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4 December 2014

Dear Friends,

Last week Americans celebrated the holiday of Thanksgiving. Though it has roots in our colonial history, today Americans use the holiday as an opportunity to pause in the midst of our busy lives and give thanks for the things that are most important to us. We spend time with family and friends, and eat delicious food!

Finding opportunities to pause, reflect, and express gratitude for the many blessings in our lives can renew our spirits and give us the strength to carry on. In the newsflash this week, we are sharing resources on gratitude.

With gratitude,

The Firelight Team

*(Article) Why Gratitude is Good by Robert Emmons of the Greater Good Science Center*  
*(Resource) Daily Grateful Living Practice Ideas from Gratefulness.org*  
*(Call for Proposals) United Nations Democracy Fund*

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(Article) Why Gratitude is Good by Robert Emmons of the Greater Good Science Center

The Greater Good Science Center at University of California Berkeley studies the psychology, sociology, and neuroscience of well-being, and teaches skills that foster a thriving, resilient, and compassionate society. They have a project on “Expanding the Science and Practice of Gratitude”. Their website is a treasure trove of articles and videos about the practice of gratitude: <http://bit.ly/1pOeP8X>

Excerpts from the article below highlight the benefits of approaching life with an attitude of gratitude. You can find the full article here: <http://bit.ly/1yct2iO>

We’ve studied more than one thousand people, from ages eight to 80, and found that people who practice gratitude consistently report a host of benefits:

Physical

- Stronger immune systems
- Less bothered by aches and pains
- Lower blood pressure
- Exercise more and take better care of their health

- Sleep longer and feel more refreshed upon waking

#### Psychological

- Higher levels of positive emotions
- More alert, alive, and awake
- More joy and pleasure
- More optimism and happiness

#### Social

- More helpful, generous, and compassionate
- More forgiving
- More outgoing
- Feel less lonely and isolated

The social benefits are especially significant here because, after all, gratitude is a social emotion. I see it as a relationship-strengthening emotion because it requires us to see how we've been supported and affirmed by other people.

Indeed, this cuts to very heart of my definition of gratitude, which has two components. First, it's an affirmation of goodness. We affirm that there are good thing in the world, gifts and benefits we've received. This doesn't mean that life is perfect; it doesn't ignore complaints, burdens, and hassles. But when we look at life as a whole, gratitude encourages us to identify some amount of goodness in our life.

The second part of gratitude is figuring out where that goodness comes from. We recognize the sources of this goodness as being outside of ourselves. It didn't stem from anything we necessarily did ourselves in which we might take pride. We can appreciate positive traits in ourselves, but I think true gratitude involves a humble dependence on others: We acknowledge that other people—or even higher powers, if you're of a spiritual mindset—gave us many gifts, big and small, to help us achieve the goodness in our lives.

#### **What good is gratitude?**

So what's really behind our research results—why might gratitude have these transformative effects on people's lives?

I think there are several important reasons, but I want to highlight four in particular.

1. Gratitude allows us to celebrate the present. It magnifies positive emotions.

Research on emotion shows that positive emotions wear off quickly. Our emotional systems like newness. They like novelty. They like change. We adapt to positive life circumstances so that before too long, the new car, the new spouse, the new

house—they don't feel so new and exciting anymore.

But gratitude makes us appreciate the value of something, and when we appreciate the value of something, we extract more benefits from it; we're less likely to take it for granted.

In effect, I think gratitude allows us to participate more in life. We notice the positives more, and that magnifies the pleasures you get from life. Instead of adapting to goodness, we celebrate goodness. We spend so much time watching things—movies, computer screens, sports—but with gratitude we become greater participants in our lives as opposed to spectators.

2. Gratitude blocks toxic, negative emotions, such as envy, resentment, regret—emotions that can destroy our happiness. There's even recent evidence, including a 2008 study by psychologist Alex Wood in the *Journal of Research in Personality*, showing that gratitude can reduce the frequency and duration of episodes of depression.

This makes sense: You cannot feel envious and grateful at the same time. They're incompatible feelings. If you're grateful, you can't resent someone for having something that you don't. Those are very different ways of relating to the world, and sure enough, research I've done with colleagues Michael McCullough and Jo-Ann Tsang has suggested that people who have high levels of gratitude have low levels of resentment and envy.

3. Grateful people are more stress resistant. There's a number of studies showing that in the face of serious trauma, adversity, and suffering, if people have a grateful disposition, they'll recover more quickly. I believe gratitude gives people a perspective from which they can interpret negative life events and help them guard against post-traumatic stress and lasting anxiety.
4. Grateful people have a higher sense of self-worth. I think that's because when you're grateful, you have the sense that someone else is looking out for you—someone else has provided for your well-being, or you notice a network of relationships, past and present, of people who are responsible for helping you get to where you are right now.

Once you start to recognize the contributions that other people have made to your life—once you realize that other people have seen the value in you—you can transform the way you see yourself.

### **Challenges to gratitude**

Just because gratitude is good doesn't mean it's always easy. Practicing gratitude can be at odds with some deeply ingrained psychological tendencies.

One is the “self-serving bias.” That means that when good things happen to us, we say it’s because of something we did, but when bad things happen, we blame other people or circumstances.

Gratitude really goes against the self-serving bias because when we’re grateful, we give credit to other people for our success. We accomplished some of it ourselves, yes, but we widen our range of attribution to also say, “Well, my parents gave me this opportunity.” Or, “I had teachers. I had mentors. I had siblings, peers—other people assisted me along the way.” That’s very different from a self-serving bias.

Gratitude also goes against our need to feel in control of our environment. Sometimes with gratitude you just have to accept life as it is and be grateful for what you have.

Finally, gratitude contradicts the “just-world” hypothesis, which says that we get what we deserve in life. Good things happen to good people, bad things happen to bad people. But it doesn’t always work out that way, does it? Bad things happen to good people and vice versa.

With gratitude comes the realization that we get more than we deserve. I’ll never forget the comment by a man at a talk I gave on gratitude. “It’s a good thing we don’t get what we deserve,” he said. “I’m grateful because I get far more than I deserve.”

This goes against a message we get a lot in our contemporary culture: that we deserve the good fortune that comes our way, that we’re entitled to it. If you deserve everything, if you’re entitled to everything, it makes it a lot harder to be grateful for anything.

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(Resource) Daily Grateful Living Practice Ideas from Gratefulness.org

[Gratefulness.org](http://Gratefulness.org) provides education and support for the practice of grateful living as a global ethic, inspired by the teachings of Br. David Steindl-Rast and colleagues. Gratefulness – the full response to a given moment and all it contains – is a universal practice that fosters personal transformation, cross-cultural understanding, interfaith dialogue, intergenerational respect, nonviolent conflict resolution, and ecological sustainability.

We have excerpted Gratefulness.org’s list of Daily Grateful Living Practices. These practices range from actions that will take only a moment to those that will take a larger commitment of your time. If there is one practice on this list that you would like to try every day, do so. Or try a new one each day. Or switch it up. What matters is that you do something every day to build the habit of intentionally directing your attention to notice and appreciate the gifts of your life.

1. Close your eyes. Take a few, very deep breaths – all the way out and all the way in. Notice how your breathing so often takes care of itself...just breath moving

itself through you – keeping you alive – just keeping you alive. Commit to NOT taking this miracle for granted.

2. Every night before you go to sleep, take an inventory of the things for which you are grateful. Let them percolate through your mind and calm your body. Write down at least five things that matter to you.
3. Engage in an act of kindness today. Notice if you are pulled toward kindness for a stranger more than someone close to you, or vice-versa. Either way, offer your kindness with no strings attached and no need for recognition. Truly. Notice the completeness and fullness of letting go of needing something back.
4. Bring to mind someone for whom you are grateful. Savor this image or memory. Try to allow the image to be held by all the cells of your body, not just in your mind. Notice what happens in your emotions and body when you do this.
5. At any point during the day, reflect upon one important thing that you have learned in this day. Write down what you have learned.
6. Send a card letting someone know that you are thinking of them today. Expect nothing in return. Just share appreciation and acknowledgement.
7. Start your day with an intention to show up absolutely whole-heartedly to everything you do today. Notice at the end of the day if anything changed because of this intention.
8. Make the decision to see your most challenging moments today as opportunities. What might be making itself known or available to you in hard times? How can you cultivate even small sentiments of gratefulness for the gifts that come from struggle? Reflect on this at the beginning and the end of the day.
9. Turn all of the “waiting” moments of the day into moments of heightened awareness. Try to be fully present in these moments to what might be blessings in disguise. Notice that time “between” things is a huge gift. Enjoy the gift.
10. If you share a meal with others today, before or while you eat, ask each person to share something for which they are grateful. If eating alone, bring to mind something for which you are grateful and dedicate your meal to that “great fullness.”
11. Choose a poem that speaks to you and read it a few times in a day. Let it awaken a new experience each time you read it. Notice how no poem is the same poem twice if you read it with true presence. Share the poem with someone.
12. Notice your hands. Think of all they do for you. Can you imagine what it would be like to offer them your true appreciation at a host of moments each day? Notice how much they help to facilitate what you love in life. Take care of them.

13. Reach out to someone you know is going through a difficult time. You do not have to have the right things to say, just connect in a meaningful way.
  14. Walk a short path meditatively somewhere near you. If you move as a mindfulness practice, you can go back and forth on the same path and it will always generate new horizons. Notice how amazing it is to move – no matter how you do that.
  15. Before you eat, take a moment to feel grateful to all those who contributed to creating your meal. The farmer who grew the vegetables, the hens that laid the eggs, the workers who harvested the wheat and stocked the food, etc.
  16. While racing somewhere, take 30 seconds to stop, take a breath, and look at the sky, or at the environment around you. What was begging for your attention?
  17. Do something truly generous for someone else today. Expand into your most full-blown expression of generosity. Give as if your life depended on it, and then try giving a little more. Stretch into your capacity. Seek nothing in return.
  18. Each time you turn on the tap, pause to feel grateful that you have access to running water, unlike so many in the world today.
  19. Tell someone whom you love that you love them – and offer that comment a larger context by spelling out some of the reasons why you are grateful for them.
  20. Ask someone a sincere question. There is hardly a more precious gift than true inquiry and deep listening. Where is gratefulness in this?
  21. Make a financial contribution to a non-profit organization doing work that you value. Accompany that gift with a note of appreciation for how hard people are working to advance missions in which you believe. Feel interconnected.
  22. Ask “What is the opportunity for gratefulness in this moment?” Try this when things are not going as you had planned.
  23. Give someone a grateful hug. Actually give the hug – don’t take a hug. Ask first.
  24. Pick out five things that you do not need anymore, and give them away with joy.
  25. Put a bag in your pocket, go for a walk, and make a corner of the world more beautiful by picking up the litter along the way. Your appreciation of the earth will be contagious to others.
  26. 775 million people in the world are illiterate. Feel your good fortune as you read this sentence, and as you read anything today.
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## (Call for Proposals) United Nations Democracy Fund

The United Nations Democracy Fund (UNDEF) 2013 Call for Project Proposals is now open for NGOs to apply. The Fund provides financial support to projects around the world for strengthening the voice of civil society, promoting human rights and encouraging the participation of all groups in the democratic processes. The main areas of funding are Community Development, Media, Rule of Law and Human Rights, Tools for Democratization, Women and Youth. Grants range from \$50,000 to \$400,000 to implement projects for a period of two years principally at country level and in least developed, low and middle income countries.

Proposals are subjected to a thorough process of assessment, quality control and due diligence. An initial examination by a team of independent assessors is conducted, a process in which all applications are judged on their inherent quality and scored according to the following criteria:

- The project promotes the objectives of UNDEF
- The project draws on the United Nations comparative advantage
- The project will have a significant impact
- The project will encourage inclusiveness
- The project will enhance gender equality
- The project has strong prospects for successful implementation
- The applicant organization has a strong track record
- The project is technically sound in conception and presentation
- The project represents good value for money
- The project has strong prospects of sustainability beyond the project duration.
- The UNDEF team then narrows down the list to 200-300 of the highest scoring projects. In doing so, the global and regional projects are considered separately from the various national project proposals and are considered within the respective global and regional baskets.

## About the United Nations Democracy Fund

### *What is the UNDEF?*

Started by the United Nations Secretary-General in 2005, the United Nations Democracy Fund (UNDF) supports projects around the world that focus on the following:

- Strengthening the voice of civil society
- Promoting human rights
- Encouraging the participation of all group in democratic processes

### *Purpose*

The purpose of the United Nations Democracy Fund is to financially support projects that support and advance democracy. Projects must come under one or more of the following six main areas:

- Community development
- Media
- Rule of law and human rights
- Tools for democratization
- Women
- Youth

#### *What Types of Projects Are Fundable?*

The UNDF funds projects related to democracy and civil society empowerment, such as: the empowerment of women, citizen's access to information, voter registration, civic education, and much more.

Examples of previously funded projects include:

5. Constitutional Reform: Support to Constituent Assembly in Zambia
6. Promoting Human Rights through Providing Access to Information for Marginalized Women in Zimbabwe.
7. Raising Civic Awareness Among Youth: Participation & Community Service in Yemen
8. Additional examples of previously funded projects can be found by searching the UNDF Projects Database.

#### *Funding Available*

Projects range from \$50,000 to \$400,000. The average project is \$200,000.

#### *Where does the funding come from?*

All funding for UNDEF projects is from voluntary contributions.

#### *Length of Projects*

Projects are for two years or less.

#### *Application Dates*

Proposals can be submitted between 15 November 2014 through 31 December 2014.

#### *How to Apply*

Proposals are only accepted on-line during the application date period. Proposals can be submitted in either English or French.

#### *Where to Apply*

Proposals must be submitted on-line during the application date window at the UNDEF website.

#### *Who Can Apply?*

The following types of organizations are eligible to apply for funding:



Civil society organizations and non-governmental organizations (NGOs) that promote democracy. This category traditionally receives most of the funding. Independent and constitutional bodies such as election commissions, ombudsman institutions, national human rights institutions, and other independent governance bodies.

Global and regional inter-government bodies, associations, and organizations other than the United Nations.

If you are not sure if your organization is eligible to apply for UNDEF funding, go to the website UNDEF website: <http://bit.ly/1yIE0vc>

**Deadline: 31 December 2014**

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As part of the Firelight Foundation's Capacity Building Program, Firelight provides "Newsflashes" to share relevant resources and information with our active grantee-partners via weekly emails and via post on a monthly basis. We hope that by facilitating access to information for grassroots, community-focused organizations, programming for children and families, as well as organizational development, is enhanced. Past editions of the Firelight Newsflash can be found on our website:

<http://www.firelightfoundation.org/resources/newsflash>

We welcome your comments, feedback and ideas for upcoming Newsflashes at [newsletter@firelightfoundation.org](mailto:newsletter@firelightfoundation.org)

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