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# Seeking Gratitude is Stressing Me Out

written by Jonna Jerome

It's often said that practicing gratitude in our daily lives helps us grow into our best selves. The practice is believed to improve our ability to cope in the face of uncertainty and anxiety, ultimately leading to a happier and more fulfilling life.

You've likely come across this message from many sources, whether that be through health and wellness experts, Deepak Chopra, or the baristas at your favorite coffee bar. Especially the baristas, as they're seeking fulfillment while highly caffeinated. Admittedly, my diet of constant stress, fitful sleep, energy bars, and pricey expresso drinks may not be helping my outlook. But I do love my positive-vibes only barista.



The exercise of seeking gratitude becomes ever more challenging with what is happening across the globe—not just my intimate world. 2025 certainly started with a big bang. I know so many special needs parents also grapple with just trying to get through the day. At times this message to be grateful when everything feels like it's in free-fall may just sound ludicrous.

Determined to resign as the self-crowned Queen of Chaos and finally sleep through the night, I decided to embrace the gratitude journey with gusto. Not content with stopping there, I added on extra credit: achieving inner peace, mastering mindfulness, and prioritizing better self-care. I was gunning for gold in the mental wellness Olympics. My Type A personality confidently declared, "I can crush this!"

Spoiler alert: I didn't.

Instead, the very activities meant to soothe my soul turned into yet another obligation. Some days my best self just wants a nap.

Gratitude lists became homework. Mindfulness meditations became another time block in an overstuffed schedule. It felt eerily similar to juggling the work/life equation or tackling the eternal Everest that is the growing laundry pile on my bed.

It began like this...

## Therapy

I decided to see a therapist to work through my fears so I wouldn't drive away all my friends. I took a deep dive to find one that I could relate to. This proved more difficult than I anticipated, especially when they don't have kids and are a decade (or more) younger than I. How can they relate?

The ultimate letdown came after the third, hearing my experiences, said, "I don't know how you get out of bed in the morning." I wish I was kidding. It was quite unhelpful.

Needless to say, a big, gigantic awakening didn't present itself in those sessions. The expectation that it should made me feel like I'm doing it wrong, and I know performance anxiety should not be the result of a therapy session. I was given the advice to meditate, which left me with a terrible urge to punch the doctor.

It's just that I've tried so hard to meditate - only to discover I'm phenomenally bad at it. And somehow it seems to be negatively and transcendently attached to my cell phone use.

## Meditation

The first time I attempted to meditate, I shut the door, settled onto my new cushion, lit a scented candle, muted my phone, and got down to it. Twenty minutes later, frustrated I couldn't stay focused, I returned to the real world, which unfortunately, I hadn't really left. I found I missed a call from my daughter in treatment. It was her only call for the entire week!

The second time, I did all the above rituals and listened to a guided meditation for assistance. This time I missed a phone call from an elusive physician to go over lab work. Apparently, I'm allergic to both my beloved cat and dog, and had a severe reaction to black pepper. It just so happens most of my backyard haven consists of pepper trees. So, the three things that bring me joy can also apparently kill me.

Epipen: Check.

The third time, I attended a group meditation designed to help people tap into their intuition. I felt like a fraud, not having the "breakthroughs" everyone else seemed to be experiencing. Honestly, how can these people be so upbeat? It was annoying. And, you guessed it, I missed *another* phone call from a stranger reporting my son had fainted while running. I rushed to my car only to find it had been demolished from a hit and run. Clearly, I have no intuition at all, or I would have foreseen all this and stayed home.

## The Full Body Soak

My girlfriend suggested an experience of complete pampering and surrender to help me relax. It didn't take much persuasion, because why wouldn't soaking in a natural hot spring and getting a massage be anything but blissful? We traveled to a serene desert wellness spa. Without going into too much detail, the healing waters brought out a rash in my most sensitive places, the deep tissue massage resulted in yet another tear in my rotator cuff, and my bank account took a big hit.

## The Kitchen Sink

I can't help but think the universe is telling me that meditation and hot tubs aren't my gateway. So, I turned to other tactics. I did yoga until my body screamed "Uncle!", listened to podcasts and read books from wellness experts and life coaches, took classes, did a diet cleanse, worked in the garden (sans pepper trees), cleaned the house until I scrubbed the finish off the floors, and walked the dog until I had to pick him up and carry him. Because I didn't want to kill my dog, I made an acupuncture appointment.

## Acupuncture

I dutifully laid on the cushy table and listened to soothing music and a tinkling fountain. I didn't punch anybody when getting needles stuck in my body, but I'm not going to lie—there was some blood.

What followed resembled a battle scene from a Lord of the Rings movie. My muscles were so tense, they contracted in a way that shot the needles out like arrows at a velocity strong enough to fly across the room! The doctor took refuge behind a decorative screen until the barrage was over. Her following words were as unhelpful as the therapist's. "Stress much?"

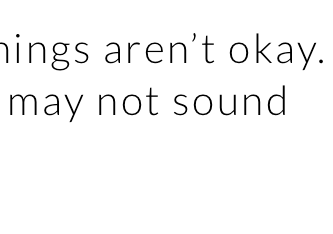
Maybe a vodka martini would have worked better. It would certainly have been less expensive.

## The Takeaway

My tired psyche at last realized the quest itself was stressing me out, and engaging in cathartic practices won't improve my mindset if I'm expecting miracles or something external to fix me. Maybe squeezing all these activities and expectations onto an already crowded "to do" list isn't as therapeutic as it should be.

I surrendered to the idea that I need to be okay even when things aren't okay. Because "things" might never be exactly as I want them. This may not sound like a huge epiphany to you, but for me it's seismic.

Suddenly, I found I was immensely grateful for that cuppa that smelled like my version of heaven. And on a much larger note, finding those few people who don't cringe or change the subject when I talk about my real life is priceless. It took time to find the, or maybe just to *recognize* them. Because if you ever want to clear a room, just start talking about mental health or disabilities—the ones who stayed have changed my life.

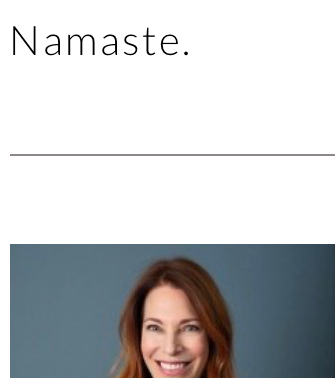


Whatever tools you apply to cope with hard times, be it a support group, meditation, prayer, health coaches or chocolate know that not all of us are going to find grace in the heat of the moment. If it were simple, we'd all be as evolved as Deepak.

Sometimes knowing you're trying must be enough, and the barista can put in a good word for you with the powers that be. Despite some unexpected outcomes, I did learn something on this journey. And for now, I'm going out to carry my dog.

One last bit of advice: If you meditate, maybe meet the universe halfway by not muting your cell phone.

Namaste.



**Jonna Jerome** is a freelance writer and content strategist who uses her words to support people, causes, and organizations she believes in. With a sharp eye and a sense of humor, she explores the poignant and absurd with a deep understanding of life's messier moments. Her work has been featured in *HuffPost*, *Business Insider*, *Your Teen Magazine*, and more. Her perspective is shaped by

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