

Be Present

Nurture your own spirit
for a happier family holiday.

EACH YEAR, the holidays entice us with promises of spiritual renewal and family bonding. Yet it's so easy to fall into the trap of doing too much, ignoring our own needs, and ending up in meltdown mode. What will it take to break the cycle this year? The answer could be as simple as devoting some time to your spiritual and emotional well-being. Give it a try and this holiday season could be one of deep inner connection and peace.

Cultivate the conscious intention to take care of yourself and holiday obligations in a more centered way. Take a few minutes each morning to turn inward and breathe. Then set a personal intention for the day. Try not to set goals; instead, consider setting an intention that will give you the emotional support you need. It could be anything from staying calm in the face of stress and responding in new ways to old family triggers to setting limits on how much energy you expend on others. Check in with your intention again before you go to sleep. That will help you reconnect to it and see how you're doing. Work with the same intention for as long as it takes for it to become a regular part of your life.

When it comes to your not-so-enlightened relationship patterns—don't worry, we all have them—a dose of mindfulness is a powerful antidote. To practice mindfulness, step back from a heated interaction by first taking a deep breath. Become aware of your emotions and any messages your body is sending—you may notice sudden back or neck pain or digestive distress, which are tip-offs to an imminent calamity. Honor those messages by finding space, such as by taking a walk, and reflecting on what you need to do to stay grounded. (If you're working with an intention, this may be a good time to review it.)

Practice *metta* (lovingkindness) meditation. This is especially helpful if you've succumbed to old patterns and are not at your best. First try a five- to 15-minute meditation. Take a comfortable seated position, draw your attention to your heart center, and recite a phrase such as "May I be happy," "May I be peaceful," or "May I be free from suffering." If this brings you comfort, you can create other mantras and recite them to yourself anywhere, anytime. —Bo Forbes



Omward Bound

- 1. Rejuvenate.** Take 10 to 15 minutes in the evening for restorative yoga; try Supta Baddha Konasana (Reclining Bound Angle Pose), Salamba Balasana (Supported Child's Pose), or Viparita Karani (Legs-up-the-Wall Pose). (See www.YogaJournal.com/poses for pose details.) You'll sleep better and thwart the fight-or-flight response that fries the nervous system.
- 2. Turn things upside down.** Practice inversions, such as Shoulderstand or a brief Handstand or Headstand, to help change your perspective and illuminate otherwise difficult situations.
- 3. Boost your circulation.** Winter's lack of light can exacerbate depression, slow your metabolism, and precipitate lethargy. If you're not inclined to do restorative poses, winter can be a great time to get moving and increase circulation with more vigorous exercise. Movement also interrupts a sluggish cycle of negative *vrittis* (thought patterns). Try taking a walk before yoga and weaving more backbends into your practice; they can lift you out of a dull mood.
- 4. Get creative.** Paint, draw, or listen to music—anything that stimulates the right brain, the seat of creative solutions to old challenges.

Yocabulary

METTA: lovingkindness. In the Buddhist practice of metta meditation, the practitioner typically offers lovingkindness first to himself, then to others.