

The Holiday Blues, the Good and the Bad

Emotional conflicts are reactivated by the visits to your family. These disturbing feelings begin before you go (to "dread" is a strong word) and linger on. The outside events surrounding your visit "home" for the holidays affect your mood. For instance, your schedule and level of activity is changed and you eat different food and sleep in a different bed. More is involved. Inner and unconscious forces are also at work.

By **unconscious**, I mean what is part of your inner (psychological) world that is forgotten or inaccessible to your awareness (as it is related to your personal history). The unconscious also includes that part of your mind that you are born with (a collective part of ourselves). Not knowing you personally, I cannot tell you exactly what your unconscious is communicating to you and bringing to your attention. However, the negative feelings you are experiencing-depression and anger- may very well be allies in that they link you to your unconscious. Jung said that "all psychological phenomena" have some "...sense of purpose inherent in them, even merely reactive phenomena like emotional reactions." When you are at the "mercy of demons in the dungeon of despair" or anger, "your inner world is demanding a hearing." Something goes wrong during your annual visit to your family. Your emotional reaction is an attempt at correcting what goes wrong.

It is usually during the holidays that we are reunited with our families. Sometimes old patterns of interaction are repeated. A father will order his adult child as he did when she was little. At other times, and often at the same time, old emotional conflicts that are not resolved and stand in the way or the person's current development. The emotional reaction is the result of that difficulty.

Let me give you an example. A woman in mid-life complains that she feels criticized when she gets together with her relatives. Whether they do or not is irrelevant at this point. The fact is that she experiences criticism. She is a very nurturing and has a most positive outlook on people. As a matter of fact she is too nurturing of others in the sense that she neglects parts of herself that need to be tended to. She is at a time of her life where she needs to come to terms with that neglected part of herself (a side who could be critical and discriminating of who to be nurturing to). It is intolerable to her to face a part of herself she considers selfish. No one would love her anymore perhaps! She sees the critical part of herself in others and as directed towards her. And now she has to deal with that.

Ask yourself: how is my emotional reaction affecting me? How am I behaving differently? What is this reaction had a grain of truth about myself that I need to confront but am afraid to own? (it could be a positive or a negative attribute).

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