

Chapter 8

THE EIGHTH SACRED RESPONSIBILITY: GRATITUDE

The best way to show my gratitude is to accept everything, even my problems, with joy.

—Mother Theresa

None of this will reach its full potential without Gratitude. Gratitude is the Eighth Sacred Responsibility and I consider this sacred responsibility a direct connection to our highest self, a connection to our full potential if you will.

Our authentic-self thrives when grateful. And the energy we are cultivating now of a life well lived, a life of thriving in our third act, ripples out to the great mystery as our full expression of who we are. We surf on the waves of the immense gratitude we have for this life and our position of empowerment!

The Eighth Sacred Responsibility is also your strongest ally enriching all the other Sacred Responsibilities, for without gratitude none of the other Sacred Responsibilities will shine in their full potential.

In Gratitude, everything has permission to exist.

It is funny to me what we complain about in our day-to-day life using words like I “have to” go to work, I “have to” do laundry, I “have to” clean the house. When we begin a life where gratitude is the prevailing wind we find our language changes and the emphasis in our tone is more like this - “I am heading to work”, or next level “I get to go to work today”, “I am going to put a load of laundry in”, “I’m going to put on some good music and clean the house today”. I “get to” do groceries today and so on. We start to delete the complaint program that has been running for far too long and install a program of gratitude.

As intelligent, spirited human beings we have the ability to self-correct quite easily. Well ok, with a little practice. We can listen deeply to the thoughts in our mind and how we are talking to ourselves, as well as the quality of these thoughts, and in natural progression the quality of our words, then the quality of our actions.

I have discovered that it is my blessing to have clothes to wash, a job that fulfils me and a little place to call home that I have the absolute honour to clean and care for. I have discovered that gratitude is common sense but not common practice for most. Sisters, we are not like most!

Gratitude and the wisdom teachings of

the women who walked before us

As I wrote this book, I spent a lot of time in meditation asking for the most helpful words to come forward for the benefit of all of us women as we reclaim ourselves in the third act of our lives.

In this practice of getting quiet enough to hear my inner voice clearly, many unexpected things came to the surface, many of which I have shared through these pages. There was a continued underlying theme as I meditated: how much gratitude I had for all of the women who walked before me. All of the trailblazers, the activists, the suffragettes, the feminists, the women who taught us how to stand shoulder to shoulder with each other in the early Civil Rights movement.

Those who modeled what it looked like to never stand down in the face of adversity, the women who raised families as single parents by choice, and the women who paved the way to give us choice. The list of the women I have taken my lead from is long, and I am so grateful I found mentorship in their work. To the original fiery and fabulous women, I am deeply grateful to know your names. This book is dedicated to these women. If you missed the dedication at the beginning of the book, please go back and read the names of these women. Read their names out loud, look them up and learn their stories, then tell them.

My meditations brought me back to thoughts of the elders in our lives, the women who are the most seasoned of us, the women who are our mentors as we walk this path and my gratitude for the women who have forged the way for us to be as free as we are today. I also found thoughts of my own ancestors come to the surface and memories of life with them and their unique wisdom. During one of my meditations I had a memory come up of a time when my grandmother on my father's side, Rose Mines, chose two things she wanted me to have. One I will share here, the other I will save to share in person one day, so remember to ask me about the second gift.

The item she gave me was a piece of pottery. My grandmother (who I resemble a lot) passed on one of her most sacred items to me when I was 25 or 26 years old. It has taken me many years to truly understand the significance of what she gave me. Really, only recently as I found myself finding younger women in my life that I felt moved to pass down my own sacred items to, have I really tapped into the experience of receiving something from a woman in her third act, my grandmother.

I came to find that until I had reached a certain maturity myself, I had not been able to fully receive the true nature of the exchange. Now as I find myself in a place to pass things on, I reflect on my own experience of receiving a treasure from an elder in the family. I now realize that the younger women in line to receive my accumulated treasures are also at a stage of maturing in the current act or phase of their lives and that it is a rite of passage for all of us.

I began to realize that the passing down of these items is not exactly what I thought it was when my grandmother gave me this particular treasure of hers. It was not simply that I "should" get this special thing because I was special, or I was the granddaughter, or that I was more important than someone else.

I see now she was handing down a feeling. She was handing down a story and a part of her life where she felt most respected, honored and seen for the work she had done in this life, the work she was proud of. And she saw in me that I was the one to hold that memory for her.

Now back to the gift she gave me, the piece of pottery. I will freely admit that receiving this in my mid 20s was not much more than receiving a sweet gift from my grandmother. Grandmas do these

things, right? But now I sit here in a different maturity and more able to feel the energy behind the gift she passed on to me.

The piece was a pottery basket and the handle of the basket was hand painted bulrushes. The basket/bowl was really more a candy dish that seemed representative of a grandmother to me at the time. But this was no ordinary candy dish. This piece of pottery represented the most important part my grandmother's life. It took my own aging and maturing to actually slow me down enough and take time for this memory to resurface to be enjoyed and to become a teaching for me to share.

You see my grandmother Rose had two sons, my father and his brother, and she also had two grandsons. Then there was me, her only granddaughter. So, it was simple for me to rationalize her giving me something that appeared a more appropriate gift for a woman than a man, and that line of thinking kept the pretty pottery candy dish in a certain category or compartment in my mind. As I matured my understanding of the gift matured also.

What my Grandmother was really passing down to me was an item that represented her self-respect and resilience. The respect she felt connected to her job, the job that allowed her to raise her family. She was not giving me her old candy dish at all, she was giving me something that represented the teaching of respect for self and how resilient women are.

I didn't get that gift because I was the only female in the family, it was given to me as a physical representation of a story. The story of the richness of respect for ourselves and for one another. The act of passing on an item to a younger person is rarely just to pass on some old dust collectors for a person in their third act, a person who is reflecting on what truly matters to them in life, but it is the handing down of a story, of their wisdom and passing the torch of that wisdom on to be shared through story and example by the ones gifted.

When my father was six months old, and his brother would have been about three, my grandfather went out for "a loaf of bread" and never came back. This would have been in 1947. My grandmother, now a single woman with two children and no explanation of where her husband had gone, was left to raise her family and work to support her boys—six months after the birth of her youngest son.

Needless to say, my grandmother had a lot of gratitude and respect for her working career as it was the very thing that saved her and her boys from a life that could have been very different.

She "retired" as an insurance underwriter with no warning; one day she went to work and by lunch time she was heading back home with a pottery candy dish. She was in such a state of shock that she had a heart attack after falling in the grocery store. A reminder to all of us that even the strongest of women have vulnerable hearts, feelings, and it is an honour to know them.

I had many more years with my grandmother since her surprise retirement and her heart healing. She was a classy lady who made all of her own clothing and sewed designer labels into them. She held her head high at a time when it was uncommon to be a single parent and most certainly frowned upon by many to be a single woman.

When my grandmother passed away I had a female urge to go to her apartment before the men of the family did and clean out the more intimate places like the drawers with her underwear and bras and her personal care items. There was something about maintaining her privacy around her personal items I simply felt compelled to do and in one last story I received from my grandmother she taught me about loyalty and love.

In her top dresser drawer, wrapped in a stitched handkerchief, was a jewelry box with a hinged lid. I opened it up to see which of her many broaches was kept in there. To my surprise the box contained a corsage and a little flower shop gift card. A delicate and perfectly dried corsage and a note that said To Rose From Gordon. Gordon was my grandfather. That corsage would have been about 50 years old.

I was curious about what kind of support my grandmother would have had at that time, and on the Government of Canada website I found out that she had entered the workforce as a single mother three years prior to the passing of the Fair Employment Practices Act and the Female Employees Fair Remuneration Act in Ontario, which was passed in 1951, and eight years prior to the Female Employees Equal Pay Act of 1956, which made wage discrimination based on sex against the law.

More currently, in a CBC News article interviewing Liberal MPP Marie-France Lalonde, dated April 1st 2018, Ms. Lalonde shares that after a two-year review of labour relations, gender-based pay gaps still exist.

Let me do the math for you, that would be 62 years *after* gender-based wage discrimination was made illegal. She goes on to say, “in certain sectors, part-time employees, (primarily women and new Canadians) were being asked to do the exact same work as a full-time employee but being paid minimum wage.” In 2015 Statistics Canada informed us that Canadian women earned 87 cents an hour for every dollar earned by men.

Thank you, grandmother Rose for that candy dish brimming with the teachings of self-respect and for the powerful lesson of loyalty and love.

May we walk gentle, with a fierce fire burning bright in our hearts, may we walk in beauty together with gratitude towards peace and happiness. May we forever respect the gift of our life.

Our Daily Statement

Today I open myself fully to living a sacred life, I call in now the people, places and things that lift me up, light me up and hold me up as the accountable, responsible and authentic woman I am here to be. And so it is.

The Gratitude Imagination Practice (Imagining/Thoughts)

Today is a day of gratitude and thanks to all the people, places, and things that lift us up, increase our vitality, have provided positive reinforcement, and have helped to raise our consciousness.

You can never say ‘thank you’ too many times. You can never have the feeling of gratitude in your body for too long. Gratitude allows us to steep ourselves in a full body feeling that makes a magical connection with each other and the natural world.

When we allow ourselves to fully immerse in gratitude for someone or something that has been part of our growth, change, and personal expansion, there is an alchemy that happens where we create a high vibrational wave of energy that flows out into the lives of those around us, as well as into the greater communities where we live.

This high vibrational wave moves further and further out touching other communities all over the globe. Gratitude has an ever-expanding reach that carries a sacred reciprocity that benefits both parties, as well as all who find themselves swimming in the waves of our gratitude.

Imagine yourself now completely relaxed with a huge smile on your face because today you are grateful for so much in your life.

We will choose a person, place, and thing and steep ourselves in full-body gratitude through our imagination and our ability to feel this gratitude in our bodies.

Gratitude as natural medicine

Imagine one person you have interacted with in the last few days for whom you are grateful. This is not a complicated exercise at all, quite the opposite actually. This person can be a friend, a family member, a teacher or someone that held the door for you when you had your hands full. It can be a person who inspired you in a video you watched; you do not need to know them personally, you are simply recognizing your feelings of gratitude towards them. The feeling does not need to be associated with any details or action either.

And say to yourself, for one full minute while you imagine something like this:

“I’m grateful for the day. I’m grateful for the person who called to say hello today. I’m grateful for my eyes that see beauty. I’m grateful for my bed. I’m grateful for the moonlight, and so it goes.

I’m grateful for the safe travels of my students to class today. I’m grateful I have the opportunity to see my bestie today. I am grateful for how much my cat loves me. I am grateful for the view from my office window.

I am grateful for the fresh water in my taps. I am grateful I have meaningful work to do today. I am grateful for my friends who are into living a healthy happy lifestyle with me. I am grateful for this community. I am grateful for all of you who hold me accountable to this work. I am grateful for coffee, really grateful for coffee.”

And so on.

Everything is fair game in this one. You are grateful for everything around you that comes into your consciousness *and* I like to add things like, “I am grateful for the things I have yet to learn. I am grateful for the things this moment teaches me. I am grateful for my experiences. Yes, I am grateful for it all and some days I am grateful for these tears that cleanse my heart.”

Gratitude is the cherry on top of all of this. Gratitude is a game changer, it is simple, and it is 100% *free!*

The Gratitude Breathing Practice (Breathing/Words)

Connect with your Magical Moment breath.

Inhale, retain, exhale, pause.

Raise your arms to shoulder height and wide, open them like you are holding a huge ball.

Now imagine that ball is the Earth.

As you breathe, your arms open round, holding the Earth.

Inhale, imagining you and the Earth expand in breath together.

Exhale, imagining you and the Earth contract together.

Inhale expand, exhale, contract.

Start to feel yourself breathing in harmony with the breath of the Earth.

Inhale expand, exhale contract.

As you breathe, have gratitude for the whole of Mother Earth you hold in your arms.

Breathe and feel your kindness, gratitude and respect for the natural world grow as you breathe together. This connection and reminder to keep the connection is vital to our happiness and our health.

The practices of gratitude have the capacity to expand us to our next level of inner peace and connection to the creative force we all come from.

Be abundant with your gratitude.

The Gratitude Physical Practice

(Physical/Actions)

Our physical exercise anchoring the Eighth Sacred Responsibility: Gratitude into our bodies has two components. First, a meditation, and second, an action of a good deed.

Sit in a comfortable position, in a place that is free from distractions, especially computers and handheld devices. You are entering into a meditative experience of gratitude now, so prepare yourself in a way that honours the exercise. Get comfortable, focused and breathe.

Place your hands at your heart in prayer position, continue breathing smoothly and evenly as you allow the feeling of gratitude to wash over you.

Inhale, retain, exhale, pause.

Begin to whisper “thank you” to yourself, quietly aloud, or in your mind.

Thank You. Thank you. Thank You.

Thank yourself for being alive. Thank yourself for being so capable and bringing you to this place in your life. Thank yourself for being a caregiver to your body. Thank yourself for all your creative expression. Thank yourself for your success. Thank yourself for the wisdom learned.

Thank You. Thank you. Thank You.

Let your practice of giving thanks to yourself activate a sense of deep gratitude and appreciation for your life.

Stay with this meditation and continue to whisper, “thank you” and allow yourself to be showered in the vibration of your thoughts or words. Thank You. Thank you. Thank You.

Continue in the seated meditation for a full minute to start with and work your way up to sit as long as you can remain comfortable and undisturbed.

An added movement: keep your eyes closed and maintain this place of gratitude and thanks to yourself. Really feel it in the core of your body, feel this inner power of appreciation for all that you have experienced in this life, through your body, mind, and heart.

With your next inhale, raise your arms out to the sides and up over your head.

As you raise your arms up, imagine your hands can scoop up the gratitude energy you have created all around you while saying, “Thank You.”

This energy of your gratitude that surrounds you gets scooped up each time you sweep your arms up on the inhale. As you exhale, follow through, use your imagination and bless yourself with this energy.

Inhale and reach up and scoop up the air full of Thank You all around you, and exhale, bring that energy to you and wash yourself with it.

Bring it down over your head and face, over your shoulders and body as if you are washing yourself with liquid energy.

Use your imagination as you add the movement, be as vivid in your mind with this as you can be.

Feel it, see it, imagine it, or simply pretend, all of these techniques work equally well. Choose which one you enjoy most.

Inhale, reach up, scooping the energy with your hands, now imagine you can press the energy of gratitude you have created right into your heart centre.

Press this liquid light energy into your heart, filling you with warmth and gratitude.

Keep breathing, scooping, and bathing in this liquid light of Thank You.

This meditation is designed to be done seated, yet it can be done standing as well. It works beautifully when standing in nature. Do this meditation in the forest, by water, even simply outside your front door or on your balcony or patio.

Spend as much time taking this in as you can hold the focus.

If your mind wanders, bring it back to Thank You. Thank You. Thank You. If you find your mind continues to wander and cannot be gently reined back in, then simply conclude the meditation, take a short break and come back to it if you'd like. This is all about you and thanks to yourself for keeping yourself alive and in continued experience in this life.

Go back to the meditation with hands at the heart and gently drop your chin to your chest.

Breathe and conclude when you feel complete.

Good Deeds, Selfless Service and Random Acts of Kindness

Our bonus actions for this Eighth Sacred Responsibility are contained in our second physical practice. Choose one and make it happen today.

As fiery and fabulous women over fifty, we are a force to be reckoned with in this area. We are wise, open-hearted, and loving—some of the best attributes to have in our tool box for just such a task!

Make a choice for this practice, choose either good deeds, selfless service or random acts of kindness and find a way to execute your love-filled plan. You can choose a category and allow the action to surprise you when the opportunity arises, or you can choose an action and see which category it ends up in after you have engaged in the action.

This practice can be done daily and repeatedly, and it is a practice that can be done in a group or as individuals. It can be covert, or it can be accompanied by a big band! The one common denominator with this practice is that we expect nothing in return for our action. We become stealth-like in our

good deeds and we get in and out most times without being detected. For the record, International Good Deeds Day takes place in April each year; stay tuned for our community action.