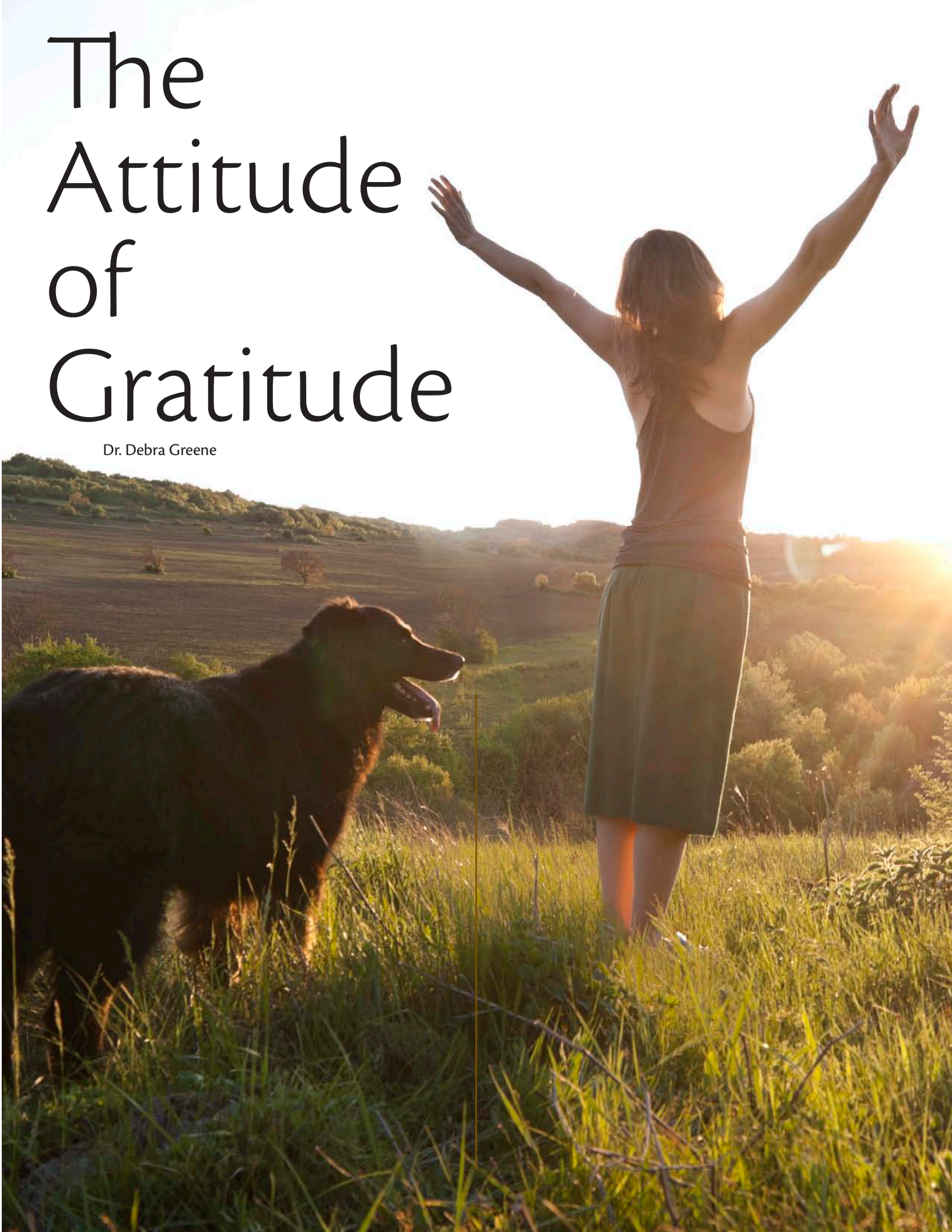


The Attitude of Gratitude

Dr. Debra Greene



Be joyful even when you have considered all the facts." -Wendell Berry

Gratitude isn't a new idea; most spiritual philosophies emphasize gratitude and compassion for others. But in recent years gratitude has shifted from being an idea to a practical tool that we can use to become happier and even healthier.

The attitude of gratitude is about the proverbial glass being half full instead of half empty. In each moment, it is always our choice to perceive life in this way. The practice involves appreciating what life has given us instead of blaming others and feeling deprived.

"When we develop a sense of appreciation for those around us and cultivate a sense of gratitude for life itself, we are relieved of the burden that comes with seeing ourselves as 'victims,'" writes Greg Krech in *Gratitude, Grace and the Japanese Art of Self-Reflection*.

Krech calls this state of appreciation "grace," a term used in many spiritual traditions. However, grace as a practice is not a belief as much as a shift in thinking. Or as Krech puts it: "It's the difference between seeing life as an entitlement and seeing it as a gift."

However it is practiced, gratitude isn't a blindly optimistic approach in which the bad things in life are whitewashed or ignored. It's more a matter of where we put our focus and attention. Yes, pain, injustice and cruelty exist in this world and are to be acknowledged and addressed. But nothing is purely black and white. Even in the difficulties there are gifts. When we focus on the gifts, we gain a feeling of well-being. We often feel more energized to reach out and help others; we feel we empowered to positively affect our world. This again leads to a feeling of well-being ... and gratitude. It's a self-sustaining cycle!

In her book *Radical Gratitude*, author and speaker Ellen Vaughn tells the story of a soldier in Vietnam, imprisoned as a POW for seven years. When he returned to the U.S. he was startled by the insignificant things people complained about. He decided then he would never stop being grateful for everything in his life, no matter how difficult.

Hopefully, it won't take such extreme experiences to help us count our blessings. In their book *Seasons of Grace: The Life-Giving Practice of Gratitude*, authors Alan Jones and John O'Neil write that practicing gratitude can be as simple as writing a thank you note, tending to the garden, walking on the beach absorbing nature's gifts, telling someone what you appreciate about them. It's even more than what you do--it's the attitude with which you do it, the authors say.

Consider the following exercise for putting gratitude into action with people close to you, whether they be spouse, children, friends, or business partners:

- Pick at least three people you want to appreciate.
- Ask yourself these questions in advance:
 - ~ What are highlights--fun times and bonding times--that you've had together?
 - ~ What specific qualities do you admire about this person?
 - ~ What efforts by this person have helped you make it through difficult times?
- Find five minutes to sincerely share the results with the person. Ask them to do their best to please receive and really take in your appreciation.

This simple exercise helps us stop taking people for granted and can effectively reawaken awareness of the abundant gifts of life.

Now try it on yourself! 