

## Balance with Grace

A monthly newsletter by Grace Durfee, personal coach  
Volume 8, Issue #11, Holiday 2008, *Holiday Harmony*

For those of you who just celebrated Thanksgiving, I hope it was a lovely holiday full of family festivities and feasting. If moments of friction surfaced amid the celebrations, know that you are far from alone in your experience. Even the most functional of families find that there are inherent challenges whenever a lot of people gather together. Ruffled feathers, flaming tempers, and hurt feelings can be just as common around the holiday table as turkey, mashed potatoes, and stuffing. Here are some approaches that can minimize friction and maximize harmony at your next family function.

### LOVE IS THE ANSWER

A Course in Miracles teaches that there are essentially only two emotions—love and fear. Some of the feelings that fall in to the love category include: hope, respect, understanding, honor, compassion, joy, tenderness, and gratitude. Feelings of fear might present as worry, dread, anxiety, anger, hurt, jealousy, defensiveness, or spite. Emotion is energy in motion. In every moment we have the opportunity to choose which energy, either love or fear, we set into motion. As much as we'd like and often have tried, we really can't ever change other people. What we can change, however, is how we respond to them. Many entanglements can be avoided by not taking offense or getting riled up when someone says or does something that's bothersome. In sticky situations, I find it helps to remember the challenge my coach gave me: "Be the love that you are."

### USE COMPASSION AS A FILTER

Use compassion as you deliver and receive communication. Pause briefly before saying something that could be received with sensitivity. Use your breath to bring your awareness down from your head to your heart. Put yourself in the other person's shoes, and ask how you might like to hear this. What you first intellectually think is perfectly fine may be very different from what you later, upon reflection, feel is a loving, heart-based way to communicate. Likewise, when you are on the receiving end of communication, take a moment to hear, not only the words shared, but also the heart of the intent. It's very common, for instance, for a comment or suggestion to be taken as criticism when it is really shared out of love.

### FIND THE TIE THAT BINDS

It is human nature to find commonalities with others, so focus on what unites instead of divides. If you find yourself in conversation with someone with whom you often disagree, look for common ground or shared interests to create rapport. Sharing best hopes for a mutual loved one or a sports team that you both support, for instance, could help bring you together in positive, stimulating dialogue. Avoid known landmines and incendiary subjects that will likely create divisiveness. Politics and religion, for example, can be controversial topics. While a healthy debate can be stirring, a holiday gathering may not be time and place for a round of verbal sparring.

### GREAT EXPECTATIONS

Be mindful of your expectations, for what you seek you will find. When you expect the worst, that's what you get. Negative expectations easily turn into self-fulfilling prophecies. When you expect someone to behave in a certain way and especially when you forewarn others, you seek evidence that you are right. It's as if, for example, you are on the lookout for words or actions you can point out to say, "See what I mean?" or "I told you so!" No one wins in this situation. You are too quick to overreact or to judge which only widens distance between you and the other person. When you change your expectations to positive ones, good things will be in store. In the week before hosting Thanksgiving, I caught myself beginning to worry, so I reset my expectations. I imagined everything going smoothly and all ten of us enjoying a relaxed, harmonious, and delicious holiday. And so it was.

- What are your expectations for the coming holiday season?
- What have you previously found helpful for creating harmony?
- What steps will you take this year to ensure peaceful gatherings?

Wishing you and yours a happy, healthy, and harmonious holiday!

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