

Your Zen Holiday Guide



Zen is a school of Mahayana Buddhism which asserts that enlightenment can be attained through meditation, self-contemplation, and intuition. For us, in everyday non-monastic life, we say Zen when referring to acceptance, calmness, and peacefulness. I have written this guide to help you add acceptance, calmness and peacefulness in dealing with the maddening stress that can accompany these fine holidays.

It is that magical time of year isn't it? Yay the joy and darn the stress!!! Our to-do-list keeps growing, our available time keeps shrinking, and our nerves keep getting more and more fried.

Last year, I quoted the Beastie Boys in my holiday newsletter, and it gives me such joy to do that I thought it deserved a repeat. Ad Rock, MCA and Mike D. may not have been talking about how to stay calm during the holidays, but it works nonetheless.

Let it flow - let yourself go - slow and low - that is the tempo.

This says that we need to:

- Relax
- Accept Myself
- Slow Down
- Accept Life as It Is

Perhaps I'm reading a little much in the lyrics, but they speak to me.

Well, it sounds good. BUT HOW??!!!

3 Simple Steps

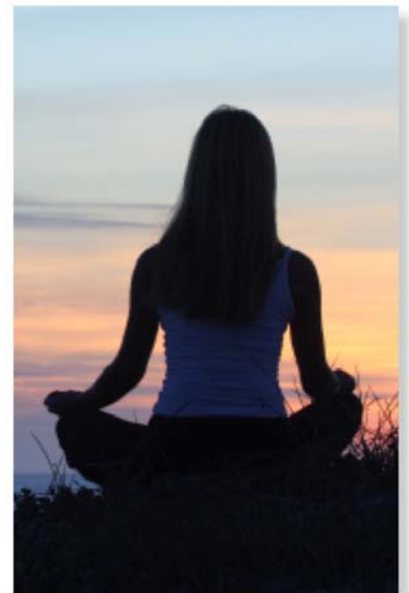
1. Take really good care of yourself.
2. Harness the power of intention.
3. Let go of trying to create perfection and enjoy this life, right here and right now.



Self Care

Find some peace. This does not necessarily mean meditation. In fact, delving deeply into a spiritual practice does not ensure happiness, as I found out in my [Holiday Meditation Challenge](#). Instead, try some of these ideas:

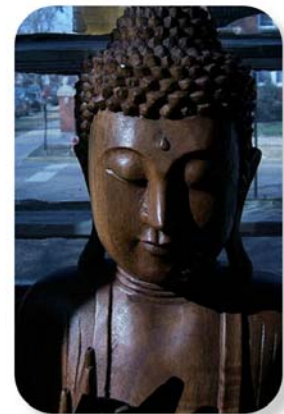
1. After returning from the stores, find something for the kids to do and lock yourself inside your bedroom. Turn on some soothing music and lie down on the floor for a few minutes. Take some deep breaths. Imagine breathing in peace and breathing out anxiety.
2. Take 30-second breaks (or longer of course) throughout the day. Just close your eyes and breathe deeply. Breathe in love. Breathe out stress. Imagine all worry and anxiety floating away and gentle peace growing within you.
3. Take Epsom Salt baths with candles and music. Give yourself a pedicure. If you can afford it, get yourself to the spa!
4. Each morning, take 5 minutes (or however much time you might have) and imagine white healing light surrounding you. Imagine breathing it in and being peaceful. You can even think of it as an aura boost protecting you from the craziness out in the world.
5. Every night before bed, send love out into the world. Really imagine our planet being blanketed in peace.
6. Pray for people and situations that just pop into your head.
7. Give what you can. Of course giving money to a charity is ideal, but a compliment, a loaf of banana bread, or a smile can do wonders to add more love to the world as well as increasing the size of your own heart.





Build up your Gratitude. I think we all remember being a snarky teenager and complaining about the gifts we received. Okay, maybe that was just me. (Poor mom and dad!) Gratitude takes practice and there are simple ways to focus on it more while also teaching your kids how important it really is to overall happiness.

1. Say your Gratefuls. While eating a meal, talk about your day with gratitude. It is okay to repeat. I think a warm house and hot food make my list every night at this time of year. Go around the table and share the things that you are truly grateful for. Also, it is a fantastic idea to include things about family members you will be seeing at the upcoming holiday festivities.
2. Keep a gratitude journal by your bed. Write down several things you are grateful for each morning after you wake up and each night before bed. Notice how your energy shifts that day.
3. If you don't have time for a gratitude journal - improvise. Think about gratitude while in traffic or first thing when you get to the office. Trust me - it makes a huge difference in mood.



Build up your Self-Acceptance. It always feels better when you think about gratitude, but some days the grouchy monsters come out too. Okay, sometimes it's everyday. Relax. Be Grouchy. The fastest way to misery is to try and deny your own feelings. Be honest about how you are feeling. Accepting your own imperfections and mood swings actually helps you accept and tolerate these feelings in others - including your own kids and extra difficult family members.

Don't neglect the basics! As tempting as it may be, it's so important for sanity to do the things you know you should do, but don't want to.

1. Get enough sleep. (VERY IMPORTANT!)
2. Drink A LOT of water, especially on days when you will be drinking alcohol that night.
3. Eat some vegetables. (Yes they count even if they are covered with cheese.)
4. Stretch for a few minutes in the morning.

Harness the Power of Intention

It is really easy to start focusing on the stress of the season! There's stress involved around: shopping, decorating, cooking, sending out cards, taking the perfect picture for cards, cleaning, overspending, getting ready to see the family and all kinds of other holiday traditions. It is completely natural to worry about, focus on, and dread the stress this time of year brings us. However, even though it is natural, worrying about it does little to remedy the problem.

Instead, focus your intention on what you would like to create. All you need to do is get out some paper and make a list of everything you are dreading about this season. Then, write an intention to turn around each of those situations. Here are two of mine to get you started:

I dread: the weird, stressful energy that accompanies holiday meals with my extended family.

Turning it around: This year, I intend to host our family holiday meal. I want everyone to be happy - including me. I want the food and wine to be wonderful. I want there to be music and candles. I want the air to sparkle with laughter, love and joy.

To do: Take time with the menu, involve the immediate family in planning, set out candles, play music, and take quiet time to put love into the house before people get here.

I dread: the stress of cooking and cleaning before the family gets here.

Turning it around: This year, I intend to slow down and enjoy the process. I want to have lots of breaks for hugs and dancing. I see my whole family smiling and cleaning and cooking.



To do: Make a plan so that it all doesn't get left until the morning of the party. Assign jobs with snack rewards for the kids and wine rewards for the adults. Play music. Put love in the food. While we are cleaning and cooking, set the microwave timer for 15 minutes. When the timer goes off, yell "Hug Break" or "Dance Break."

Give it a shot! Of course there is no guarantee it will work perfectly. Still, it really does help to dream, set intention, and take action. Heck - it is amazing what happens when you try this system in other areas of your life too!



Let go of Perfection

It is completely natural to want to have a perfect holiday season. From finding the perfect gift to decorating the perfect house to cooking the perfect meal, we want to create joy and happy memories.

Unfortunately, seeking perfection creates stress. It just is not worth it to completely stress yourself out in order to have a giant beautiful house, a giant beautiful tree, and a giant beautiful meal. I would much rather create a memory of sparkling joy, laughter and a happy momma for my kids, than a super fancy house, tree or meal with a stressed out mom.

This year I did just that when we started to put up our holiday decorations. Since the children were old enough to hang ornaments, we have always let them help with the tree. This year, I decided to take letting go a step further and let go of my house decorating perfectionism. I let my kids decide where almost everything should go. When I saw how much fun they were having, I decided that I didn't even care what the house turned out like. They were so cute! I even let them put this crafty country goose in our dining room. This goose is not my style at all, but it actually looks fantastic there. I was quite surprised. They did a terrific job, and it looks better than it did last year when I decided where everything went. Our holiday house has new vibrant energy, and it is wonderful!



I confess to even letting go to the idea of putting colored lights on the outside of our house. Ever since I was little, I associated white lights with high class decorating. Therefore, I have NEVER allowed multi-colored lights on or in our house. My husband has a great fondness for multi-colored lights and he told me he wanted to hang them up this year. Fine - I said. Yes, on the inside I was cringing a little. Again, they are awesome! I love them!!

For me, this year, letting go of perfectionism has just given new life to our holiday season. Maybe I am just appreciating the beauty of letting go and creating joy for my family. Maybe it doesn't actually look all that good. I DON'T CARE! It feels so good to see the beauty of joy in our home.

When you let go of perfectionism, you actually open to a brand new possibility that was not there before. You also let go of some fear of what will happen if it is not perfect. Sometimes it works out better than you could have expected, and maybe sometimes it looks terrible. It doesn't matter because you are still embracing something new and releasing something old. Let yourself and your perfectionism go, and enjoy your holidays!

Happy Holidays from Inspired Balance!



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