

Seasonal Delusions

Written by Katherine Tandy Brown

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Ready or not, here it comes... 2019 is nearly upon us. How'd that happen, anyway? What I know from experience is that the more years that roll by in one's life, the faster they seem to pick up speed. Remember when you were a child and Christmas took its own sweet time arriving? Not unlike reaching the destination of a trip. "Are we there yet?"

Though we're not quite "there yet," many of us may already be slipping into a couple of seasonal delusions that are not always obvious. Retail marketing "Mad Men" admen hope we consumers stay oblivious to both. Awareness of them can help keep the holidays brighter.

The first concept is expecting a perfect Norman Rockwell holiday, as appeared on the cover of a 1943 *Saturday Evening Post*. In the painting, a jovial family gathers around the table while Mom places a perfectly-cooked, fat turkey in front of Dad to slice. Iterations of this scene will indeed play out during the holidays in numerous households, with yummy fixings and great times among families that love each other – may actually *like* each other, to boot – and adore convening during this season of premeditated togetherness. If this is your experience, thank your lucky stars and revel in those memory-making times.

However, if the above is *not* your experience, rest assured you're in good company. Trust me, the season *can* work for you. And it's not about bringing your relatives together, hoping they'll get along for once because it's Christmas. Many families with grown children and kids of their own boomerang back to the fold for annual "merriment" – because it's expected – and heave a sigh of relief when it's time to hit the road back to their *real*

home. Lest that statement seem Grinch-like, the fact is that scads of people have relatives they consider neither family nor friends. This no doubt contributes to the fact that 12-Step meetings tend to be packed in December. In case you didn't know, your "family" does not necessarily have to be made up of blood relations. Even if you found them on Ancestry. Pretty cool concept, huh? So if yours don't necessarily represent your idea of a loving family, you get to create your

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own.

Bottom line here is to be aware of unrealistic goals this time of year. Forget about perfection. Create your own holiday traditions, which can be *anything* at all, and find folks to share them. Volunteer to serve meals to the homeless, take a winter stroll on the Spanish Moss Trail, or catch a movie.

The second delusion is that of New Year's resolutions. As you read this, many of us are currently immersed in holiday festivities that, by their nature, include the opportunity to indulge – and perhaps, *overindulge* – in food, drink and/or behavior choices we know aren't the best for our wellbeing. But hey, this is a once-a-year thing and with the New Year come resolutions that will make us into the perfect people of our imagination. Right?

So how's that worked for you in the past? If it has, by all means stick to whatever you're doing. But the rest of us have all anticipated that one day a year when we resolved to make lifestyle changes that we weren't able to stick to, and were disappointed when we failed yet again.

Instead, why not start new behavior now? One kindness you can give yourself is forgiveness for your idea of a "screw-up" as soon as you become aware of it. Did you load up on chocolate truffles and eggnog at a Christmas party, when you've been eating healthier food, exercising at the gym regularly, feeling higher energy and swearing you'll be "good" through the holidays? Maybe you yelled at your child before putting him on the school bus and then felt guilty about it all day, or gave your husband a hard time for forgetting your anniversary before realizing that it's really *next* week. Did you have to spring for a bumper repair on your new car because you were talking on your cell as you backed up and didn't notice the fire hydrant behind you? Or perhaps you inadvertently cut off a little old lady in traffic because you'd just found out while chatting on your cell – while driving – that your daughter's wedding planner had quit.

That gift I believe we've all been given is the capacity to turn over a new leaf on any day at any time. In truth, numerous new leaves. As many as we need. Always a groaner for me is a situation in which I know from past experience what's right, yet I do the same wrong thing *again*. That can make me feel stupid. Which I'm not. But I can sure feel that way until I forgive myself.

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Years ago, I had the honor of attending a talk the Dalai Lama made at Berea College in Kentucky. The minute he stepped upon the stage, a peace settled over the auditorium. He didn't say anything I hadn't already heard at some point in my then-young life, but when those words came from him, I truly believed them. One quote that's etched in my memory from that experience was, "We can never obtain peace in the outer world until we make peace with ourselves."

A way to do that is to allow yourself to turn over yet another new leaf as many times as you need to. Start wherever you are in a particular moment, the second you realize that whatever you've done or said doesn't feel right. You're likely aware of that feeling, whether it's just a niggling suspicion, or an eyes-rolling-to-the-ceiling sense that screams into your gut how big you've messed up.

Don't set yourself up for once-a-year failure by allowing outdated concepts of family and of self-care wreck the season for you. You have choices. Embrace them and put your own take on real joy into your holiday.