

Beginning and Ending with Gratitude

How was 2022 for you? Did your year work out perfectly according to your best laid plans? Probably not! Gloria and I were having a pretty wonderful time during the first half of 2022. Then Gloria broke her wrist badly, and followed that up just three months later by suffering a minor heart attack. Who on earth would spend New Year's Eve wishing that they would have to have two major health problems in the year ahead? Not Gloria for sure!

So, as 2022 comes to a rapid close, I am in a reflective mood. I am pondering deeply on the fact that we really cannot control our future in any which way. As the old joke goes, 'Whenever you make plans for the future, God has a good laugh!'

The only real power we have as we go through this crazy experience that we call 'life' is the power of choice. We can choose to see any challenges in our life, including really major ones such as a life threatening illness, as a curse, or we can choose to find the deeper blessing in them. We can choose to complain constantly about everything that is wrong with the world and with our own life, or we can choose to give thanks for everything that is right with the world and with us.

As a young woman, I suffered from more or less constant anxiety and depression. At that time, my basic attitude was, 'Life is so unfair! Why can I not find the love that I so long for? Why do I only attract frogs when all my friends are finding their Prince Charming?' Of course, I had absolutely no idea in those days that I was reinforcing my depression with every negative thought that I entertained. But I was definitely choosing to believe that life on earth was incredibly unfair and painful. I was then reinforcing this belief by constantly reciting the mantra 'Woe is me!'

I really am not quite sure why I was fortunate enough to receive all the incredibly skilled help that I needed to escape from this mental and emotional prison of my own making. But I am now so incredibly grateful that whilst I was still in my 30s and 40s, I met exactly the right spiritual teachers who then painstakingly helped me over many, many years to begin to see clearly just how neurotic I was. They also eventually enabled me to connect to a much stronger, deeper

core-self who was finally able to begin to tune into an infinite source of love and light.

One of the practices that I have found most effective in learning to choose to see love and light far more than fear and darkness is the practice of cultivating heartfelt gratitude for all that is right with my life day by day and year by year.

So as we look forward to yet another New Year, I would like to ask you to join me in choosing to see all the challenges that you went through in 2022 as blessings in disguise. Although I certainly would never have wished that Gloria would have to go through two urgent surgical procedures in one year, I can now genuinely look back at that difficult time for both of us and give heartfelt thanks for all the numerous blessings that came our way. In particular, I keep saying 'Thank You!' for all the incredibly skilled and kind staff who looked after Gloria brilliantly within our wonderful NHS.

Everyone seems to be complaining about the state of the NHS at the moment, and I am not denying that it has many weaknesses. However, it is also still an amazing institution! Surgeons in particular are now my 2022 heroes and heroines. I would especially like to mention here the orthopaedic and cardiology teams at Wythenshawe hospital who put Gloria back together again twice with consummate skill and compassion when it looked like she could end up like Humpty Dumpty. (Tragically, there was no National Health Service when Humpty Dumpty had a big fall off a big wall)

But on a more serious vein, by choosing to cultivate gratitude in our heart for all the many acts of kindness (from minor to major) that occur day in and day out in our troubled world, we can begin to shift from choosing to dwell in the darkness of victimhood and resentment to choosing to dwell in infinite love and light.

Choosing the identity of a victim seems to be weirdly trendy at the moment – a certain 'royal' couple come to mind for example because they seem to see themselves as almost total victims, despite living in a luxury mansion in California that the rest of us could not even dream of owning. But one thing I now know for sure: adopting the identity of a helpless, hard-done-by victim does absolutely nothing to contribute to our long-term well-being in this world.

Counting our blessings day in and day out on the other hand, is a tried and tested way to increase our inner joy and gratitude whatever our particular

circumstances. Now I cannot claim that I never chose to play the victim in 2022. One morning just before Christmas, for example, I was having a festive coffee in Starbucks and instead of relaxing and enjoying it, I spent the whole time huffing and puffing about an alarm system that kept pinging loudly in my ear every 30 seconds or so.

Did I enjoy my expensive festive drink? No! Was that the alarm's fault or was it totally my choice to let that alarm upset me so much? You decide! (But before you condemn me too quickly, I would just like to point out that I am super-sensitive to loud noises.)

Well, the real moral of that little story is that we all make mistakes in life and we are all really slow learners when it comes to learning the deepest lessons that a life on Planet Earth offers us. So if you do find yourself habitually moaning and groaning as 2022 morphs into 2023 please, please, please, do not tell yourself off about it. Simply pause to ask yourself whether complaining like that gives you real, lasting joy. If it does not, maybe you could just go within for a moment or two to find one little thing in your current life to give thanks for.

Shall we start as we mean to go on? Shall we commit to making a list of all our many blessings in 2022 on New Year's Eve? Then maybe we could just say a BIG THANK YOU in advance for all the new blessings that are going to come our way in 2023, including the blessing of being challenged from time to time. Let us count all our future challenges as blessings on the pretty firm ground that whatever problems we may face in 2023 that do not actually kill us will only make us stronger.

The more suffering that I experience in this world, the more determined than ever I am to raise my consciousness day in and day out way above egoic fear, aggression and darkness into an infinite field of pure love and light!! Please come with me. We will have an absolute ball!!

Happy New Year!

Peggy Foster
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