

THE TWELVE ~~DAYS~~ NIGHTMARES OF CHRISTMAS PAST AND PRESENT

Christmas is based upon traditions - functional and dysfunctional. The traditions of our childhood often rise to haunt us when we are grown up and often when we have children of our own. The depression that sometimes overtake us at the Holiday Season are usually optional. Here are some ideas for a "Holiday Tradition Make-Over"

1 HOPING TO RECREATE THE "GOOD OLD DAYS" -- We have forgotten some of the pain and problems of the "Good Old Days" and often only remember the magic and mystery of the "Good Old Days". If we live emotionally in the past we tend to diminish and devalue the present. As grown-ups, now, we get to refocus on giving, not receiving as when we were children. Seeing the joy in children's faces may help us to authentically relive some of our Christmas's past. Making new traditions for the people present helps make up for those who have died, moved away, or dropped out of our historical Christmas traditions. Blend the past and present into "your own" traditions.

2 THE CHRISTMAS MARTYRS -- Many holiday traditions involve the women in the kitchen and the men doing something else. Sometimes Mom or Grandma has taken this task on as a life work and will not have anybody interfere with her efforts. Single-handing the whole show from the kitchen may be a "work-hard" and "collapse-hard" tradition involving isolation and guilt. Everybody in the family needs to be and feel like a part of the production. Allow that part to be a legitimate sharing of affection and a sense of belonging at Christmas. Guilt, exhaustion, and resentment do not have to be part of the holiday tradition, or the rest of the year for that matter.

3 LAST MINUTE SHOPPING -- You know that you are in trouble when you ask the clerk at the gas station Mini-Mart to gift wrap your gift candy on Christmas Eve. Some people shop a little every week, wrap a little every week, and have an easy time at the last minute for legitimate last minute details. Plan ahead - spread out the work - no wild-eyed, exhausted 4:00 am bicycle assembly on Christmas Eve!

4 "THROW-MONEY-AT-IT-TO-MAKE-IT-BETTER" -- Spending more money does not make up for the emotional losses that are real or imaginary about our feelings of Christmas Past. Expensive gifts do not make up for guilt or fantasies of yesteryear. Thoughtful choice of gifts, or handmade gifts, hit the mark more often. Gifts from the heart and head are better received than gifts from obligation or the wallet.

5 IN-LAWS AND OUT-LAWS -- Do we go to your folks or to my folks for the holidays? We could do one, or both, or neither and stay home and start our own traditions for the holidays. Every body talking about their feelings and expectations is often a good start to avoid fuming, fussing, and a lot of hurt feelings about who is "honored" and who is not. Sometimes you may get all three families together at a neutral place as a transition holiday celebration. You have a right to your own life, and to start your own meaningful traditions.

6 "WHO GETS THE KIDS?" -- Planning ahead -- by agreement and with fairness -- about child custody arrangements does a lot to make Christmas for the children less stressed. The children are also the ones that are forming emotional traditions about the holidays -- make them good ones. The parents need to give-a-little and take-a-little for each other and for the children. Nobody "owns" the children, they are not property, do not fight over them. Don't make the kids "pawns" in the parents power plays -- not a good tradition to start.

7 LONELINESS -- Part of the expectation of Christmas is of love, sharing, warmth, caring, and that everybody loves each other and gets together to celebrate all of that. This is a problem for those away from home, single, newly out of a relationship, working, or for some other reason find themselves to be alone during the holiday season. Plan ahead to avoid becoming overwhelmed by these circumstances. Plan to be with people and celebrate in some ways that are meaningful for you. Enjoy what you can -- avoid depression about what you "can't have", "should have", "deserve to have", "never did have", -- make it happen for yourself this year and enjoy it!

8 STUFFING -- Should be reserved for the turkey. Overeating during the holidays is often a "target-of-opportunity" problem. "Well, they served it!" "I only do this once a year." "I just got carried away." Nor is this the time to declare a "diet" approach to holiday overeating. Set a limit about how much candy, cookies, cake, turkey, that you will have. Losing all self-control may result in binge eating. Indulgence with a limit -- not necessarily a paradox -- is often less painful the morning after. This works for the rest of the year too!

9 DRINKING TOO MUCH -- The host and hostess should have a plan, ahead of time, about how much to serve and when to start serving coffee. Over half of traffic accidents during the holidays are drinking related. The "joyful holiday season" lends itself to indulgence with poor limits. And, remember, you don't have to drink at all to have a good time. The kids appreciate it also.

10 HOLIDAY OBLIGATIONS -- Holiday traditions often have an unhealthy GUILT component. There are OK should's and NOT OK should's. Christmas cards may take care of some of the OK obligations but some lists can get out of hand. Christmas get-togethers may multiply into a week of dinners, cocktail parties, receptions, office parties, neighborhood visitations, and the like. Take time to figure out how much that you do will ADD VALUE to the holiday season -- for you and your family -- not just having to meet another arbitrary social obligation. During the rest of the year we are often much more careful of demands upon our energy than during the holiday season.

11 GUILTY GIVING TO THE LESS FORTUNATE -- Holidays are a time when the mail is filled with requests for aid to charitable and humanitarian organizations. People often feel guilty about how much they should, could, or do give. Planning, again, is a key to make giving a balanced act from the heart and from the head. All resources are limited. Some people can give money, some can volunteer to give time. Collecting canned goods for food baskets may be more rewarding than writing a check. Children often feel a greater sense of belonging when they are included in charitable activities. Do what you can with a full heart, a clear head, and planned limits.

12 NEW YEARS RESOLUTIONS -- May follow on the heels of "HOLIDAY EMOTIONAL EXCESS". Probably not a real good time to be making "rational" and "reasonable" reassessments of our life. The let-down that can follow Christmas may generate withdrawal, unhappiness, depression, hopelessness, and associated miseries. Unmet expectations, guilt about not doing enough, often feed a frenzy of "good intentions" to "do better next year." Hey! did this year really fall that far short! Probably not. Take a calm look at what is worthwhile changing. Don't make those decisions on January 1. Take your time. Christmas attitudes are not only for December. ENJOY!



**OPINIONS AND FEELINGS ARE FREQUENTLY A PERSONAL TRIUMPH OVER GOOD THINKING
YOU DEFINE REALITY BY WHAT YOU KNOW, WHAT YOU BELIEVE, AND WHAT YOU DO ABOUT IT.**