



Peace, Love and Holiday Wishes

BY EVA RITVO, M.D.

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This holiday season will present us with a unique opportunity to find cheer in new places. Our brains love patterns and it is easy to repeat the same or similar events each year and many of us have been doing just that. But like the rest of 2020, this holiday season will need to be reimagined. Years and even decades of tradition will need to be broken as we look to the CDC <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/daily-life-coping/holidays.html> and California Health Department [Covid19.ca.gov](https://www.cdph.ca.gov/Programs/CID/DCDC/Pages/COVID-19/COVID-19-Holiday-Travel.aspx) for new guidelines.

In 2020, our year of "perfect vision," nothing looked like we expected. We had to learn to adapt very rapidly and to "build it as we sail." Historians and psychologists will look back to see how we honored this special time of year during a pandemic.

Here are a few tips to help you find cheer in a very odd year:

Embrace Change: This year will be one of a kind. Gatherings will be smaller, and distance may need to be maintained. Be creative and try to find ways to make the new format fun. Take a family walk before gathering for turkey or the other festivities. Meeting during the day and limiting alcohol intake can also assist in making sure everyone stays safe.

Be Realistic: Travel restrictions will dramatically alter the next several weeks and months. Trips are cancelled and gatherings have shrunk. End of the year bonuses may be lower or non-existent. You might not look as good as you would like to but that most likely isn't a top priority in this pandemic. Cut yourself some slack. This too shall pass.

Reprioritize: This year you will not be running from store to store or party to party. Instead, you will find yourself surrounded by fewer friends and family. Some may even be alone to optimally protect their health. The holidays will be about depth not breadth, quality not quantity. Remember these changes can lead to growth so welcome them.

Say No: Less is definitely more in 2020. Health matters most. Many invitations may have to go unaccepted this year. It is not a time to overeat or drink too much. Keep your immune system strong and limit your exposure to others.

With lines between home and work even more eroded than in the past, it is important to take a break for the holidays. Even though you aren't traveling, you can still disconnect from work. Set up a schedule and stick to it making sure you take plenty of time off. Creativity and productivity will be enhanced in 2021 if we come in rested and recharged.

Acknowledge Your Negative Emotions: We can't pretend that 2020 was a great year. It was filled with challenges, disappointments and grief on unprecedented scale. If you try to deny negative emotions, they continue to pop up. If you can give them time and space to be felt, you will find they diminish in intensity. Let yourself feel the sadness for those lost this year or in previous years. Be open about missing those that can't be with you due to travel or other restrictions. Let yourself experience the disappointment



about your holiday travel plans that you can't embark on. Allow yourself to feel your feelings. You may elect to share them with someone close to you, a therapist or your journal. To paraphrase Carl Jung, "what we resist, persists" so don't try to hide from your negative emotions.

Unify: Let's put politics aside for the holiday season as best we can. In 2021 and beyond, we must work together to create a better world for ourselves, our children and our grandchildren. Let's celebrate that democracy has prevailed no matter which side we were on. The legendary University of Michigan football coach Bo Schembechler said, "the team, the team, the team." We are all on team U.S.A. Or take it even further, and in the words of Albert Einstein, "A human being is a part of the whole called by us universe. Our task must be to free ourselves...by widening our circle of compassion to embrace all living creatures and the whole of nature in its beauty."

Find Joy: Often times, we find real happiness in smaller moments and experiences. For many, this time of year is filled with so much stress that it can be hard to carve out moments of joy. As we may be less busy this year, might we find even more joy?

Joy can only be experienced in the present moment. Tap into all your senses. Cherish those who can still gather at your table. If you find yourself alone, embrace that experience. For it is only when we become truly comfortable in our own presence, that we can receive the greatest gifts life has to offer.

Focus on Meaning: Thanksgiving so often becomes about food and fun and we forget to take stock and be grateful. This year we have the opportunity to approach the holiday differently. We can choose to celebrate our accomplishments as we have learned to work at home, cook more and find ways to connect to others using technology. We have become more resilient and many have gained confidence as they faced this historic challenge. When we are reminded of death daily, we can learn to appreciate life more fully and not take any day for granted.

Hanukkah, Christmas and Kwanzaa have become so much about the celebration and gift giving that the meaning may have gotten obscured. Let's shop less yet give more. This year we may decide to give from our hearts. Cook or bake for others. Make home crafts. Connect on Zoom or in ways and with people that we didn't in prior years. In the words of Mother Theresa, "It's not how much we give but how much love we put into giving."

New Year's Eve is always a time of reflection and hope for the future. Most of us will be glad to see 2020 in the rearview mirror. We will have better skills and hopefully less anxiety moving into 2021. We have gained wisdom that will help us navigate more efficiently in this turbulent water. With a vaccine on the horizon, we can anticipate a brighter future. We must remain patient, diligent, creative, resilient and optimistic. We can strive to fill our days with hope and purpose.

"The best and most beautiful things in the world cannot be seen or even touched. They must be felt with the heart. Wishing you happiness."

Helen Keller

We here in Beverly Hills are a small community but the world is always looking to us as a beacon. We must show them that we can rise above our challenging circumstances and experience joy as we reflect on and celebrate the true meaning of this very special time of year.

Wishing you peace and love in this holiday season and beyond.