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Gratitude for the Future

BY RICK HOYT

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Enjoy!

Wisdom to share from friends of **Peleg Top**

Gratitude is the foundation of spirituality.

Gratitude puts us instantly in relationship with something larger than ourselves, which is the basis for all spiritual work.

We're only grateful for things that are already present in our lives, already here with us, already created, and claimed, and appreciated.

Through gratitude, we acknowledge that we are not isolated beings but connected to the universe, to the earth, and to each other. It's that feeling of being part of something larger than ourselves that is the meaning of spirituality. We are spiritual when we recognize our place in the interdependent web of all existence. And when you start feeling gratitude, then you start feeling that interdependent web. When you start naming all those places where something outside yourself has contributed to your life, to your joy, to your learning and growing and becoming, then you start feeling spiritual.

For the Thanksgiving holiday last month, perhaps you had family and friends together for a meal, and perhaps you took

some time to share what each of you were thankful for. Thanksgiving is the national holiday of saying thank you.

But if you made a list of what you're thankful for you would see that every item you name is something that you already have: the friends you have, the job you have, the health you have, the life you have. And that means you're only grateful for your past. We're only grateful for things that are already present in our lives, already here with us, already created, and claimed, and appreciated.

That's what gratitude means. But with so much of existence still to come in the future, it seems a terrible impoverishment of our spirituality if we can only

Let's learn to say thank you for what we have and for what we're about to have.

be thankful for what already happened. Couldn't we imagine a bigger kind of gratitude: a gratitude for what is yet to come, for what's surely on its way, for what will be created; gratitude for what will in time fill our future lives with joy and peace, and satisfaction? Let's learn to say thank you for what we have and for what we're about to have. Thank you for the big success we're going to have next year. Thank you for the return to health we're expecting. Thank you for the relationship with the person we haven't met yet.

Two weeks ago I was doing sit ups at the gym. And I guess I got a little overly enthusiastic and I strained my back. The next day my lower back was painful and stiff. I could barely bend over. I could barely get my pants on. And my struggle to put on my shoes and socks without bending at the waist would have made for a great comedy routine, except that it was so painful. If Thanksgiving had come that week, instead of the next week I wouldn't have been feeling very blessed.

But I've strained my back before. I know how it goes. You feel miserable and crippled for a few days. And then the pain and the tightness start to ease up. And a week later you're still feeling some pain but it doesn't really limit you, too much. And then a little after that you're back to normal.

So all during the week my back was out, instead of focusing on how miserable I was, and how terrible my life was, and how sad and unfortunate I was. I tried to focus on the relief I knew was coming a few days into the future. Instead of feeling abused and angry at my terrible fate, I tried to feel gratitude for the health I knew was coming in the future. I focused on the good life I knew was waiting. I focused on the strength and happiness and joy that was coming, and knowing that I didn't have it yet, in the present, made me grateful for the future.

Thank God, I thought, I have a future, when my back will no longer be hurting



ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Rev. Rick Hoyt received his MDiv from the Claremont School of Theology in May 1998 and was fellowshiped and ordained to the Unitarian Universalist ministry later that year.

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Rick Hoyt and Peleg Top have shared their lives together since 1996 and were officially married in 2008.

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the way it does right now. Thank God, we have a future, when the kinds of temporary set-backs we feel right now, will have vanished into the past. Thank God we have a future when the problems and hurts of the present world will be resolved, plus a whole bunch of new wonders we can't even imagine.

If we can only feel gratitude for the past, then we might think that the best years of life are behind us. We might be tempted to undertake a continuing re-creation of the person we were, rather than a new creation of the new kind of person we will be in the coming years.

Let's develop a gratitude for the future: a forward-looking, clear-eyed, high in the sky vantage point kind of vision; a gratitude that sees open spaces and infinite possibilities; a gratitude that knows that hardships are temporary and no matter how miserable at the time they don't last forever; a gratitude that's willing to be a

little foolish in claiming a future blessing that hasn't yet been given; a gratitude that cherishes the blessings of our past as a sure foundation we build upon but gives thanks for a future rising far above that foundation, gratitude for the person we will be with accomplishments, and gifts, and happinesses unguessed but surely coming.