

Take charge of your traditions and enjoy your holidays by Dr. Robert N. Karman, Licensed Psychologist, Yucca Valley

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On January 15, 2013, I wrote an article for the Hi Desert Star entitled "Not again this year, SAD sufferers just need to see the light". It describes a common biological disorder called Seasonal Affective Disorder (SAD) in which we don't get intense enough sunlight during winter to signal our brains that it's daytime. The clues that it's biological are depressed mood, daytime sleepiness, difficulty sleeping at night, and carb craving every day for a couple of months but not during the rest of the year. If you think you are part of the five percent who have SAD, please see the article for more details.

More than five percent of us feel down during the holidays for other reasons. Curious, I googled the phrase: holiday blues. I was not surprised to get nearly 73 million hits. What those Net articles say matches what I have heard from people over the years.

Especially for those who celebrate the holiday period as part of their religious faith, their lives have disappointments that vividly contrast with unrealistic expectations of a "Miracle on 34th Street" or "It's a Wonderful Life" holiday experience with family and friends.

Our culture conditions us to expect things to be special at the holidays. But when life deals us losses, disappointments, and hurts, it's hard to have the level of joy we expect. The hurts remind us life isn't perfect. So what can we do to shake these holiday blues?

First, we need to acknowledge the truths of our lives without excessively dwelling on the details of past and present hurts and disappointments. Memories will recycle from past holidays and unfulfilled expectations, but we need to set them aside and decide to re-invent ourselves or at least how we spend our holiday time.

Second, the holidays are here for us. We aren't here for the holidays. Considering different traditions, experimenting with change can help shake us out of our seasonal slump.

If you always have a tree and certain decorations, remember you don't have to celebrate that way every year. Do something different. Or at least be less frantic about getting it all done again this year only to face exhaustion as the new year begins.

Here's an idea. How are the holidays spent in the country from which you or your ancestors immigrated to America? If that question intrigues you, use the Internet to discover and then try some of those ideas this season. Or even consider the traditions of some country that has nothing to do with your family line.

Sounds strange, but why not? Try out another continent in 2013. You might like it enough to continue it, or try something different each year for awhile. Then as you proceed, combine several traditions into your own eclectic holiday celebration as you discover what you and your loved ones enjoy.

Another option is to shift your priorities this year. If you usually spend your time exclusively with family, spend a little less and see some old friends. Take a short trip to visit people you like but seldom see. Even if travel is out for financial or other reasons, how about an extended phone call to catch up as a mutual holiday gift?

If your kids and/or grandkids live too far to visit often, why not set up webcams at both homes and spend some video time with loved ones? It's not being there in person, but it can be a lot of fun. After all, they are your holidays. Take charge and enjoy.

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