

On Post-Christmas Let-Down

By David Jay Collins

December 29, 2017

Feeling the Post-Holiday Blues already?

It's more than just the calendar...

Our common phrase “Good-bye” carries undue finality. At my job I have the privilege of working with visitors from around the world and when our time together ends, they rarely say “Good-bye” to their fellow-visitors from other countries. They’ll say, with handshakes and hugs, some variation of “Until we meet again” or “Safe travels.”

They’ll say “Good-bye” to me, to honor the words and ways of their American host, just as I say “Bom dia!” or “Sawadee Khrup!” to honor their words and ways each morning. To combat my own post-holiday blues this year, I’ve taken a cue from our gracious visitors and I’ve stopped saying Good-bye to Christmas. Because there’s simply no need.

And once you take away the finality of “Good-bye,” you take away the let-down. So instead of saying “Good-bye, Christmas,” I’ve started saying “Until next Christmas...” By changing my words, I’ve changed my perception. So can you! To get another Christmas, you must first part with this one. Think of Holiday 2017 as a chapter—one chapter of many in your past and in your future. You’re simply finishing up this Christmas chapter and Holiday 2018 has yet to be written. Next Christmas is full of possibility—yours.

Whether we admit it or not, many of us felt sadness on the morning of December 26th. *Good-bye, Christmas* + sad emoji. As things slowly get back to “normal,” we’ll wonder if we did this Christmas right. I will! Did I do enough? Did I make Christmas special for others, the way the holiday felt to me as a child? And was I as happy as everyone else? Because my friends on Instagram and Facebook looked so much happier.

And now the natural darkness of this time of year settles in: we’re the ones who make it bright. One aspect of our holiday celebration is most noticeable only after it’s gone: the abundance of light. It’s everywhere! Additional light is essential at this otherwise dark time of year. Bright, cheery light, on streetpoles and in storefronts, strung up on rooftops and eaves and in windows, sustains us through these shortest days of the year. (But here’s some great news: the shortest day of the year *has already passed!*)

The warmth of light inspires us through the bleak mid-winter long after the pine garlands and red bows and snowflake lights have been taken down; long after snowfall, so beautiful on Christmas Eve, simply becomes something to shovel away and shuffle through. And with the cold comes long winter naps, but also a feeling of isolation. Of quiet. Of absence after abundance. Snow itself becomes an obstacle between homes and neighbors, further entrenching us indoors.

For those who can’t get away for long winter weekends, plan ahead to add light to your home in January and February.

Buy candles (all on sale now!) in holiday scents that will add brightness to your home and keep your favorite scents aglow: brisk pine, warm cinnamon, rich vanilla. There's no reason that uplifting candlelight and fragrance has to be confined to the month of December. (Speaking of light...the elaborate holiday displays in so many of our zoos and public parks are still going strong. Enjoy the festive lights in the evening, but without the crowds.)

In these current days of diminishing abundance after Christmas but before New Year's, when we feel The Holidays coming to a close, there's an inevitable sinking feeling of "What's next?" Everything in these past weeks has been heightened: anticipation, expectation, decoration. And this high-water mark has become our norm. It's the most wonderful time of the year because we can eat rich, sweet, fattening foods and drink rich, sweet, fattening drinks, day after day with a variety of people in a variety of settings that would be socially unacceptable in, say, August. Second helpings are welcome. Turning down food? Rude! This too will end.

There's another aspect of post-holiday blues that has less to do with the calendar on the wall and more to do with the calendar we carry around inside. If you doubt that we time-stamp our emotions, then why do our hearts sink at the thought of The First...Without...? The First Father's Day without Dad. The First birthday without Grandma. Christmas, our grandest First, and the Holidays in general,

are deeply imprinted upon us from a young age, when the season was filled with childhood magic. Who made it magic? Santa of course, but also Santa's Helpers who, we learned later on, were the ones behind the magic after all. Can we do it as well?

For many of us, Christmas brings a deep longing for those we've lost—our loved ones—a longing for their time, their hugs, their advice, and their presence in our lives once again. For those who lost a loved one this past year, the pain of loss is deep indeed, as this is their First Christmas Without... Even as we may re-experience the loss of our dearest family and friends over the Holidays, reach out to someone whose pain is more recent. Call them. Send a text. Let them know you're thinking of them and acknowledge the loss they're feeling but not sharing. This is when kindness of friendship matters most.

Writing this piece has reinvigorated me and I hope reading it has helped you as well. I've come up with a few ways to break through your post-holiday blues in the days and weeks ahead. Like a plateful of frosted Santa sugar cookies, take as many as you'd like—no judgment!

Let's keep the joy going... Did you know that the Twelve Days of Christmas and their multitudinous gifts are given *after* Christmas, not before? That's right, **today** is the actually the Fifth Day of Christmas and you know what that brings—**FIVE GOLDEN RINGS!** So I've put together this list of five ways to keep the spirit of Christmas around just a bit longer:

1. First, take nothing down until **January 7th**, the day after Epiphany (also when the Twelve Days of Christmas wraps. Or *unwraps*, as the case may be). Leave the tree up! Leave those lights on! Cheerfulness and twinkling lights are your best defense against post-holiday blues.
2. Christmas music sales drop like a rock after December 25th, but there's no reason you can't keep playing your favorites if it makes you happy. Most streaming services keep their holiday playlists active so if you continue listening, you'll send a holly jolly message to their data analytics for next year's timelines.
3. If you're having friends over for New Year's, leave the tree up and all the ornaments and lights on—remember that “The Holidays” is a seasonal celebration. If you choose to remove the ornaments ahead of New Year's, start a new tradition by adding more blue or white lights or silvery garland (also on sale!) to fill in the open space. This way, you get to decorate your tree a second time. My vote: keep Christmas up past New Year's!
4. As you're taking down the tree, keep a favorite ornament out. That little toy train from childhood or that ornament your much-missed grandmother gave you so many Christmases ago? Why pack it away? Keep the spirit of a loved one out for the whole year. When friends ask why you keep an ornament out year-round, share why it still means so much to you.

5. Lead with Gratitude. The best way to kick post-holiday blues to the curb is to focus on others. The new year brings new opportunity to give back—look at the needs in your own community. Food banks are loaded up right now, but what they need most is steady income throughout the year. Can you afford \$10 - \$15 a month to combat hunger, which is a year-round battle? Do you have one evening a week to tutor a student, or help someone learn a new language? The best way to keep the spirit of Christmas alive is to live it every day by word and deed. Be the example and share joy in 2018.

Until next time, Christmas!



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