How To Love Yourself Up (Even During the Holidays)

Can you feel it? Here it comes, the holiday's busy buzz of activities, parties, gatherings, and events galore. We all love to celebrate, but we sometimes feel exhausted and less excited than we'd like to be at this time of year (maybe even crabby to those we love). Why is it that these supposedly precious and magical times end up zapping all of our energy?

Could it be that our expectations are the root of this and perhaps our own expectations? I have decided this year will be different. I want to enjoy the time with my loved ones. I want to laugh and be merry without the stress. I want to squash those silly expectations of perfection and embrace the gritty goodness instead. Is it possible? Let's find out.

What if we all just used gentleness with everything we do this season? I mean really love yourself up, spread on the inner love so thick that you are covered with it, that you drip the love everywhere. How would that change how you and I experience the next few months?

It's simple. Just be gentle. Be gentle with yourself. So gentle and ginger, like you would treat a sick child or pet. Nurture yourself up and down again. Say the things you always want to say but don't. Be the juicy, gentle spirit and make people wonder what you're up to.

G.E.N.T.L.E

G: Gratitude

When you find yourself grinding your teeth at the thought of yet another social event or party on your schedule when all you really want to do is curl up on the couch, feel the

gratitude instead. Just 3 minutes spent counting our blessing actually changes the permeability and structure of your brain. This gratitude thinking is a kind of meditation. According to a NY Times article, How Meditation May Change Change the Brain, studies have shown, "…there are structural differences between the brains of meditators and those who don't meditate." And now a new study shows that gray matter actually grows in meditation. How cool is that? NOT thinking actually grows your brain, too. You don't need a special pillow or a half an hour. You don't need to sit in a lotus position and chant to meditate on gratitude. I like to do my gratitude meditation as I'm moving through my day—when I'm in the shower, while brushing my teeth, when I pull on a soft and warm sweater in the morning, or as I pet my dog before I run out the door.

There are many ways to guide your gratitude meditation. Thinking about the people closest to you and what you love about them can be one way. Here are a few favorite affirmations I use when I'm feeling that inner Scrooge:

- I am blessed for all my gifts.
- I feel the support and love of my community.
- I am taken care of no matter what.
- I love how fresh our magical winter wonderland feels.

E: Enjoyment

This time of year is supposed to be fun but why is it that most people struggle with the blues and blahs during this time of year? In her Psychology Today article Dr. Teresa Aubele states, "Happy thoughts and positive thinking, in general, support brain growth, as well as the generation and reinforcement of new synapses, especially in your prefrontal cortex (PFC), which serves as the integration center of all of your brain-mind functions." So, what we choose to think about, what we enjoy, and what we experience as fun is, well, actually good for us. So take that scrooge!

Also, less light affects your brain’s chemistry too, which can lead to feeling a bit down or low energy. You may just need to supplement with vitamin D3 when you are getting less sunlight.

N: Notice How You Feel

Is your jaw grinding at night? Are you shoulders permanently living at your ears? Does your stomach ache? Are you feeling rushed or irritated? Don’t try to fix it or manage it. Solve it. Just notice how it feels and be aware of it. By noticing and becoming aware, you create a shift. It’s normal to have feelings, emotions, and physical manifestations of stress. The question is, now that you are aware of them, what do you want to do?

Increasing your awareness does so many things. It allows you to be more open, more insightful, more connected, and to integrate all the parts of yourself (mind/body/spirit), which leads to a more balanced and beautiful you.

T: Take a Risk and Get Vulnerable

This time of year we are often around family and people we may, or may not, feel that close to. Letting our vulnerability show takes courage and feels scary at first, but it is really the only way to live. Take a chance this holiday season and do something that takes you outside of your comfort zone. Buy a stranger a coffee. Reach out someone you know who needs extra support right now with a phone call or lunch. Simply smile at someone.

You don’t have to know what you are doing. Take a tip from sociologist and researcher Brené Brown, one of the most admired people on the planet right now (for good reason). She has spent the past ten years studying vulnerability, courage, authenticity, and shame. She encourages us to practice being vulnerable every day. If you haven’t seen her TED talk on vulnerability, check it out today. It will change your life.

L: Let love lead you.

“We need to go after love with all our might and act as if we cannot live without it!”

I love this quote by Joyce Meyer in her article on how “Love Changes Everything.” If you are not familiar with Meyer, she is a New York Times bestselling author researching and writing about finding hope and restoration through faith. She is a lead pastor who teaches on a number of topics with a particular focus on the mind, mouth, moods, and attitudes.

When we let love lead us, it takes a bit of the self focus out of the way and brings a sense of play and whimsy to life. Everything comes down to this: love is what we are all searching for and want to experience. So when life gets a bit complex, or wildly busy and nutty, just reset your yourself with thoughts of love.

I think The Beatles said it best, “All we need is love.”

E: Energy Reboot

Lets be honest, more requires more. It is okay to call a time out and say so. Have a night in during this busy season of more socializing, more giving, more expression (more, more, more) for some self care and restoration. It is just what you need to reboot. Here are a few of my favorite things to replenish and refuel that tank:

- Bathe with essential oils (5 drops of lavender, 2 drops of ylang-ylang, 2 of rosewood)
- Drink a cup of tea (my favorite is Berry Detox by Yogi tea or the aveda comforting tea)
- Watch a ridiculous episode of 2 Broke Girls (stream for free on your laptop)
- Enjoy a massage or facial
- Read a great book and lose myself in it (The Rosie

Project is my current fave)
- Play with my dog (she loves playing catch with her plush animals)
- Listen to some good tunes (Rocking on Gwen Stefani’s latest or Michael Jackson always does the trick)

What’s your go to thing? What do you like to do that you know will give you an inner glow of ahhhhh. Make a list and post it somewhere to remind you that there are so many ways to be gentle with yourself and reboot. Practice these things daily (one, or more, might be just what the doctor ordered). Not only does this essential self care give to us, it really is a gift to our whole community. When we feel better so does everyone around us!

Let me know how you showed your gentleness this season. It takes courage and love to do so, but you deserve it.