



COUNT YOUR BLESSINGS: HOW TO MAKE YOUR HOLIDAYS REALLY SPECIAL

By Yvonne Thomas, Ph.D.

It's hard to believe that the winter holidays are almost upon us again! For many people, this time of year might seem like the "same old, same old," with December rapidly gusting in and then gusting out in a BLUR of gift-buying, giving, and sending, decorating, cooking, cleaning, relatives, friends, holiday cards sent and received, Christmas trees, Santa's, and wreaths, menorahs, dreidels, and chocolate coins, etc., etc., etc.! It's too bad that so many people get lost in the whirlwind of holiday "to do's" and actually don't get to take in and experience the WONDERMENT and JOY that the holidays can truly signify for them. Unfortunately, what IS all too frequently felt and experienced is stress, anxiety, depression, and/or loneliness during this time of year.

In actuality, the holidays really are NOT the "same old, same old," where they indistinguishably merge into each other from year to year and seem like déjà vu. If one pays close attention and looks at the WHOLE holiday picture, he/she may find that each holiday is unique, special, and not just a carbon-copy of the previous year's Christmas, Chanukah, or New Year's. Instead of counting to ten to prevent a stress-induced holiday melt-down, you can actually COUNT YOUR BLESSINGS and be grateful for all that you have by following these suggestions.

Firstly, consciously ask yourself, "What makes this Christmas, Chanukah, New Year's, etc. unique and different from previous ones for me?" LOOK FOR THE SPECIALNESS of the holidays, instead of focusing on the negatives or seemingly monotonous repetition of them. Perhaps this year, there is a new addition to the family, or your long-distance friend/s or relative/s will be in town for the holidays. Perhaps your mom and/or dad are still in pretty good physical and emotional health this holiday time – who's to say how they will be NEXT December. Perhaps this holiday season will be warmer - or colder – than usual. Perhaps you've learned to make a great dish that you'll be providing for the holiday spread. Perhaps you're hosting the holiday for the first time.

Also, identify what you DO have in your life instead of what you don't, so you can appreciate and not take for granted some things that others may be doing without. Maybe you are in good physical and/or emotional health, maybe you are involved in a loving, supportive, and fulfilling romantic relationship, maybe you always wanted children and you have them, maybe you have a great pet, maybe you have loyal and dependable friends, maybe you still have one or both parents alive and in reasonably good physical and emotional health, maybe this year you've added a new hobby or tried out some new activity that you've never done before, maybe...fill in the blank as applicable to you.

And, yes, there is even something USEFUL you can do with the things you find negative about holiday time and/or feel bad about because you don't have them. Make a list of these items and then write down how you could change these negatives or have-nots into positives and items you DO have. And, voila, do you realize that you have just created what could be your list of New Year's Resolutions? Why NOT make 2004 the year you consciously strive to NOT be stressed, anxious, depressed, lonely, etc.? Why NOT make 2004 the year you commit to getting your career, love life, friends and/or family relationships, and your physical and/or emotional health where you want them to be? Give yourself the biggest "gift" this holiday season – the gift of EXPERIENCING AND APPRECIATING ALL THE GIFTS YOU ALREADY HAVE AND THOSE GIFTS THAT YOU WILL WORK TOWARD HAVING IN 2004. In essence, give yourself the gift of INNER PEACE AND SELF-PRIDE. I wish you all special and rewarding holidays!

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