



A HOLIDAY COMPANION





The holiday season is a time when we bring the year to a close and focus on the things that are most important in life—our families, our loved ones, and the ideal of peace on earth.

We know this can be a busy and stressful time, so we're offering this Holiday Companion as a gift to help you navigate the days ahead. Here you'll find a selection from many teachers in the Sounds True library—offering easy-to-use practices to restore calm and balance in your life, suggestions for better health and harmony at home, and guidance for awakening to your own authentic expression of the holiday spirit.

May this season be blessed and bright for you and yours,

YOUR FRIENDS AT SOUNDS TRUE

TABLE OF CONTENTS

part 1 SELF-CARE FOR THE HOLIDAYS

- Four Ways to Feel Better During “Stressmas”
Dr. Henry Grayson
- Calm Yourself Instantly with Tapping *Amy Kurtz*
- Learn When to Say No *Karen Brody*

part 2 PRACTICES TO RESTORE BALANCE AND HARMONY

- Boost Your Immune System with Wintertime Foods
Acharya Shunya
- Five (Pachydermal) Tips on Staying Peaceful
Sarah Bamford Seidelmann
- Nine Pointers to Peace *Lama Surya Das*

part 3 FAMILY, FRIENDS, AND HOME

- How to Host a Holiday Party and Actually Enjoy Yourself
Edward Espe Brown
- Cultivate Generosity in Your Children
Dr. Christopher Willard
- A Bedtime Practice for Children and Adults
Mariam Gates and Sarah Jane Hinder

part 4 PEACE ON EARTH, GOODWILL TO ALL

- Winter Solstice: The Rebirth of Light *Shiva Rea*
- The Reach of Kindness *Mark Nepo*
- The Gift of Being Present *Rabbi Rami Shapiro*



part 1

SELF-CARE FOR THE HOLIDAYS

How I rush rush rush!
Thoughts flutter and dart like birds.
Slow down, thoughts.
Come quietly with me.
There is time to breathe and be.

KATE COOMBS



FOUR WAYS TO FEEL BETTER DURING “STRESSMAS”

by Dr. Henry Grayson

Christmas has become a dramatically different kind of holiday—it could now be accurately called “Stressmas.” It has truly become a time when we worry about having to get the right presents for the right people, getting enough presents, how much money to spend or not to spend, expecting certain gifts from specific people, who and how many to invite to celebrations, and so on.

Since stress causes 80 percent or more of our physical symptoms, the way we celebrate can bring on illnesses, or intensify symptoms we are already manifesting. It is the “ego mind” that has taken over—that internal voice which promises safety and fulfillment, but always gets us to think or do that which produces the opposite.

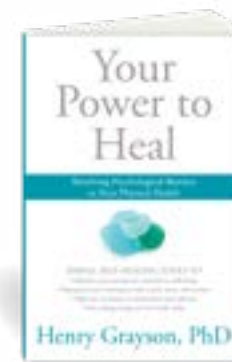
Why not start by consciously deciding that we want to promote love, joy, and peace instead of stress and sickness during this season?

Here are some tools for keeping love, peace, and joy—and, therefore, health—more of a priority this holiday season:

- **GIVE PRIORITY TO MEDITATING AT THE BEGINNING AND END OF EACH DAY.**
You might even keep repeating to yourself this mantra, “I choose joy, love, and peace instead of stress today.” Breathe deeply and say the mantra thirty or forty times.
- **WHENEVER YOU FIND YOURSELF FEELING PRESSURE, START BREATHING DEEPLY.**
Fully empty your lungs and then breathe in fully, filling the belly, and then adding a little more into the chest. Keep repeating throughout the day, so that you do not play out the American saying, “I didn’t have time to breathe.”

- **MAKE SURE THAT EACH GIFT YOU GIVE ONLY COMES FROM THE HEART.**
No “shoulds” or “have tos.”
- **DO THE THYMUS HEART RUB WHEN YOU START TO FEEL ANXIOUS, PRESSURED, OR GUILTY.** Place your hand flatly over the upper chest. Begin to rub gently and soothingly in a circle, starting at your heart and beginning the circling motion in the direction of your left arm.

As you continue rubbing, say, “I deeply love and accept myself even though I have started to feel stressed (pressured, guilty, etc.). I deeply love and accept myself because I am so glad I caught these negative thoughts. And I deeply love and accept myself as I choose to let these thoughts go.” Repeat this practice every time you catch yourself thinking a thought that takes away your joy, peace, or love.



HENRY GRAYSON, PHD, is a therapist, researcher, and author who has been lecturing, teaching, and providing professional training for more than 30 years.



CALM YOURSELF INSTANTLY WITH TAPPING

by Amy Kurtz

Tapping is a technique in which you use your fingers to tap on meridian points in order to relieve stress. We intuitively know, for example, that the key meridian points near the eyebrows, nose, temple, and chest can comfort us, which is why we often unconsciously touch these areas when we are under stress. Tapping lets us access these points in a conscious and deliberate way.

Before you begin, choose an emotional focus you would like to clear from your mind. Then frame it as a phrase, such as, “I am stressed out.” Now insert that phrase into a sentence that ends with “I love and accept myself,” like this, “Even though I am stressed out, I love and accept myself.”

Adapted from Kicking Sick by Amy Kurtz



AMY KURTZ is a wellness expert, an AADP-certified Holistic Health Coach, and a regular contributor on *Good Morning America*, *mindbodygreen*, and *Yoganonymous*.

The Tapping Sequence

Using two or three fingertips, you will tap on each of the following meridian points, in order, gently and quickly from six to ten times. As you tap, say your full emotional-focus sentence out loud.

POINT 1 The soft side of the hand between the wrist and little finger. Use a karate-chop motion to tap this point.

POINT 2 The point where the inner eyebrow begins.

POINT 3 The outside of the eye, but not touching the eye.

POINT 4 The lower rim of your eye socket directly under your eye.

POINT 5 The fleshy indented area between your nose and upper lip.

POINT 6 The indentation on your chin that sits just below your lower lip.

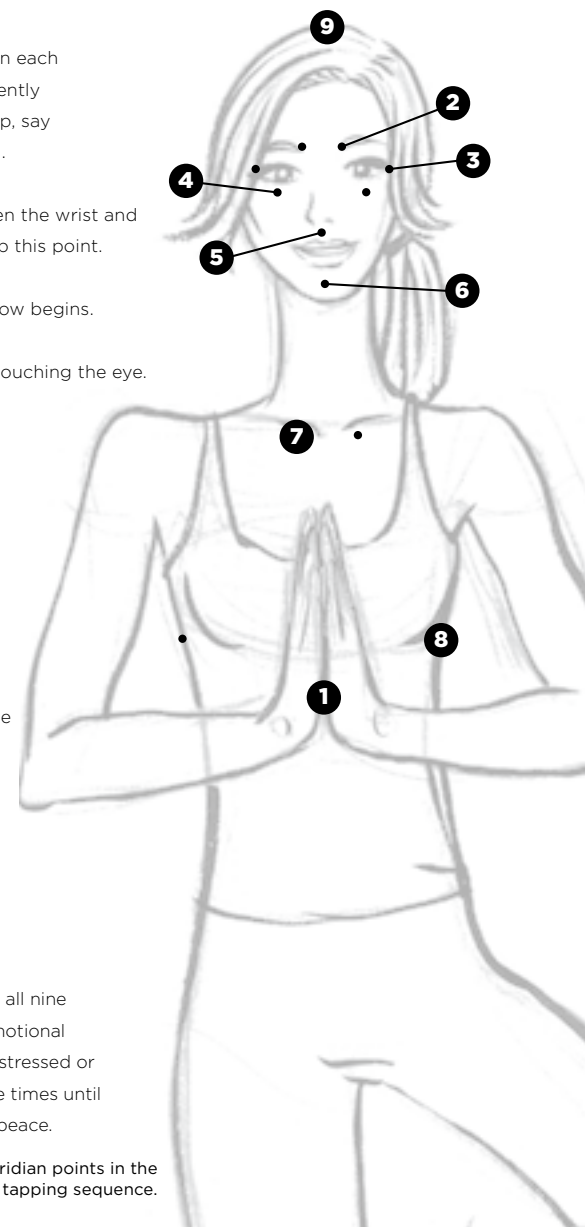
POINT 7 The area about an inch below the lowest edge of your collar or breastbone.

POINT 8 Three to four inches directly under your arm pit, where there is a soft and slightly tender spot.

POINT 9 The crown of your head.

FINISH After you have completed tapping all nine points, take a moment to reevaluate your emotional state. If you are still intensely or moderately stressed or upset, repeat the sequence two to four more times until your emotions are in control and you are at peace.

Tap each of these nine meridian points in the numbered order during a tapping sequence.





LEARN WHEN TO SAY NO

by Karen Brody

One of the most exhausting stress loops for women starts with saying yes when we feel no. Becoming your most authentic self is the first step to learning what a no and a yes feel like in your body. We often tell women to say no more, but equally as troublesome is that we also don't feel and then follow our yeses.

Here's a quick way to practice sensing what yes and no feel like to you:

1. Put your hand on your heart and gut.
2. Place your attention at the space between your eyebrows (your third eye).
3. Inhale from the space between your eyebrows to the base of your spine, while mentally saying "Sooooooo." Then exhale from the base of your spine to the space between your eyebrows while mentally saying the sound "Hummmmmm." Repeat twice more.
4. Be still as you rest your attention on your third eye for 20 to 30 seconds.
5. Call up a question you want an answer to, and see if you feel a yes or no.

For women who have lots of decisions to make, like mothers, I often suggest making a list of all the things stressing them out, and then, on the same day every week, doing this practice, seeing if they get a yes or no for each item on the list. This is also a great practice to do weekly when you're pregnant, because giving birth centered in your true self, knowing your yes and no, is the best gift you can give your baby.

Using this practice to help make decisions will help you stop overdoing. You begin with feeling, drop your ego, and then, from your true nature, make decisions that end the worn-out feeling. Beware of mistaking things you love to do as a yes. For example, many of the creative moms I work with love to cook, but when they use this practice to ask whether they want to stay up cooking cupcakes late at night for their children's school when they have work the next day, the answer they get might well be no.

Sometimes you may be faced with a difficult no: your inner wisdom will tell you that saying no to something will liberate time, but saying no may not feel good right away or may disappoint someone. If this happens, I encourage you to say no anyway. If you want to feel well-rested, you need to make the choice that supports your wholeness.

Adapted from Daring to Rest by Karen Brody



KAREN BRODY is a certified yoga nidra instructor and the founder of Daring to Rest™, a yoga nidra-based self-empowerment program for women.



part 2

PRACTICES TO RESTORE BALANCE AND HARMONY

Take the giant step of
not knowing which step
to take. Your true path
cannot be lost, ever.

JEFF FOSTER



BOOST YOUR IMMUNE SYSTEM WITH WINTERTIME FOODS

by Acharya Shunya

In general, Ayurveda declares winter (November 15 to March 14) as the healthiest season. However, the body's natural intelligence copes with the external cold by automatically increasing the *agni* (digestive fire) in the belly, resulting in increased inner warmth. Naturally, appetite and hunger also increase in parallel.

Hence, if we fast in this season or eat a lot of cold and light foods, like salads, *Vata dosha* (the energy of air and space) can go up due to increased quality of lightness and coldness (the principle of "like increases like" at work). So eating nutritious fatty food at the right time—in winter—is a precautionary measure.

We can eat nourishing foods to proactively build health and immunity for the entire year ahead.

DO

- Increase your intake of sweet, sour, and salty; reduce your intake of sour, pungent, and bitter.
- Give preference to heavy over light, and fatty over dry foods.
- Enjoy hearty meat and vegetable soups with added ghee to fortify the body.
- Treat yourself to a midday drink of Ayurvedic buttermilk every day. Eat 1 tablespoon of raw honey daily if possible (especially in the morning).

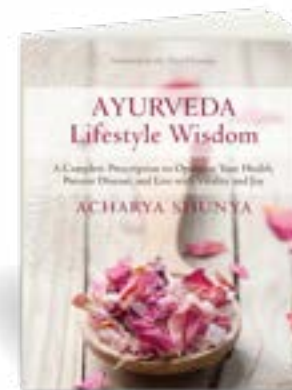
DON'T

- Fast or skip meals.
- Eat salads and raw foods.
- Consume chilled foods like ice cream, chilled water, or frozen foods.

PREFERRED WINTER FOOD LIST

- **CEREALS:** Unfermented wheat products (bran, cereal, chapatis, cookies, cream of wheat, crepes, dumplings, pudding, tortillas), white or brown rice, rice pudding. In moderation: quinoa, millet, oats.
- **LEGUMES AND BEANS:** Black gram, black beans, kidney beans, mung.
- **VEGETABLES:** Asparagus, beets, cabbage, carrots, cilantro, eggplant, fennel root (anise), garlic, green beans, green peas, leeks, okra (in early winter only), onions (cooked), parsnips, pumpkin, radish, rutabaga, spaghetti squash, spinach, sweet potatoes, turnips, winter melon, winter squash.
- **FRUITS:** Amalaki (a nutritious fruit supplement available online), almonds, apples, dates, figs, grapefruit, guavas, lemon, lime, mandarins, oranges, pears, plums, pomegranate, tangerines.
- **MEAT:** Chicken, deer, goat, pig, rabbit, seafood soup, turkey.
- **ALCOHOL:** Aged wine is ideal.
- **SEEDS:** Sesame.
- **DRIED FRUITS AND NUTS:** Almonds, cashews, macadamia nuts, pecans, pine nuts, pistachios, raisins, walnuts.
- **DAIRY:** Sweet butter, Ayurvedic buttermilk (takra), sweet cream, milk (boiled), yogurt (never frozen or with fruit; always eat with added raw honey or crushed black pepper).
- **WATER:** Drink boiled water reduced to warm, drinkable temperature.
- **FAT:** Ghee is best; all other natural cooking oils are also fine (except mustard oil).
- **OTHER:** Honey, chyawanprash (Ayurvedic supplement), vinegar in moderation.

*Adapted from Ayurveda Lifestyle
Wisdom by Acharya Shunya*

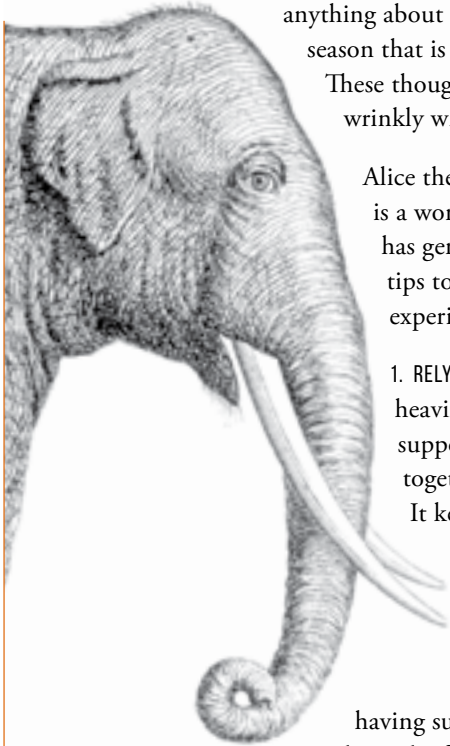


ACHARYA SHUNYA is the founder of Vedika Global, a spiritual foundation dedicated to serving humanity by illuminating India's Vedic spiritual traditions of Ayurveda, yoga, and Vedanta.



FIVE (PACHYDERMAL) TIPS ON STAYING PEACEFUL

by Sarah Bamford Seidelmann with Alice the Elephant



Though it may seem unlikely that an elephant could know anything about navigating the wild and woolly holiday season that is now upon us—you might be surprised. These thoughtful beasts have much soft, gray, and wrinkly wisdom to share with humans.

Alice the Elephant, an elephant in spirit form, is a wonderful companion of mine, and she has generously agreed to share five aligning tips to help you have the most meaningful experience possible this holiday season.

1. **RELY ON YOUR POSSE.** We elephants lean heavily on one another for emotional support and make it a point to linger together at our favorite watering holes.

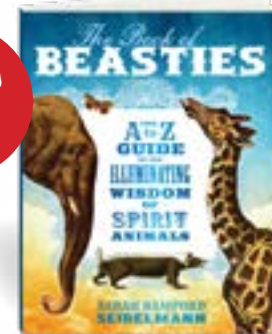
It keeps us strong. The holidays are no time to skimp on time with friends. I lovingly insist that you double down on phone calls, caring texts, walking/coffee dates, and nights out with your girls/boys. You'll be

having such a good time you won't even worry about the fact that your holiday cards never even got ordered in the first place.

2. **GRACE IS AN ATTITUDE.** Have you ever seen an underwater view of a swimming elephant? We are capable of balletic flow and majesty! It's as if we have no idea that we weigh as much as a car! We embody buoyancy. So, remember, when you are trying desperately to find a gluten-free, vegan, fair-trade, sustainably harvested, dairy-free entree on Pinterest to serve at Thanksgiving—and despite how heavy that might seem—you can choose to float. Breathe, and even try a pirouette.

3. **SHOW YOUR HEART.** When we elephants feel something, we aren't afraid to express it. We cry. We reach out and touch each other with our trunks to trace the beautiful curves of our friend's cheeks. I implore you this holiday season to say what you need to say—a good place to start is “I’m sorry,” or “I love you,” or “I appreciate you.” These simple gifts are always better than any kind of shark attack survival kit or three-piece, minty melon bath set from T.J. Maxx.
4. **CLEAR A PATH FOR YOURSELF.** We elephants aren't afraid to do what it takes to get what we need. If the last juicy marula fruit is dangling from a tree's tip-top branch, just out of reach, we will wrap our trunk around the tree and pull it out from the ground to get that fruit. What is standing between you and your marula fruit (a.k.a. your peaceful holiday season)? Too many commitments? Too many gifts to shop for? A holiday letter you have dreaded writing for twenty years? It's time to pull out (by the roots) what stands between you and that juicy fruit! Jettison the letter. Go gift-free for a year or agree to exchange books, for that matter. And, for elephant's sake, say no to the office party that gives you hives!
5. **NEVER FORGET.** Above all: Commit to believing that you deserve to experience all of the love and connection your heart desires. No earning or repenting or serving time is required. Elephants never forget this.

COMING
SOON!



SARAH BAMFORD SEIDELMANN was a physician living a nature-starved, hectic lifestyle until a walrus entered her life and changed everything.



NINE POINTERS TO PEACE

by Lama Surya Das

My own practice for not sweating the small stuff entails utilizing a few homemade quotes and potent slogans that speak to me. I keep yellow sticky notes and index cards on my desk, bathroom mirror, dashboard, computer, and in my wallet. I practice what I call *remindfulness* by remembering to look at these handwritten adages; they help me recall what is important in the bigger picture and in the long run—my values, principles, vows, practices, and goals. I let the wisdom of these maxims sink in, inevitably defusing the situation before it gets anywhere near out of hand.

Among these potent pointers, here's my favorite:

THIS TOO SHALL PASS.

This slogan reminds me to practice patience, acceptance, and forbearance in the face of irritation and disappointment. I also remember to stay in touch with the long view, because things are cyclic and nothing happens without causes, even if not immediately apparent to me.

Here's another one I like:

HOW MUCH WILL THIS MATTER TO ME A YEAR OR TWO FROM NOW?

I also like to echo the *Diamond Sutra*, the world's oldest printed book, which quotes Buddha saying:

SEE THINGS AS LIKE A DREAM, A FANTASY, A MIRAGE.

I usually add the word sitcom or movie, just for fun. This traditional dharma teaching helps me remember to regard everything as like rainbows or the divine dance of illusion. It helps me take things a lot less seriously and leave room for my inner child and little Buddha within to stand up, play, dance, and sing.

Probably the most effective, practical yoga and meditation related maxim is this:

BREATHE, RELAX, CENTER, AND SMILE.

NOTHING IS AS IMPORTANT AS IT SEEMS AT THIS MOMENT.

That really cools my jets, and allows for more intelligent decision-making and clearheaded thinking to proceed.

I've gotten my friend Amelia into the habit of singing (often in her head) the great nursery rhyme mantra guaranteed to defuse any difficult situation:

ROW, ROW, ROW YOUR BOAT, GENTLY DOWN THE STREAM.

MERRILY, MERRILY, MERRILY, MERRILY, LIFE IS BUT A DREAM.

If I have a good amount of time and feel inspired to co-meditate with the Masters for further spiritual relief and sustenance, I recite Buddha's Metta Sutta (Maitri or Lovingkindness Sermon), which includes the line:

MAY ALL BEINGS BE HAPPY AND AT EASE!

Or, I might take St. Francis of Assisi's Peace Prayer out of my wallet and read:

MAKE ME AN INSTRUMENT OF YOUR PEACE . . .

I invite you to try my small-stuff slogans out, one at a time, and see how they work for you. Or, find other one-liners and make up your own.

Adapted from Make Me One with Everything by Lama Surya Das



LAMA SURYA DAS is one of the most learned and highly trained American-born lamas in the Tibetan Dzogchen tradition.



part 3

FAMILY, FRIENDS, AND HOME

Our most cherished memories are rarely found in a box, but rather reflect the moments when we offer our full presence to the people we love.

WENDY STRGAR



HOW TO HOST A HOLIDAY PARTY AND ACTUALLY ENJOY YOURSELF

by Edward Espe Brown

First things first, lower your standards enough to have a good time. The best story about this is one that Robert Bly tells at his readings about his friend William Stafford, who was confirming to an interviewer that he had a practice of writing a poem each day. “How,” the interviewer wondered, “can you do that day in and day out? How can you be that creative?”

To which Stafford replied, “I lower my standards.”

This is a brilliant piece of advice that requires a sleight of hand: lowering your standards actually lets others think highly of you. To engage in trying to control what others think of you is stressful, exactly because it is impossible. To lower your standards, you let them think whatever they do. And they will!

So instead of trying to be impressively masterful, you could aim to enjoy yourself alongside your family and friends. Enjoyment in this case is a choice to rest easy doing what you are capable of doing, and letting go of the rest. And tuning into warmth, gratitude, and well-being.

Sure, make some plans, consult some culinary bibles or online cooking sites, but leave room for your plans to change as the holly hour approaches. If things are getting stressful, reassess what to do and what not to do. Decide to do less! Perhaps if people are not too busy with being impressed with the spread, they will have more energy for happily engaging with one another.

Be entirely willing to ask for help. When I’ve wanted to appear masterful, I have hesitated to do this, as then others might see me as being needy and helpless, and my project to appear capable and competent would be a disaster. Then nobody helps. But they do tell you to calm down, which doesn’t help.

So ask for help, whether it’s for food dishes from others, drinks to bring, people to serve, help with cleaning up. Inspiration, assistance, guidance, support—the more you ask for it, the more it appears.

Again, it’s not up to you to make sure that everyone has a good time. That’s their job. After all most of them are probably adults now, and they may choose to enjoy themselves. It’s your job to offer what you have to offer, sincerely and wholeheartedly. Let go of the results.

And when you let go of assessing the results, you may be pleasantly surprised that you are smiling. You discover what’s in front of you can be sweet beyond compare.

Happy hosting!

COMING
SOON!



EDWARD ESPE BROWN is the bestselling author of several cookbooks. He was the first head cook at Tassajara Zen Mountain Center and later helped found Greens Restaurant in San Francisco.



CULTIVATE GENEROSITY IN YOUR CHILDREN

by Dr. Christopher Willard

Nearly every spiritual tradition has a practice of generosity and giving. Neuroscience agrees with the spiritual wisdom that tells us we feel more joy in giving than in receiving—we are, in fact, wired to be generous. We know now that making a practice of kindness and generosity leads to health, mental health, and social and spiritual benefits. The benefits even extend to just witnessing an act of generosity.

However, our consumer culture tells us the opposite, that getting will make us feel better. In families today, children are often in the “getting” role, adults in the “giving” role.

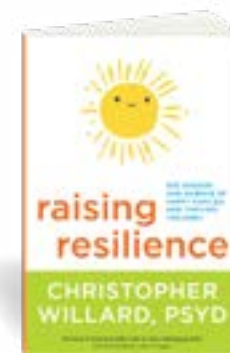
How can we encourage a spirit of generosity in our families?

Here are a few ideas to consider:

- Involve your kids in the decision for charitable giving, taking into account what your family’s values are, such as: social justice, the environment, health issues that have impacted your family, or giving presents for children or families in need.
- Follow the lead of my friend’s grandmother who gave the grandkids \$100 each year, with \$50 to spend on themselves and \$50 that she would donate to a charity of their choice.

- Remember that you can also give your time or support. Volunteer as a family, a practice shown to boost happiness, empathy, and build closeness.
- Give experiences—the happiness will last longer than the lifespan of a toy. Perhaps travel, theater tickets, a class, or museum passes.
- Donate toys to make space for the new. Notice together which toys are getting lonely and would be happier in a new home, saying thank you and goodbye to old toys, and imagining the happiness they will bring after they’ve been donated onward.

Adapted from Raising Resilience by Dr. Christopher Willard



CHRISTOPHER WILLARD, PSYD, is a clinical psychologist and consultant specializing in bringing mindfulness into education and psychotherapy.



A BEDTIME PRACTICE FOR CHILDREN AND ADULTS

by Mariam Gates and Sarah Jane Hinder



MARIAM GATES holds a master's in education from Harvard University and has more than 20 years of experience working with children. Her renowned Kid Power Yoga™ program combines her love of yoga with teaching to help children access their inner gifts.



SARAH JANE HINDER is an author, illustrator, and yoga teacher who creates acrylic artwork for a variety of children's books.

Cloud Journey Visualization

*Lie on your back with your hands by your sides.
Take a deep breath in . . . and let a long breath out.
Imagine you are lying on a white, puffy cloud.
Feel yourself sink into its softness as the cloud
lifts you up, up, up into the air.
You are floating. Rocking back . . . and forth.
Your cloud is taking you somewhere you love to be.
This wonderful place has colors to see and sounds to hear.
Feel how good it is to be there.
Breathe in.*

*Breathe out.
When you are ready, your cloud
slowly brings you down, down, down.
It settles you gently back on the earth.
As your cloud pulls away, it takes with it anything
that is troubling you—whoosh!
You are left feeling calm, peace,
and happiness inside.
Take another deep breath in . . .
and let a long breath out.
Sweet dreams.*





part 4

PEACE ON EARTH,
GOODWILL TO ALL

Love is showing up fully with
presence—openhearted, raw,
and vulnerable to the world.
It is the only thing that matters.

ALBERT FLYNN DESILVER



WINTER SOLSTICE: THE REBIRTH OF LIGHT

by Shiva Rea

At winter solstice, the darkest point of the year, light begins its journey of reemergence. This great cosmological rhythm sets our internal clocks, our biorhythms, to the subtle flow of slowly increasing light. In our spiritual and creative process, we begin our own gradual awakening and reemergence from the dark, fertile soil of winter.

This biological and spiritual attunement to light is what has made the many cosmological temples, with their ritual periods of connection to the sun, so powerful through the ages.

Can you imagine the impact of the winter solstice less than a hundred years ago when we lived life primarily in natural light? At the nadir of the year, we were sustained by the living fire of candlelight and bonfires when, in some places, a day might consist of as much as 23 hours of darkness.

And we were sustained by celebration—such as the 12-day festival of Yule—in which we came together, made merry, and honored the promise of the lengthening days ahead. We have marked the all-important time of winter solstice, the rebirth of the sun, with the literal birth of a son. Myths about the return of the sun king at this time of year have been recorded as far back as ancient Sumeria and Egypt.

In fact, there are more cross-cultural celebrations at this point in the wheel of the year than at any other time—as we turn to one another for comfort, solace, and the shared joy that comes from celebrating the return of the light.

Here is a practice that you can do to echo the ancient ceremonies of the winter solstice—and align your spirit and life with the cosmic rhythm.

THE FIREKEEPING PRACTICE—IGNITING A NEW CYCLE

Ignite a special candle that can last a whole year (or shorter cycle if you wish). This candle is lit during special holidays and represents the concentration of your life-energy fuel, intentions, and dedicated tending of the fire through that period. This can be a powerful offering to be placed on a personal altar and incorporated into your spiritual and ritual practices. It will bring continuity, passion, peace, and clarity through the fire of consciousness that you ignite on the solstice. Create your own ritual to ignite the new.

Adapted from Tending the Heart Fire by Shiva Rea



SHIVA REA, MA, is the founder of Samudra Global School for Living Yoga based upon her worldwide travels and studies in yoga, tantra, Ayurveda, and dance.



THE REACH OF KINDNESS

by Mark Nepo

Kindness is the antidote to everything. Just as water soothes fire, kindness calms how we burn each other from time to time. And under all the ways we burn and hurt, there's the soft and lasting presence we were born with, waiting to blossom in the midst of any trouble.

For despite the many ways we try and the many ways we miss, we are kind nonetheless. Inevitably, we're required to step out of the house, afraid as we are of all we might meet. Because it's the kindness and wisdom we will encounter beyond our fear that brings us together, that brings us alive.

The truth is that kindness turns fire into light and presence turns misses into surprises. The first reward for kindness is a thoroughness of being. The next reward for kindness is a greater integrity in our relationships. But the most enduring reward for kindness is our experience of Oneness. For being kind renews our kinship with all things.

JOURNAL QUESTIONS TO WORK WITH

Where a diary is a place to track the circumstances of our life, a journal is a place to unfold the events that lift and drop us through our days, a place to ask all the questions that have no answer, a place to gather meaning from all we go through.

Journaling is how we stay in conversation with the universe. These journal questions have been gathered over the years from my own exploration of journaling and from my work as a teacher.

They are starting points, dive spots if you will. Feel free to change them, combine them, undress them, and to voice questions of your own that these might stir, questions that might feel more relevant to what you're going through. These questions are invitations to better know yourself and to better relate to the currents of life.

- Describe your commitment to the ones you love.
Under what conditions would you stop loving?
- What kind of care is necessary to create love, maintain love, and protect love?
- Describe the combination of care, freedom, knowledge, and need that makes up the kind of love you value.
How is this different from the love you feel able to give?

Adapted from Things That Join the Sea and the Sky

by Mark Nepo



MARK NEPO is a bestselling poet, author, and philosopher who has taught in the fields of poetry and spirituality for more than 35 years.



THE GIFT OF BEING PRESENT

by Rabbi Rami Shapiro

Both Hanukkah and Christmas owe their innermost meaning to the turning of the seasons in the Northern Hemisphere. This is our dark time of year when the sun appears weak, daylight is brief, and (to the extent we carry the fears of our ancestors in the recesses of our mind) we fear that light may be leaving the world never to return. So we do the outrageous: we kindle candles and tell stories about light overcoming darkness. And we reach out to others with forgiveness, hoping to rekindle love in relationships grown dark in the shadow of anger and shame.

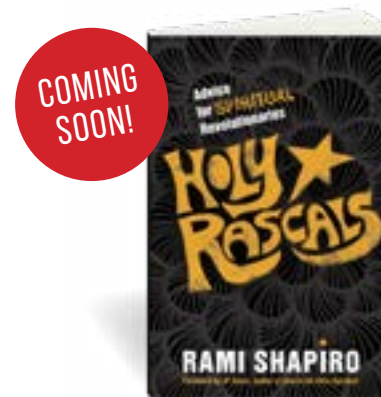
But forgiveness cannot be kindled the way a candle wick is ignited. Nor is a story of hope enough to erase a memory of hurt. Forgiveness isn't a strategy or a tactic; it isn't something you bestow or grant or do—forgiveness is the liberating grace that happens of itself when you understand the nature of reality and are present to the ten thousand joys and sorrows of everyday living.

We like to believe that the people who hurt us could have acted differently—that in some sense they chose to hurt us. But is this true? Is it true of you when you cause another harm? When you said the hurtful thing you said or did the hurtful thing you did, did you weigh your words and actions in advance, and deliberately choose to cause another to suffer? Or did you say and do what you said and did because, in that moment, nothing else could be said or done? I think the latter is truer.

Understanding the nature of reality doesn't lead to passivity; it isn't a matter of turning the other cheek, or making excuses, or trying to fix others or oneself. Understanding the nature of reality leads to being present to what is true.

And what is true is that we are all trapped in our own stories, fears, and compulsions. Don't expect mean people to become kind, or evil people to become compassionate, or dangerous people to become loving. Don't expect anything at all; just stay open to what is rather than what you expect or wish it should be. Hurtful people may need to be avoided; dangerous people may need to be incarcerated. But saint or sinner, we are all doing the only thing we can do given the conditions in which we find ourselves doing anything at all.

Rather than practice forgiveness, practice being present to what is true, and allow forgiveness to arise of its own accord. Meditation, chanting, and contemplative walking are just three ways to practice being present to the truth of what is. Being present will break your heart, but it is only a broken heart that has the capacity for compassion and forgiveness. The gift of a heart broken open with wisdom, compassion, and forgiveness may be the best gift you can give or receive in any season.



RABBI RAMI SHAPIRO is an award-winning author of over 30 nonfiction books, whose poems and short stories have been anthologized in over a dozen volumes, and whose prayers are used around the world.



WE THANK YOU

for joining us in celebrating the
2017 holiday season. We hope this
Holiday Companion has helped bring
peace and harmony into your life,
and we wish you—and the world—
all the best in the new year.



ABOUT SOUNDS TRUE

Sounds True is a multimedia publisher whose mission is to inspire and support personal transformation and spiritual awakening. Founded in 1985 and located in Boulder, Colorado, we work with many of the leading spiritual teachers, thinkers, healers, and visionary artists of our time. We strive with every title to preserve the essential “living wisdom” of the author or artist. It is our goal to create products that not only provide information to a reader or listener, but that also embody the quality of a wisdom transmission.

For those seeking genuine transformation, Sounds True is your trusted partner. At [SoundsTrue.com](https://www.soundstrue.com) you will find a wealth of free resources to support your journey, including exclusive weekly audio interviews, free downloads, interactive learning tools, and other special savings on all our titles.

To learn more, please visit [SoundsTrue.com/freegifts](https://www.soundstrue.com/freegifts) or call us toll-free at 800.333.9185.