

## HOME FOR THE HOLIDAYS - HEAVEN OR HELL?

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"The mind is its own place, and in itself can make heaven of Hell, a hell of heaven." - Milton

Here we go again - whizzing into another holiday season with a sense that the year has passed by all too quickly. With thoughts now turning to balancing hectic schedules and family get-togethers, the mind becomes overwhelmed with thoughts and memories of holidays present and past. Small cues trigger strange responses as we become enmeshed in chaos of activity and often over-react to situations without even knowing why. In our ideals of perfection we want our holiday to absolutely flawless...and all family members to follow our expectations in their words and actions. Is it any wonder that depression and disappointment follow?

Why do so many people feel unappreciated, ignored or taken for granted? Why does there seem to be so much resentment that is carried on for years and years? What is normal and what is dysfunctional? How long does this need to go on? What can be done to make this year different?

Even if you grew up in an ideal family, there were times when your needs were not met. If you grew up in a toxic environment, the scars may be even more evident. To this day there may be times when you are still treated like a child. There may be intense emotional or physical reactions after spending time with your family. Your family may still control you with threats or guilt or shame. They may manipulate you with money. You may feel that no matter what you do, it's never good enough.

In the movie *War Games*, a computer was programmed to start a nuclear war. Every attempt to change the computer's program failed. But at the last second the computer stopped itself by saying: "Interesting game. The only way to win is not to play." The same is true about the game so many people continue to play - trying to get others to change! Often a person may struggle to get others to become loving and accepting. This struggle can drain energy and fill days with turmoil and pain... and it's all futile. The only way to win is not to play.

So this year it's time to stop playing and let go of the struggle. It does not mean that you have to let go of your family. It does mean that you have to let go of trying to get others to change so that you can feel better; of trying to figure out what you are supposed to do to get their love; of being so emotionally reactive to them; of carrying the fantasy that one day they will give you the caring support you deserve. Often you are going to a dry well and your bucket will come up empty again and again.

One of the most difficult parts of letting go of the struggle is letting your family members be who they are. You don't have to lie still while they ride roughshod over you, but when they try, you do have to learn to tolerate your anxiety and control your reactions to them. You have the right to set boundaries that are for the highest good of all concerned, including you. You have a right to set and hold fast to new ground rules so that you can have better relationships everyone. When you let go of the struggle you have more energy to focus on creating your life to be, as you want it to be. When you let go of the struggle you no longer have a need to sabotage your life.

True love doesn't grind you down or create feelings of hatred. Genuine love creates feelings of warmth, pleasure, safety, stability and inner peace worthy of true thanksgiving. Once you come to the realization of what love is, you may realize that your family couldn't or didn't know how to love. This is one of the saddest truths you may ever have to accept. But when you clearly acknowledge your family's limitations and create your life to be different, you open a door to personally experience a holiday that is filled with true love and gratitude.

**Dr. Darlene Treese** has been in private practice in hypnosis and counseling since 1983. She is a Diplomate in Counseling with the National Institute of Sports, Past President of the American Psychotherapy and Medical Hypnosis Association and Vice President of the Rotary eClub of Southwest, USA. Darlene has been internationally acknowledged for her positive action and solution-based therapies and work with corporations. "A person for the people," Dr. Dar is always available to help with your questions and dilemmas through office visits, email or telephone consultations. Call her at **850-201-0073** or visit **[www.AskDrTreese.com](http://www.AskDrTreese.com)**