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Welcome to the Open Grove! We have a lot to share with you this issue. Because most of you were with family and friends on Thanksgiving, we wanted to share with you our Thanksgiving conversation with Rachel Naomi Remen, MD. We also completed our first annual Open Grove Book Contest. We announced the winners on the show November 29th, and actually were able to have most of the authors on the show! Finally, we have exciting news about growth in the Grove which will impact us all!

Gratitude and Grace

Thanksgiving is a holiday designed to celebrate gratitude. Yet, mental wellness includes the daily activity of noticing and experiencing your blessings. We would like to encourage you to begin a daily practice of gratitude by sharing with you our Thanksgiving conversation with Dr. Rachel Naomi Remen, master storyteller.

As we discussed gratitude, Dr. Remen expressed the connection between gratitude and grace. I encouraged her to share with us what she meant. "Often when you are looking around you at the objects or people, the relationships in your life and experiencing the blessing of them, it is an experience of grace. It's not about earning these things, it's about (the fact that) we have them. Most of us never earn love, love is grace."

Dr. Remen expressed the idea that gratitude, blessings and grace are a way of connecting us to each other and to a greater whole. The experience of gratitude is not something to be experienced only on one day of the year, but something that can bring power to your life every day of the year.

"In this country we seem to feel that expertise is power. But expertise is not power. You always will come to the edge of your expertise in your life, sooner or later, and you'll find life itself waiting there for you, to show you what real power looks like. Real power doesn't look like holding on to everything you have ever been given. It looks like recognizing your ability to touch the lives of others and be touched by them. And that we are not here alone."

"Most people have blessed so many more people than they know. We touch people – we don't even know it. And yet every person we touch is a clear mirror to us of who we are. We receive blessings from people, we have no idea."

"One of the people that I work with cancer said this wonderful thing. We were talking about having been given many more blessings than you have ever received. She began to receive her blessings only after she had been given her diagnosis of cancer.... She visualized all of us with our blessings circling us, like airplanes in a landing pattern at the airport, looking for a moment of our time and our attention, so that they can connect with us and change our lives. And most of us are so distracted and so busy that we don't even notice that we are being circled by our blessings all the time."

Very simply, gratitude is the process of allowing yourself to notice the blessings in your life and of life itself. You can begin in a structured way such as writing down 5 things that you are grateful for every night before bed. You can also begin in a less structured way such as noticing one new thing on your way to work or beginning the practice of the Loving-Kindness Meditation or Metta meditation (this meditation can be found on my website at: www.selfkindness.com, click on the "Selfkindness" page). We encourage everyone to wake up to the grace of their lives.

Dr. Rachel Naomi Remen is the author of Kitchen Table Wisdom and My Grandfather's Blessings. She has been counseling those with chronic and terminal illness for more than twenty years. She is cofounder and Medical Director of Commonweal Cancer Help Program (www.commonweal.org), and is currently clinical professor of family and community medicine at the University of California at San Francisco School of Medicine.

Book contest results

We had such a great time with this book contest. One of our judges is an expert on self-help books, while another has never read “books like this”. The judges were split between men and woman, although in each case, the judge’s partner became involved in reading the books. The judging was close; in fact, two of the categories were tied until the last judge sent in his choices. Each judge spoke about his or her struggle to actually pick one book over the other. One judge said, “all the books are worthy of attention and it was difficult to choose. I am overall, grateful that great, insightful thoughts continue to be generated in our modern, unconscious world.”

Let’s get on with the contest!

Emotional category:

As you know, the two books in the emotional category were Being Enough by Leigh Sanders and The Dance by Oriah Mountain Dreamer. One judge described Being Enough as “powerful” while another described it as “sweet”. “I liked that the book was broken up into small, but connected poems,” said one judge. Another said: “The structure of the seasons reflective of the seasons of life is particularly meaningful to me right now”. Yet, Being Enough did not win this category.

The Dance, by Oriah Mountain Dreamer, “encourages its readers to awaken to the circumstances and relationships in their everyday lives in ways that they have not previously and to become an aware participant in life, with a sharpened ear and eye tuned to the lessons and influences of ordinary things”. This book made a big impact on our judges – male and female. In fact, one judge lamented that it had a headless woman on the cover as it might discourage men from reading it. “The Dance is a simply stated, profound challenge to live life to the fullest,” wrote one of our judges. “(Oriah) writes with honesty and depth. She inspires me to think, shift my beliefs and even do some of the meditations.” ***The Dance won the Open Grove award for the Best Book in the Emotional Category.***

Mental Category:

20 minute Retreats, by Rachel Harris, won the Open Grove award for the Best Book in the Mental Category. “(It) is a wonderful, step-by-step primer to taking time for yourself and actually using the time to get what you need,” said one of our judges. “I read this like I might read a cookbook with sumptuous pictures, thinking, ‘That one sounds great’ or ‘I’d really like to try this’ or ‘I think I’ll skip that one’.” One of our judges is really busy. She said, “20 minute retreats are definitely doable, but I enjoyed the one-minute retreats more. I am able to do these one minute retreats while driving to work, waiting at a traffic light.” Yet another wrote, “Its thematic organization helps one to quickly tend to immediate needs as well as trend through a course of teachings. It has practical meaning to human emotional holdings with respect to relationships, nature and behavior.”

Each of our judges also liked The Complete Dream Book by Gillian Holloway. “It’s a refreshing approach to dream study based on an actual collection of dreams and events in people’s lives at the time of the dreams instead of considering dreams in the usual context of myth or history” said one judge (who has kept a dream journal for over 20 years). “We just kept the book by the side of our bed for a week so that we could analyze our dreams when we woke up. What fun!” wrote another judge!

Physical Category:

"Allergy Free (by Konrad Kail) is so loaded with information regarding dealing with allergies that it can be overwhelming. As a person who has dealt with allergies all of my life, I will certainly keep this book on my reference shelf." "Allergy Free has the look and feel of a well-researched text book...." Our judges spoke of the amount of information in this book and how helpful it would be to people with allergies. "Its influence upon lifestyle extends beyond cures and prevention into environmental awareness and respect as well as concern for our life strategies", reflected one judge. As much as our judges enjoyed it, Allergy Free didn't win.

"Volumetrics (by Barbara Rolls) is the most sensible approach to diet I have ever seen", wrote one of our judges. "The premise is really very simple for readers to understand – and to explain to their friends and families who may not be following the Volumetrics program." "I've never bought into the idea of a diet, because once a person returns to their normal life, the weight inevitably comes back on.... This book actually presents a plan for helping one make the best choices." Our judges liked that Volumetrics was an easy to understand, "common sense approach" to losing weight. **Volumetrics by Barbara Rolls won the Open Grove award for Best Book in the Physical Category.**

Relational Category:

"I have read other books on relationships, but this one just made the most sense," said one of our judges. "My overall impression of this work is that while it is quite serious, it is also very gentle and non-judgmental." Yet another judge said, "Hendrix is on target about marriage being part of one's life journey and therefore must be lived consciously." Finally one of our judges wrote: "The couples described in Getting the Love You Want are all heterosexual, but I believe that the vast majority of the material can be applied to gay couples as well. Although the couples are all male-female, the work is not written in such a way that a gay reader would feel excluded or unwelcome." **Getting the Love You Want by Harville Hendrix won the Open Grove award for Best Book in the Relational Category.**

Man and Boy "is an engaging novel about relationships." "The rites of passage through boyhood and manhood is usually dismissed in our future-thinking world. This work gives us insight to like memories that passed us, as insignificant events yet were milestones we never recognized. I will give it to my son," wrote one of our judges. "It is much easier for me to learn something about relationships reading about peoples lives than reading a third point of view regarding someone else's relationships."

Spiritual Category:

"I liked The Laws of Spirit (by Dan Millman). Of course, I was drawn to the book having read and loved three of Millman's full-length works. This one is as clear, simple, easy to absorb as the others." "Each short vignette offers an idea to ponder. The stories serve as a coach, breaking life's lessons down into smaller, manageable parts. Looking at small chunks helped to make 'transformation' an achievable goal." Every judge had something nice to say about The Laws of Spirit, yet it did not win the spiritual category.

"Original Self is a tremendous journey into the meaning of what it is to be human." "Without complicating any idea with definition of the path and belief, this work helps to develop the insight to the dualities of living and helps to allow one to watch himself living without taking on the baggage of false investment, losing the experience of the moment." "...(I)t is something that can be read (and re-read) in pieces and at random and still impart meaning". **The Original Self made a big impact on our judges and won the Open Grove award for Best Book in the Spiritual Category.**

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