

Holding Light in Darkening Days

I think we can all agree that the holiday season is one with many layered and sometimes conflicting moods. While there is so much that lifts our spirits, there can also be plenty that triggers old feelings of disappointment and unmet expectation, grief at the absence of loved ones, separation and loneliness. Many of these feelings can go back to our own childhoods and our parenting years. And do you often feel overwhelmed at Holiday times, with that long list of projects, gifts, menus and social events? There is an irony in what we've made of this more appropriately inward looking time. In the Gaian view of the earth as a living being, Winter solstice is the depth of the planet's in-breath. We know that in our hemisphere the energy of the sun we receive is at its lowest ebb. There is just little force to fuel us at this time of year, and yet we set ourselves up to do and do.

For those who carry something of the Christmas story, there appears in that deep humble place the beginning of what may yet be possible, but it is tender and fragile—worthy of veneration but requiring loving care and protection. I suggest that this time of year it is vital that we look inward to what our inner world is trying to bring forth and commit to the gift of self-care. Holiday or winter blues are real, and given all, no surprise. So how can we support ourselves, and therefore our loved ones at this time?

- ◆ **Get outdoors:** All of us need sunlight to help us regulate our mood. SAD (seasonal affective disorder) is well documented and is helped with increased exposure to light. You might benefit from periods of light therapy in the home. And of course time spent even in our suburban nature reminds us of the life force that may just be dormant in us as well. (Keep well bundled of course and always give attention to the hazards of ice and snow.)
- ◆ **Exercise:** Vigorous exercise releases endorphins, the “feel-good” chemicals that help regulate our mood. And of course oxygen is such a nourishing thing.
- ◆ **Volunteer:** The year round mood booster! “Volunteering will help you feel connected to others and stave off loneliness and depression. It boosts your self-esteem and takes the focus off of your own problems,” says Dr. Michael Craig Miller, assistant professor of psychiatry at Harvard Medical School. Volunteering is associated with lower blood pressure, greater well-being, and a longer life.
- ◆ **Socialize:** Say yes to some of those invites, or plan something that brings you in contact with others. Remember together the joys and disappointment of holidays past, and work together to plant seeds of new memories.
- ◆ **Stay cozy:** Look for and savor those moments that nourish you. And don't feel you have to do too much. Say no to the unessential and yes to what brings sparkle and inner warmth. One thing for me is the sound of that solo boy chorister and the first verse of “Once In

Royal David's City." For you it may be your sister's annual holiday dessert or the one glass of egg nog your wife allows you to have. We look for the fleeting and precious, and we give those gifts to ourselves.