



THE POWER OF ACCEPTANCE

Creating a Peaceful Holiday Season

By Catherine Dowling

I find it difficult to recall a family Christmas without some sort of conflict. I've spent Christmas with several different families from my own nuclear two parents, three kids family of origin to extended families of unrelated adults. At some point, somebody gets upset, testy or outright angry. It's a common experience. One of my friends decided that staying home alone on Christmas Day was easier than facing twelve hours of squabbling with his family. For many years he spent Christmas in his own house, phone turned off. But does it have to be this way?

For those of us lucky enough to have families, whatever shape they take, Christmas is family time. Families by their nature, contain a complex and very old network of relationships. Spending Christmas together puts those relationships under pressure. No matter how grown up everyone is, the intensity of Christmas can reactivate those old patters of relating.

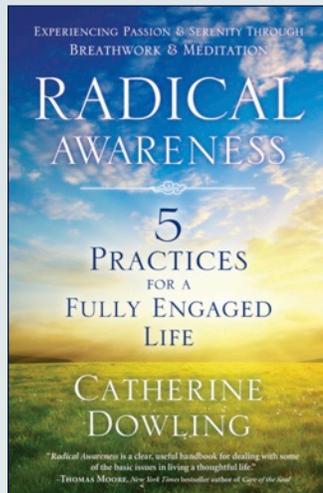
A lot of work goes into creating the perfect Christmas dinner. Sometimes the cook gets so invested in having everything just so that his or her tensions spills over into the family atmosphere. And sometimes that cook, who works so hard to create the perfect meal, feels unappreciated and unloved when their family is not quite as enthusiastic or helpful as they 'should' be.

For parents who have to grapple with poverty, the pressure of buying gifts can feel overwhelming. They know that after Christmas the debts they've run up must be faced. I remember my own mother getting very upset because my brothers didn't seem to properly appreciate the gifts she had struggled so hard to buy for them.

And then there are the old patterns and belief systems that lie buried in the heart of many families. I have spent a couple of Christmases with a family where the adult daughter spent the day sniping at her brothers because of an old belief that her parents appreciated their sons more than they appreciated her.

What would Christmas be like if we could accept whatever happened on the day? If the dinner was burned, or late, or less than perfect and that was ok by everyone, including the cook, would that take the pressure off everyone? If the cook accepted that they and only they chose the level of effort they put into preparing the meal, would that remove the need for a corresponding level of appreciation by the rest of the family. And if parents could accept loving their children is far more precious than the latest toy, would that take away at least some of the stress and a lot of the debt?

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YOUR LIFE THINKING OUT LOUD —

There's a road somewhere just waiting
for you to feel the bend of its winding curves;
a dirt-ridden path ready for you to walk it to the
very end, and a LIFE wondering if you are ever
... going to choose to LIVE IT!

~ Sibyl English

