tiny good moments that were already part of it. I stopped looking for happiness out there and learned to find it right here."

— Nataly Kogan

How do you feel grateful when things in your life are going wrong? What if your grandchildren are sick? What if your daughter and her husband just got separated? What if things are not going well in your world? How then do you feel grateful?

The answer is in the understanding that how you feel is not about what is happening in your outside world. Though we are conditioned to believe that it is. Rather gratitude comes from the inside. It is a choice.

"Gratitude should not be just a reaction to getting what you want, but an all-the-time gratitude, the kind where you notice the little things and where you constantly look for the good even in unpleasant situations."

— Marelisa Fabrega

Sometimes the best way to attain that state of gratitude is to focus not on what you are worried about but upon what is right in your world. You can feel grateful for the commonplace things, the things you usually take for granted. You can look for the silver lining within the clouds. As you do so you create alignment. There is nothing that is going on in your outside world that is not supported by your inner alignment. That is why gratitude is such a powerful spiritual tool.

Your Higher Self and Spirit know what you are worried about. Your Higher Self and Spirit know what are the best actions you can take (or not take) to create healing, improvement, betterment of whatever the situation is. Your Higher Self and Spirit need your permission given through prayer, to intervene and set the spiritual ball of healing rolling.

As you release worry and focus upon what you are grateful for, you move back into alignment. As you do that you will be inspired into what will truly support the situations you are concerned about. From that centered place you will be able to connect with, hear and feel inspiration.

Gratitude is the tool that can move you from worried wheel spinning to inspired action.

Your Spiritual Toolbox - Make a Gratitude List

If your mind is filled with worries and gratitude feels far away, get out pen and paper, get down to basics and start to list whatever you can come up with that you do feel grateful for. It may be the air you breathe, the fact that you are able to put words on paper, the eyes that let you see what you are writing, the roof over your head, the breakfast that filled your stomach, the bed that supported your sleep last night, the trees, the birds, the sky. Wherever you need to start to feel even a twinge of gratitude, start there. Even if it feels stilted or uncomfortable at first, keep at it.

In time as you continue this exercise you will find yourself relaxing and your gratitude list flowing more easily.

Now read back over your list, breathing in that feeling of gratitude for each item on your list.

Feel that sense of expansion and alignment that gratitude gives you. Now ask your Higher Self and Spirit to support you to take inspired action today.

Choosing Happiness

As you focus your attention on appreciation and gratitude something magical happens – happiness. It is the gold created by the alchemical reaction of expressing love into your daily life through appreciation and gratitude.

For so many of us our daily lives feel leaden, filled with negative, fearful thoughts, judgments, and self-criticism. Negative thinking that can transform the golden possibilities of each day into lead.

Happiness is a moment by moment choice. Now, this is the most important part – you choose over and over again, with each thought that you think. In each moment that arises, every day, you make the choice. Do you choose to think a thought that supports you? Is it a thought based in love? Is it a thought that feels good?

Be doggedly persistent in monitoring your thoughts. Thought by thought, ask yourself, “Is this thought motivated by love? Or is this thought motivated by fear?” You’ll know the answer because thoughts motivated by love feel good. Thought motivated by fear, don’t feel good. It is that simple.

As you choose thoughts that feel good, those thoughts that are motivated by love, you feel happier. As you do so over and over again, you form the habit of happiness.

You can be the alchemical magician. You can transform leaden thoughts into the gold of happiness with each thought that you think.

Your Inner Pollyanna

“What men and women need is encouragement. Their natural resisting powers should be strengthened, not weakened ... Instead of always harping on a man's faults, tell him of his virtues. Try to pull him out of his rut ... Hold up to him his better self, his real self that can dare and do and win out! ... People radiate what is in their minds and in their hearts.”

-Eleanor H. Porter

Pollyanna, that indomitably happy character and creation of Eleanor H. Porter, taught us to look for the best in others, focusing on what’s good about them. But how many of us do that for ourselves? Instead, how many of us look for everything we do wrong, all the things we could do better? How many of us look for the ways we show up in which we aren’t good enough or worthy enough as if by focusing upon our faults we can make ourselves better?

In the past this was such a habit for me that the first thing I’d do when I woke up in the morning was to call to mind all those things I felt uncomfortable about. It might have been something that happened the day before in which I felt ‘less than,’ it might have been something I’d worried over, or someone I was worried about. Whatever it was, the thoughts and images would pop into my mind, one following another as I fell down the rabbit hole of negative thinking once again. I’d get up feeling grumpy and irritable, resistant to all the possibilities for happiness that new day offered.

That’s not how it has to be. It is your right and your choice to feel good in the morning when you wake up, and to feel good throughout the day. It is your right and your choice to focus upon the positive aspects of how you show up in every situation in which you find yourself.

I have recently been enjoying the “Great British Baking Show,” in which amateur bakers compete. At the end of each episode one baker wins Star Baker, and one baker has to go home, those remaining compete again the following week. Understandably the losing baker is often devastated and self-critical. In this most recent episode, I was impressed by the attitude of the losing baker. She was of course, disappointed, but when the others comforted her with hugs, she responded by saying, “This has been the best!” You could tell that she meant it.

“The secret of change is to focus all of your energy, not on fighting the old, but on building the new.”

Socrates

Granted some of us have well-worn ruts of negativity to pull ourselves out of, habits of thought built up over a lifetime. Allow yourself to follow this advice of Socrates and know that you can build new pathways with new thoughts, choice by choice, thought by thought, day by day. Allow yourself to get in touch with your inner Pollyanna.

Your Spiritual Toolbox - Choose Thoughts That Support You

Happiness is a thought by thought choice, it is a result of the habit of filling your mind with positive thoughts. Starting with your next thought, notice the trend. Does it support you? If not, find something, anything to think that feels better than what you were just thinking. ‘Pollyanna’ your way into feeling better by focusing on what is right. What did you do right? What did they do right? What were your positive motivations and intentions? Allow yourself to focus on the best of you that shows up for any given situation. As you do so, you can trust that more and more of the best of you will keep showing up.

Give Yourself the Power to Choose

“...happiness is the result of love coming out of you...”

Don Miguel Ruiz, Mastery of Love, A Toltec Wisdom Book

A forty-something, tired-looking woman (who looks nothing like me) stares at her daughter with dismay.

“You are not going out of this house dressed like that!”

Her daughter slams the front door she had just opened, turns and looks at her mother, eyes narrowed, and disgust distorting the outline of her mouth. She runs upstairs to her room, screaming,

“I hate you!”

If you were me... um, I mean this mother; how might you choose to feel in this situation? For the sake of argument let’s pretend that you have forgotten you have a choice about how you want to feel and that you respond with a knee-jerk reaction. Your feelings are hurt. You feel anger and fear. You are trying to protect your daughter. Who knows what teen aged boys might assume if they saw her parading around in that 6-inch skirt and tight, low cut, cropped t-shirt?

When your daughter comes back downstairs wearing an 8-inch skirt and a tight, low cut, uncropped t-shirt, and looking at you as if you were condemning her to death, your hurt, anger and fear for her causes you to overreact.

“Get back up to your room, young lady! You are grounded! No phone, no mall, nothing till you can learn how to dress properly!”

And so, it repeats, in many homes, in many variations, with many different teenaged daughters and sons.

This is an old road, traveled by many an irate parent of a teenager.

You may not have teenagers. You may not be a parent. Your life may not look anything like this. The learned behavior patterns of this scene may not be one of your patterns, but most likely you will have others.

We all have our individual behavior patterns, based on fear and built in response to family patterns as we were growing up.

Our hypothetical mother had a choice of how to respond to her daughter, though she may not have been aware of it at the time. (In fact, I can say for sure that she wasn't. She knee-jerked much of her way through motherhood, sigh...)

We are constantly confronted with situations in which we choose how we will respond. The choice is not always conscious, but it is always a choice. Many of us forget this.

We are trained from infancy to perceive the world around us as our parents, family and society perceived the world, a process known as acculturation. It is the way we learn how to be in the world. During the process of acculturation, we learn about how our world works and where we fit into it. As infants and children, we swallow whole the view of our world from those around us. Later, as adults we may question this view, but the foundation is laid.

During the acculturation process we learn to make the choices about how we feel without conscious thought, based upon what those around us have taught us. We learn knee-jerk responses to certain kinds of experiences, reacting without conscious thought.

We learn that we need certain things or events to happen in order for us to respond lovingly and feel happy. If those things do not happen, or other things happen instead, we respond with fear and we feel unhappy.

It doesn't feel like a choice for us. Our happiness depends on events outside of ourselves.

This is an unhappy way to live, because we give up our power to choose. We forget that we have the power to choose a loving response, to choose to feel happy. We believe that our happiness lives outside ourselves, when in fact just the opposite is true.

How do we choose to feel happy? We have these learned patterns that tell us when we can feel happy and when we have to feel unhappy. How do we unlearn these patterns and start over?

How do we give ourselves back the power to choose?

We retrain our automatic responses through repetition.

Learning anything new requires repetition. My granddaughter will repeat a new skill over and over, day after day, until she has mastered it. Whether it is riding her bike without training wheels, drawing a human figure, or hanging upside down on the monkey bars, she is driven to practice again and again, until one day she has it. Then she will lose interest and move on to something new.

Our brains are hard-wired to learn this way. When mastering a desired new skill, we feel a driving need to practice. We are creating new pathways in our brains that allow us to master these skills.

In time, the pathways in the brain associated with any particular bit of learning become like well-traveled roads.

What happens when we want to relearn these responses? We have to stop using the old roads and build new roads in their place.

Relearning requires the repeated practice that any new learning requires. It also requires paying attention and catching ourselves before we start down an old response road, then reorienting ourselves to the new response road we are building.

When you choose to relearn old behavior patterns be patient with yourself.

You are rebuilding the learned pathways in your brain. You are learning to choose a love-based response over a fear-based response. Relearning takes time and effort.

Chances are there will be times when you suddenly find yourself on the old roads, responding in a knee-jerk negative fashion to familiar stimuli. You will have by-passed all the detour signs and gone barreling down the old road. That's OK. Wherever you find yourself you can choose to reorient and keep rebuilding.

It's worth it, because our choice of response, whether we respond from fear or from love, determines how we feel about any situation. When we choose to respond from love we choose to feel happy.

Don Miguel Ruiz, in his book *Mastery of Love*, explains that we are only happy when we are expressing love.

A feeling of happiness is a side effect, a beneficial result of expressing love into the world. When we choose the loving response, we feel happy.

Give yourself the power to choose love.

Your Spiritual Toolbox – Look for the Positive

Imagine that you are the parent of the teenager we met earlier. Your beloved child has just screamed, "I hate you!" You find yourself at the entranceway to the fear-filled road of hurt,

anger and overreaction. But with your new understanding, instead of traveling its well-worn path you stop. You remember that you have a choice.

Take a deep breath and ask yourself, what is positive about this situation?

Well, your daughter stopped. She didn't go out that front door. She accepted the structure you imposed and went back upstairs to change. She did what you asked of her.

You could go on, thinking of how blessed you are to be the mother of such a high-spirited young woman. How lucky you are that she has good health, and that you are able to give her enough food to eat and a comfortable place to live.

Of course, you may not be feeling blessed by these things at the moment. You have to choose to think of those things which feel positive to you.

Counting your blessings is an excellent tool for short-circuiting knee-jerk reactions.

Remember too to lighten up; it is not all so serious. Can you imagine what a cartoon of this situation would look like?

Remember what Erma Bombeck says, *"If you can't make it better, you can laugh at it."*

Now think about this - today is exactly perfect just as it is. Every annoying detail is exactly as it should be.

We put so much of our energy into annoyance with small details of everyday life that are as they are. See them as perfection. You can trust that your daughter is learning how to make her own choices. This is a good thing, even if it requires you to occasionally butt heads.

You have the ability to choose love. Love would give your daughter a calm choice with full knowledge of appropriate consequences.

The next time you find yourself reacting in a fearful or angry, knee-jerk reaction, take a deep breath, count your blessings, lighten up, see the perfection, and ask yourself, "What would love do here?"

The Magic of Inspiration

"One thing about trains: It doesn't matter where they're goin'. What matters is deciding to get on."

-The Polar Express

What inspires you today?

I've felt inspired by the bright, blue sky this morning, the sun shining off new fallen snow. I've felt inspired by the woodstove with fire crackling warmly within. I've felt inspired to create Christmas decorations, hanging our wreath and stockings, putting up the little tree in our front

hall. I've felt inspired listening to Christmas music and that magical Christmas movie, *The Polar Express*.

Inspiration follows the energy of the day. It is not always linked to the same activities or ideas. It comes and goes on its own schedule. If we're lucky we get on for the ride and are carried along delighting in the flow. Can we do this intentionally? Like waiting at the train station for the train and leaping aboard as it comes rumbling, steaming and puffing to a stop just long enough for us to get on?

I think we can. I think we are meant to allow our lives to follow our inspiration, that small, shining gem hidden within the layers of the everyday sameness. Magic is found within our inspiration.

The Christmas season is all about magic. The magic of the twinkling lights, the mystery of the presents under the tree, the Spirit of Christmas, the time of year when love and giving is the theme, and everywhere you look there are representations of magical beings, beautiful decorations and sparkling colors.

It's magic that we long for, the magic that is Spirit. Feeling and following our inspiration from within is our connection to that magic. That's where the real magic is in this 3D world we live in. The magic lives within each one of us.

The train of your inspiration is stopping at your station. All aboard!

Your Spiritual Toolbox – What Inspires You Today?

Look for the gem of your inspiration today. It's there, perhaps hidden within the repetition of the day to day.

If it's not immediately apparent to you, quiet your mind and ask your Spiritual Support Team to show you where your inspiration is today.

Feel for it inside.

Feel that hint of excitement when you think of taking some action.

Feel for that child-like delight when you imagine yourself doing a particular activity.

Look for an inner sparkle, a happiness, an expansion, a contentment, maybe even a sense of relief when you allow yourself to contemplate what inspires you.

Acknowledge your inspiration and express gratitude. "Thank you for inspiring me today!"

This is the great gift of Spirit, that what inspires us is what we are here to do.

The Universe Will Support You

"Everything is always working out for me."

-Abraham-Hicks

Awhile back my husband left early in the morning to drive to a convention several states away. He'd be gone for six days. In the past when I've said goodbye to him and found myself alone in the early morning dark, I've sunk into feelings of loneliness and abandonment.

This time I chose to experience it differently.

I put my thoughts and feelings on hold as I tidied up the kitchen from breakfast focusing my attention on what was immediately in front of me. I put in a load of laundry and made myself a cup of tea. The sun came up and I took my tea outside to sit on the patio and watch the backyard awaken.

Negative thoughts arose and I chose to focus my attention on my immediate environment. I paid attention to my breath moving in and out. I watched the light in the leaves and felt the fresh, cool morning air. I noticed the birds at the feeder and heard their morning songs.

Even as I did so I could feel the old anxieties and fears just beneath the surface. I knew what was there. I'd experienced it all before and now it lurked, a darkness pressing against the door of my awareness. This time I chose not to give it any attention, nor did I allow it to come to the fore. I didn't even try to fix it as I've done before. Instead I paid attention to what I sensed all around me.

It felt like I was faking it, and any minute the reality of negativity would take over, but it didn't. In fact, just the opposite happened. In a little while my thoughts turned to what I'd like to do during the day, what would feel good to do.

I made a mental plan and decided to start by making myself a delicious soup to eat throughout the day. It felt nourishing and supportive.

I then took the dog for a long walk and thoroughly enjoyed the cool woods and sunshine.

When I felt worry thoughts start, I reminded myself of my favorite Abraham-Hicks quote and thought, "I don't have to worry about this because, "Everything is always working out for me."

As I walked on, I heard a repeated bird call from the trees. Over and over it sounded like the bird was saying, "Thank you, thank you, thank you, thanks!" It became my mantra as I walked.

Afterward, I got home and ate nurturing soup and took a nap.

When I awoke once again, I felt the aloneness pressing at the door of my thoughts and again I chose to focus elsewhere.

Instead, I went to the kitchen and baked a healthy version of blondies made with white beans. They were surprisingly good. I replaced our broken mailbox and ordered a planter to go around the base of the mailbox post.

Throughout the day several friends called with invitations and connection. My daughter called for support with something that was bothering her, and my husband called just checking in, letting me know he was thinking of me. The calls felt connecting and supportive.

I realized that as I chose to support myself with where I focused my attention, and in the thoughts I chose to think, so the Universe supported me. I chose to feel connection. I chose to feel support. I chose to nurture myself. The Universe reflected that right back to me.

You will have your own ways of loving and nurturing yourself. You know what feels good to you. Begin with your inner home, your thoughts.

Your Spiritual Toolbox – Nurture Yourself with Your Thoughts

Choose to feel good today because by doing so your daily life will reflect that back to you with more and more things to feel good about.

When you feel negativity pushing at your awareness remember that just because you think a thought doesn't make it true. Just because you think a thought doesn't mean you have to pay attention to it or fix it.

Love and nurture yourself with the thoughts you allow into the sacred home of your mind.

Choose to be on the wavelength of love and nurture within, then you can perceive it around you and receive it from your outer world.

It is as if our daily life is a giant 3-D mirror surrounding us with what we are creating for ourselves from within, with our thoughts and what we pay attention to.

Choose happiness today because it feels good now from the inside out. Choose happiness today because in each moment of contentment you are creating many more to come.

Conclusion

Appreciate the sweet moments that fill your day. Feel gratitude for your daily life. Choose happiness in each moment as you choose loving, nurturing thoughts.

It's magic.