



Holidays

By Wendy Marks
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From silver bells, candy canes, carolers, and snowmen to wrapping paper, candles and cake, everyone believes that they should have a Hallmark holiday season - one where everyone is perfectly dressed, excited and happy. Advertisements present images of families sitting down with friends and puppies and children of all ages gorging on eye-popping amounts of food and having a terrific time, with wrapping paper in bright colors all over the floor.

For most people I know, including myself, the holidays do not fit these images. They are altogether messier and more individual. But when our goal is that we match this idealized version of celebration and family we feel as if we are somehow not succeeding in the American dream. We feel as if we are in some way lacking if we do not merrily move with great abandon through mountains of food and gifts. If we feel lonely, sad, or awkward something must be wrong with us, our family, or our values.

Even if you were brought up in a tradition where everybody got together and sat around the table, I would posit that it was not ideal. Perhaps Uncle Marvin had a drinking problem, or Aunt Sarah didn't like small children, or the cat was throwing up on the Oriental carpet (That certainly happens in my house).

I would like to challenge you to create your own ceremony, your own holiday season. Take the things that you enjoyed from your childhood, perhaps the Christmas tree, perhaps the tradition of gift giving, perhaps even the fun of overindulging on foods that you wouldn't eat at any other time of year.

But I ask you to think what it is you would really like to do. What would really make you happy? What would make your family happy? Does the entire family have to do the same thing at the same time, or can Johnny go skiing with his buddies and Susie volunteer at church? Might it be possible

to have a meeting with your family unit and discuss getting everybody's needs met, perhaps even doing a little family volunteering together?

When my kids were growing up we had a tradition on Thanksgiving. We would volunteer at a church in a nearby town to provide Thanksgiving meals to the homeless. It was great fun, and afterwards we would go to our own or a family or friend's feast. This was an idea suggested by my kids as a way of really providing our family with a sense of giving thanks. It didn't impinge on any holiday celebration we would have anyway, and we all went home feeling grateful, and maybe even a little self-righteous. We had cooked an enormous pot of soup, laughed with strangers in the kitchen, and seen the smiles on the faces of the homeless people happy to have some turkey, vegetables, potatoes, and pumpkin pie.

In this amazingly difficult and challenging time, when we have all been struggling to come to terms with all of the horrors abroad, and many thousands of refugees are without a place to go, it might be a wonderful time to include something that gives back in your holiday celebration. Whether this is volunteering, donating money, or just spending time together without any agenda, there is so much to be grateful for, and so much to give thanks for. Let's make

Christmas, Hanukkah, Kwanzaa, Winter Solstice, or whatever holidays you choose to celebrate, a time of recognizing the good fortune we have to be in a place where we are safe and warm and not running for our lives. May PEACE be with you all.

Namaste, Wendy

Breaking news my new book "Your Body's Companion" is in the works. I'll update you with progress. Wendy
