

Use the Holiday Season as an Opportunity for Growth

It is the end of the year, a time to slow down, spend more time with friends and relatives, take a break from work, and temporarily put aside the preoccupations of making a living. Around Thanksgiving, some areas enjoy beautiful snow storms. Buildings and trees dressed up in white, evergreens look mysterious, and the seeds of trees show a particularly intense red. The aromas of holiday delicacies fill our senses, and colorful lights illuminate houses and gardens. Music everywhere invites to celebrate life. Indeed, the colors, the scents, the tastes, the sounds of the season provide an ideal environment for pure enjoyment. We could say that it is a time people should be happy, and many truly are.

Then, how is it that so many people experience sadness, sorrow, even depression during this time? I have friends who are engaged and reasonably happy throughout the year, but fall into distress during the holidays for no particular reason. Some of us sadly remember distant friends or departed loved ones during this time. Many family reunions, which should be moments to renew ties and converse with rarely-seen relatives, end up being an embarrassing time, even an angry exchange with others.

Thus, the holiday season, presumably a time to relax and enjoy the fruits of our labor throughout the year, is a time of emotional suffering for many. There are many reasons for this phenomenon. Part of it is the high expectations imposed by the media. The picture-perfect holiday portrayed everywhere is unreal and unattainable by most. The family, relationships, and financial difficulties of real life create an environment far from the idealistic representations displayed everywhere. We are expected to be as fresh and as happy as the advertisements in magazines and television commercials; our attempts to imitate such an impossible image can only bring frustration. Also, unresolved past conflicts with relatives tend to flare up during a holiday dinner.

There is another important reason why during a vacation, or during the holidays, we face negative emotions not normally experienced the rest of the time. We spent most of the wakeful hours during a “normal” year dealing with the realities of life: working, enduring the politics of a hostile corporate work environment, paying the bills, making investment decisions for the future, assisting our children and relatives, managing a household, etc. These are activities that primarily use our physical, logical, and rational faculties, that is to say our “middle-self” consciousness. However, there is another part of the self, the “lower self,” or unconscious self, that works in the background and whose needs and feelings only surface at night when we sleep—in the form of dreams, which most people neglect—or during a vacation or a holiday season. The lower self is the seat of your emotions, your bank of memories, the level of consciousness where all of your traumas and unrationalized experiences are stored. These negative emotions are trapped in the unconscious by means of large amounts of psychic energy. They are the cause of much suffering. They remain there forever, that is until you release its energy and rationalize its memory content.

A Thanksgiving reunion, or a Christmas dinner is the perfect time when these emotions reemerge as fresh and as new as the first time they occurred. After all, you are not busy with your normal working duties; you may be in the company of parents and siblings who know exactly how to re-stimulate your old childhood feelings. Did you ever feel like regressing to your childhood while, after a decade, decided to visit your parents? The good news is that you do not have to be

the helpless victim of your negative emotions. You do not have to be sad or angry each time someone makes a comment that seems sarcastic to you, or that reminds you of a past traumatic event. The first thing to do is to take the emotion as an indicator of some work you need to do with yourself. Rather than being upset, quietly thank the other for pointing out to you where you need to do some emotional cleaning. It is not the other person who caused you pain, it is *your reaction* to their statement. Until you change your reaction to the external stimulus you will behave like a robot that responds automatically.

The second thing to do is to recognize that there is not much you can do on the rational side to resolve your inner conflict. In other words, positive thinking –or any other new age technique– and pure will power to control your negative emotion will not help much. Recognizing that you have an inner problem to resolve is a great first step, but it will not be dissolved by attempting a conscious control alone. It may help somewhat to talk to a supportive friend who would listen to you without judgement. I am not suggesting to spend the holidays doing “talk therapy” with a counselor. Most modern psychological talk therapies are expensive, they may only help you “manage” your distress, but they will not treat the cause of the negative emotion.

The third and most useful approach to dissolve a negative emotion is to take the time to sit down, address you lower self with the intention to listen to its needs, and discharge the psychic energy abnormally attached to an outlawed past event in the unconscious memory. In my book [*The Three Spirits*](#), I discuss practical exercises to learn how to communicate with your lower self, get its support, and effectively eliminate negative emotions. Also, there are several new techniques, such as [*Emotional Freedom Technique, EFT*](#), which puts into the hands of the general public tools to eliminate negative emotions. These techniques are simple and free. By systematically treating each negative emotion that arises during wakeful hours in any social event, you can remove feelings that in the past caused you much suffering and unhappiness. Fifteen minutes a day in quiet solitude with yourself is all it takes. The long-term result is a more harmonious and balanced character, better relationships with friends and family, a happier life. Resolve to use the events that during this holiday season caused you to feel unhappy and to remove their cause forever. Happy holidays!

Dr. Sergio E. Serrano is the author of [*The Three Spirits, Applications of Huna to Health, Prosperity, and Personal Growth*](#), and the translator of [*An Art of Living*](#) by André Maurois.

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