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RECLAIMING GRATITUDE



JUST BE GRATEFUL FOR WHAT YOU HAVE...

BULLSHIT SOCIALIZATION

Why reclaim gratitude?

Because those of us raised and socialized as girls and women are taught, in both big and small ways, using gratitude as a catalyst, to stay small.

“Just be grateful for what you have,” they say. Meaning, “Stop wanting more.” Leading to, “Stop wanting...at all.”

Gratitude has been coopted by puritanical, white-supremacist patriarchy and late-stage capitalism as a weapon of oppression.

If we stop wanting more, we'll settle for what's handed to us. Those in power get to stay in power. And we learn to live off of less than what we truly desire.

We become separated from our desire, and resentful of anything that reminds us of what we once wanted.

Eventually, we become complacent and accept that things just “are the way they are,” and weaponize gratitude against ourselves. “I should be grateful for what I have” becoming a mantra for over half of our population.

But what does gratitude even mean? What does it mean to be grateful?

Let's explore that together. Because I'd like to offer you an opportunity to consider that grateful is not something you “should” be. Ever. It's not something to BE, at all. It's not an identity.

Gratitude is an emotion. Which means it's something you can feel, any time you want. And in that, it can be incredibly powerful as a tool for forward momentum toward what you desire.

Let me say that again: Gratitude is a tool to reclaim your desire, not a weapon to disconnect you from it. This is the “why” behind reclaiming gratitude.

Let's dig in.

FALSE GRATITUDE

Let's explore the concept of what I call False Gratitude — the societal expectation of being grateful for something because we "should" and trying to force ourselves into gratitude from that place of socialized expectation.

- What's one thing you think you "should" be grateful for?

- Why "should" you be grateful for it?

- How do you ACTUALLY feel about that thing?

- How does it feel when you tell yourself you "should" be grateful, instead?

Commonly, what I hear in response to these questions are narratives that sound something like this:

I should be grateful for my children, because otherwise it makes me a bad mom. How I ACTUALLY feel about them is stressed, worried, and overstretched...sometimes even burdened. When I tell myself I "should" be grateful for them, I feel guilty and ashamed...like I AM a bad mom.

I should be grateful for my career, because otherwise it means I've put all this work in for nothing. How I ACTUALLY feel about it is burnt out, overworked, and under-appreciated. When I tell myself I "should" be grateful for it, I feel guilty for complaining...I mean, some people never make it to where I have!

I should be grateful for the pay I receive, because to ask for more means I'm greedy. How I ACTUALLY feel about it is belittled, because I know other people are making more than I am. When I tell myself I "should" be grateful for what I have, I feel ashamed for wanting more...who am I to take that much?

GRATITUDE IS AN EMOTION - “UNGRATEFUL” IS NOT

It’s something you FEEL. Not something you ARE. Our emotions are not permanent states of being, but cognitively generated, malleable fluctuations of physiological sensations — which is why we FEEL them. And we behave from the emotional state we’re in at any given time. For example, you may curl up into a blanket and cry yourself to sleep when you’re sad. But that’s not likely something you’ll do when you’re happy.

When we look at the above examples, the emotion generated from telling ourselves that we “should” be grateful is commonly guilt or shame (or both). And I’m betting that even if your response wasn’t guilt or shame (or both), telling yourself you “should” be grateful doesn’t lead to you feeling grateful.

Again, I’ll state this: our emotions are cognitively generated. That means how we’re thinking is what generates our emotional state. And thinking you “should” be grateful generates something OTHER than the emotion of gratitude. It will never generate gratitude to think you “should” be grateful.

But what does the emotion of gratitude even feel like?

That’s a question we don’t often ask ourselves. We say we “should” be grateful, but we don’t think thoughts that lead to feeling gratitude and we don’t even consider what gratitude actually feels like. So we end up digging ourselves into a hole that instead of climbing out of, we just dig further into.

Let’s climb, instead.

- When is the last time you genuinely felt grateful? Use as much detail as possible, to put yourself back into that moment.

RECLAIMING GRATITUDE

- In remembering that moment of gratitude, shift your focus to your body. We call emotions feelings because we feel them. So notice what you feel. What physiological sensations do you feel that, when put together, you'd call "feeling gratitude"?

- Now that you know what gratitude feels like in your body, stay with that moment in your memory and shift your focus to what you were thinking. What are the thoughts you had in that moment?

Because our emotions are cognitively produced — what we're thinking determines what we're feeling — that means it's these thoughts that put you in the emotional state of gratitude in that moment. Of course, you were likely feeling grateful FOR something/someone, but the gratitude wasn't generated BY that something/someone. It was generated by YOUR THOUGHTS.

This means you can step into the emotional state of gratitude any time you want to. But it won't come from telling yourself you "should" be grateful. Instead, it'll be a temporary emotion (as all emotions are temporary) generated by thoughts like those you listed above. Because THOSE are the thoughts that produce the emotion of gratitude for you.

Let's flip this a bit and look at another level of socialization. We're often taught to NOT be "ungrateful," and we're afraid of coming across or being seen as "ungrateful." And while gratitude is an emotion, "ungrateful" is not. "Ungrateful" is neither an identity we can be nor an emotion we can feel. Instead, it's a bullshit label used for coercive control that you didn't ever consent to and can choose to opt out of if you'd like.

- Consider the last time someone accused you of being "ungrateful" in some way. What was happening in that moment? Use as much detail as possible to put yourself back in that moment.

RECLAIMING GRATITUDE

- What were you ACTUALLY feeling in that moment? (Notice the physiological sensations and decide what emotion words best describe those sensations.)

- What were you thinking, that generated those emotions?

- How about the last time you were afraid of coming across as “ungrateful.” What was happening in that moment?

- What were you feeling? (Sensations and emotional label.)

- And what were you thinking in that moment to produce those emotions?

YOU GET TO CHOOSE

There are many benefits to tapping into the emotional state of gratitude. And you can choose to tap in any time you'd like to experience those benefits by thinking thoughts that generate the emotion for you. But there's not that same level of benefit to using guilt and shame producing thoughts to try to force yourself into a false sense of gratitude. That simply doesn't work.

"Ungrateful" is neither something one can be nor feel, so when someone accuses you of "being ungrateful" (even — perhaps especially — when that someone is YOU) consider what you are actually feeling in that moment. And then decide if you WANT to feel gratitude. If so, great! You can focus on the thoughts that produce the emotion of gratitude for you! If not, you get to own that choice and own your emotional state.

This gives you autonomy as a person and authority over how and what you feel gratitude for, rather than defaulting to the socially constructed notions of what you "should" be grateful for. Which ensures that when you do tap into the emotion of gratitude, it's ACTUALLY gratitude, rather than guilt, shame, or something else that doesn't allow space for true gratitude.

If you'd like to work more on gratitude and other socially constructed concepts, I'd love to invite you into Project Reclamation. We're an equitable self-coaching community built on concepts of nervous system regulation, emotional processing, and cognitively shifting the oppressive narratives we've been handed. We would love to welcome you into our community. Sign up today at KeliLynJewel.com/reclamation.

And if you'd like more in-depth work, I'd love to meet you over Zoom and talk about what it looks like to work with me for 1:1 coaching. Book a consult call at KeliLynJewel.com/consultation.

Wherever our working relationship goes, I'd love to see how this workbook on Reclaiming Gratitude has helped you. Tag me on socials and let me know! @Keli.Lyn.Jewel on [TikTok](#) and [Instagram](#).

Thank you for trusting me with this piece of your life. I'm truly grateful for you.

-xoxo-

Keli