

# Transitions



*Congratulations!* It's your first holiday season in a gorgeous new home. I bet you've been looking ahead, imagining how you'll bring the holiday traditions of your previous home into this new environment. How big a tree will fit in the living room? Where is the best place for the menorah? Will the neighbors mind your New Year's Eve blowout?

Most likely, you're in a very different place since the move--not just physically but psychically as well. Maybe the move has you thinking about cutting back on the holiday frenzy. Maybe you've been thinking about refreshing some of your usual customs, reinventing them, or even retiring them. After years of the go-go-go, you're ready to reconsider how you spend the months from November through January.

The holidays--with all the celebration and ceremony--are an ideal time to begin a more purposeful lifestyle. 'Tis the season that can teach us to recognize the difference between a tradition and a habit, and to make conscious choices between the two.

A tradition is a repeated activity that adds meaning to our lives. It nourishes us. It provides an experience that deepens our sense of self and our connection with others and the world around us.

A habit, by contrast, is a repeated activity that offers only empty calories. It may once have been a vital and life-affirming tradition, but people change, as do their lives and the world around them. We go through the motions of a habit, but we don't connect with it at any significant level. We may be doing it to fulfill the expectations of other people, but it adds no value to our own lives, or to those of our family and friends. A habit is all form, and no substance.

How to separate the habits from the traditions? Take stock of your holiday activities, and assess how meaningful each one really is.

What needs to be examined is not just the activity itself, but how you experience the activity. We often mistake an activity--a meal, a party, a trip, a decorating scheme--as an end in itself. In reality, the activity is only a means to an end: to the experience underneath the activity. That experience may be emotional, or social, or spiritual, or recreational.

Your experience of any given activity is unique to you and your family and friends. For your clan, an elaborate homemade feast may mean love and intimacy. For me, it may just mean a lonesome morning in the kitchen. Instead, my husband and I may prefer a luminaria-lit stroll through the gardens of the Ladybird Johnson Wildflower Center. What's important is not the meal or the walk per se, but how we experience them.

As you prepare your new home to make its holiday debut, take some time out to consider how you can update your holiday customs for a more meaningful--and less stressful--season. Ask yourself, and your family and friends, these three questions:

1. What kinds of experiences (emotional, social, spiritual, recreational) are most meaningful to you at this time of the year?

2. Which of your current holiday activities provide these meaningful experiences? Which don't?

3. What new holiday activities would provide fresh opportunities for more meaningful experiences?

With this information, you can revise your holiday schedule to focus on those activities--old and new--that touch you most deeply. These are the traditions that everyone will remember most fondly and look forward to most eagerly.

This year I am thinking about ways to reconnect with friends. We're all so busy that it's a challenge to keep up with each other during the year. But I don't want to throw a big bash, because I would be too busy playing hostess to find enough time to talk with each of my friends. I don't want to host a dinner party, either, because cooking stresses me out too much to enjoy my companions. What I'm looking for is a fun, low-key activity prepared by someone else that permits us all plentiful opportunity to share our stories. You know, like a Chuck E. Cheese for adults.

I'll let you know what I come up with. In the meantime, I'm interested in how you'll be reinventing your holiday traditions this year. Tell me what you are planning. Email me at: [transitions@ann Daly.com](mailto:transitions@ann Daly.com).

*Ann Daly PhD* ([www.ann Daly.com/coach](http://www.ann Daly.com/coach)) is a clarity coach based in Austin, Texas. She helps women in transition who are reaching for a more expansive life to get clear about what they want and how to get it. Write to Dr. Daly at: [transitions@ann Daly.com](mailto:transitions@ann Daly.com).