





Holiday Journal

31 ways to cultivate more
peace and joy this season





“Be kind whenever possible. It is always possible.”

– Tenzin Gyatso, 14th Dalai Lama



The holidays are a season of comfort and joy, and, for most of us, ... some other things, too. We created this journal because with just a little planning, it's possible to experience more stillness, more peace, and more delight.

The Calm Holidays journal is a mix of practical mindfulness tips and contemplation prompts, and how you use it is up to you. You may choose to write on each topic daily for the month of December as part of a morning or evening practice. Or you may prefer to cozy in for an entire weekend, sitting with all of these tips and questions, alone or with a partner – a private retreat! Or, this journal may be something you reach for in the moment and choose a random tip to guide you as needed. However it is you use it, may it be a chance to extend to yourself, too, the kindness we celebrate this season.





Make a plan for calm.

The holiday season can be ... intense. We have more places to be, more people to see, more things to do. And, for many of us, the holidays bring emotional complexity too. In the midst of it all, it can be hard to find your center. So today, before it all begins, block off some time for self-care in your calendar. Take a moment to write a list of things below that keep you feeling nourished and balanced (a walk outside? lunch with an old friend? a trip to the bookstore? a massage? ...), and then schedule them into your December (there's a calendar on the next page)!

Remember that how you do these things is as important as doing these things. Meaning if you're taking a bath with a clenched jaw and running through your to-do list you'll likely miss out on the rejuvenating qualities of the activity. So, don't forget the subtle in self-care. Can you soften your jaw? Can you breathe a little deeper? Can you let yourself be supported by your chair?

List out a list of things that help you to feel balanced and nourished:



December 2019

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Prepare for presents

Take some time to write down a list of all the people you would like to give a gift this holiday season. Beside each person's name, do a quick brainstorm of what you'd like to make or buy for them. Then make a plan for when and how you are going to do this. We recommend scheduling it right into your calendar. Plan also for any other things you may need, like scissors, tape, wrapping materials, and cards -- so that way you're not rushing out at the last minute.

Whether you're making or buying a gift, as you consider each name on your list, take the opportunity to pause and connect a little deeper to the person. Don't worry if you didn't figure it all out today, just by starting the list you've asked your mind to start working on this – don't be surprised when brilliant ideas arise seemingly out of nowhere.

My holiday gifting to-do list:

FOR:

IDEAS:





Give yourself some quiet time



It's so important to check in with yourself each day. When life gets busy, there can be a bit of a snowball effect. Busyness begets *busyness*. And if we don't take some time every day to interrupt the "snowball" from rolling, it gets bigger, faster, and harder to stop, leading to burning out or, to keep with the snowball analogy, crashing into a wall. Meditation is one excellent way to create an intentional pause in your day, but if that's not your thing, that's okay -- there are plenty of other ways to experience some inner quiet.

How will you make space for quiet this holiday season?

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Reach Out

Many people experience feelings of loneliness and emptiness around the holiday season. Perhaps your family is far away, or your family doesn't accept you, or you're breathing through a breakup or your life isn't quite working out as you had hoped or expected. While the movies (and Instagram) can make this time of year seem magical, the reality is that most people will struggle in some way or another over the holidays. One of the worst things we can do is keep our feelings to ourselves, that just further isolates us. At the beginning of the month is a good time to reach out to let people know how you're feeling and to make some alternative plans so that you create more possibilities for connection. Ultimately it's our vulnerability that brings us closer to others. Perhaps you can volunteer at the soup kitchen, host a dinner for people whose families are far away or ask to tag along to a friend's gathering. Let go of the way you think things "should" be and explore new ways to invite joy into your life. Of course, we're not saying you have to push down your feelings. Tend to your loneliness and meet yourself with care and compassion always. Remember that you can feel both loneliness and joy. Mindfulness trains us to experience both without resistance.

How will you reach out this month?



Make your bedtime routine non negotiable

Or, if you don't have a bedtime routine, make one! We get it, you may end up having a few late nights this month. That's okay, but when possible try not to throw out your whole routine. Prioritizing sleep might be the best gift that you can give yourself this season. Some things that can help you settle your mind and relax your body include: staying away from technology 90 minutes before bed, dimming the lights or lighting candles an hour before sleep, spraying Sleep Mist on your pillow, listening to Sleep Stories, doing the Calm Body Evening Wind Down or completing one of our Deep Sleep body scan meditations. Experiment with a new addition to your sleep routine tonight.

How will you prioritize sleep this month?



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Stay Hydrated

Over the holiday season, it's not uncommon for many people to drink more alcohol and coffee, both of which are dehydrating. A handy hydration practice is to match every cup of coffee or glass of wine with at least one cup of water. It can also be helpful to pause and ask yourself why you're reaching for another beer or cup of coffee, to pause to see if this is really what you want (*"Yes, the bright citrusy notes of this pinot grigio are exactly what I'm after right now"*) or if there are other physical or emotional needs that you might be avoiding (*"Actually, instead of a coffee, I really want a quick cat nap"*). This will help you connect more deeply with yourself and build on your mindfulness practice, while also keeping your brain and body hydrated.

What's your hydration strategy?





Create new traditions

Sometimes we do things just because we've always done them. Traditions can be both powerful and beautiful but they can also be outdated and unnecessary. It's good to check in with yourself and other friends and family about your traditions. Do they make you feel grateful, joyful, and peaceful or do they cause stress, strain, and depletion? Maybe it's time explore new ways of connecting and celebrating with your loved ones? Change takes time and there will no doubt be a handful of different hopes and opinions so it's good to start to have these conversations early, knowing they may take years to sort out. Perhaps something that you generally find tedious, feels lighter once you understand how much it means to your Grandma. Or perhaps you discover that no one really gets anything out of a particular tradition and you all laugh when you realize that you were all doing it for each other. Most importantly, get to know what everyone values about the holiday and see what creative ideas you come up with to best meet everyone's needs. And, remember, tradition can be touching and meaningful without being expensive or a lot of work.

What tradition would you like to let go of? Why?

What tradition would you like to start?





Be mindful about sugar



Sugar is EVERYWHERE and for many of us, it can stimulate and stress our bodies. Be prepared to find cookies, cakes, and chocolates around every corner. Every fruitcake and doughnut is an opportunity to practice mindful eating. Before you reach for a sweet, check in with your hunger levels and the emotions underneath your desire to eat as a way of building awareness. From there, if you choose to eat the snack, do so with presence and pleasure. Tune in to your senses to truly touch, smell, and taste. Express gratitude for the food and resources and hands that made it possible for you to experience this food. Notice what shifts with your relationship to food when you give yourself permission to savor it.

How do you practice mindful eating?

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Know and honor your needs

'Tis the season to be generous, but at what cost? If we don't honor our own needs and take the initiative to create boundaries for ourselves, resentment arises and that doesn't serve anyone. How would it feel to trust that you know what's right and best for you? Perhaps what's necessary is to realize that sometimes when we say no to others, we're saying yes to ourselves, and that is an act of self-care. Of course, it can be complicated when we're spending more time with family, friends, and coworkers. For example, we might want to show up for our family but get really drained as everyone gathers around the television to watch the football game. What if you watched the first quarter and the last quarter and went for a walk in between? Spending within your means is another way to honor your needs. How might you show your dear ones that you

Be creative. How can you be generous with others while still taking care of yourself?





Be kind

Mondays are almost always challenging and especially so when stress levels are up, parking lots are full, subway cars are jammed, or the weather is bad. It's the perfect day of the week to perform random acts of kindness. Buy the person behind you a coffee, hold the door for someone, let someone go ahead of you (even though they're being a jerk), bring flowers for a co-worker, or offer to do someone an unexpected favor. Our actions, big and small, affect the world, and your kindness has the potential to make someone's day better.

What acts of kindness that have been offered to you have been meaningful for you?

How do you want to be kind this year?



Co-create the holidays



Do you get caught up trying to make the holidays magical all by yourself? Do you work so hard at making the holidays wonderful for everyone else that you end up being too stressed, tired, or busy to actually enjoy them? It's time to delegate and collaborate! It might not turn out to be your exact vision but the beauty will come from the collective effort. Tell people how they can help. Many people are happy to help they're just not sure how. Let people know what to expect ahead of time. If people are so used to you doing all of the heavy lifting that they are not willing to help out, then decide how much is realistic for you to do without sacrificing any holiday cheer for yourself. After all, connection is the point, not the perfect pie or the prettiest decorations.

What tasks can you delegate this year? Who would be willing to help out?

*“If you think you’re
enlightened, go
spend a week
with your family.”*

– Ram Dass





Be aware of triggers and learn how to ground yourself

Spending time with family can feel pretty good until someone says the wrong thing and your inner angry teenager appears. . It's a tale as old as time and no doubt the inspiration behind the famous Ram Dass quote, "If you think you're enlightened, go spend a week with your family." Nobody knows how to better press our buttons than our family; they were probably the ones who made them. So it's best to prepare yourself for the next family gathering. A few good questions to contemplate are: Who in your family triggers you? What boundaries do you need? What body and behavior signals warn you that you may be close to fighting, fleeing, or freezing? Put another way, what is your very first sign of distress? What can you do in those situations so that things don't escalate and you can support yourself? This is not easy, it takes practice (and sometimes therapy) and requires compassion in all directions.

What boundaries do you want to put in place this year?

When you get triggered, what supports you to feel more grounded?

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Be mindful of how you talk about your body and other bodies

From getting dressed up to dinner parties to spending time with family, many people will deal with difficult feelings about their body image over the holidays. As if the barrage of unrealistic beauty ideals we face year round isn't already enough!? Everyone deserves to enjoy the holidays without being shamed for how they look or what they eat. Remember that the words that you use can be a powerful step towards creating a body positive culture for all. Here are a few phrases to try out from Bevin Branlandingham,

- *"Hey, I try to be neutral about food because I think all bodies are good bodies."*
- *"Hey, I'm worried about commenting about the value of food and body insecurity in front of these little ears nearby. I'd love to help them love bodies of all sizes so they don't end up with food or body issues."*
- *Cultivating a culture of food enjoyment is really important to me. I would love to enjoy this delicious food instead of assigning value to it!"*

Of course, it may not always feel safe to talk in this way and we don't have a lot of control over what others do and say, but we can notice the impact of what we say and choose our words wisely. It's also really important to practice self-compassion if you find yourself in a space where people are body shaming you, themselves, or others. This kind of talk hurts a lot of people.

What does this bring up for you? How do you support and care for yourself around body image stuff?





Remember that you are enough

Many of us experience some form of social anxiety and it's not unusual for it to feel heightened during holiday gatherings and parties. We worry about saying the "right" thing, wearing the perfect outfit, and people liking us. We encourage you to be your perfectly imperfect self in upcoming social situations. If you're feeling shy, be shy – maybe people will appreciate your smile and warm presence. Be curious about the people you are with and use this as fuel to facilitate connection rather than wasting time analyzing what the funniest/coolest/smarest thing to say might be. Every time you catch yourself judging yourself, take a moment to take a deep breath, remind yourself that you are enough and then practice walking, talking, and breathing as if that were true (because it is true).

Write out "I am enough" 31 times.

*“Walk as if you are
kissing the Earth
with your feet.”*

– Thich Nhat Hanh





Choose your battles wisely



Your family is bound to get on your nerves a little while spending so much extra time together in close quarters. It can be tempting to start a fight or to try and sort it all out in a night. The holidays are not the most effective or appropriate time to unpack complicated family dynamics that have formed and solidified over years. Take a step back, relax, go with the flow, and find ways to take care of yourself. If it's important to you to sort out these issues in this lifetime make a commitment to figure out how to tackle them later in the year.

What can support you to go with the holiday flow?



Let things go

No doubt people will do things that are annoying and get under your skin. It can be easy to go to a place of “they’re wrong and you’re right.” Let’s face it, you probably are right, but getting stuck there just causes tension in the jaw and tight muscles in the upper back. It can be helpful to imagine that everyone is doing their best; even if their best sort of sucks today, we can’t always know what’s going on for someone. Did they get in a fight with their partner this morning, are they late picking up their kid, do they have something scary they have to share with a loved one at dinner? When we realize that life is so much more complicated than being wrong or right, it’s possible to soften a little and forgive someone for cutting in line or not saying thank you when they ought to. How might we work together to make this often challenging time of year a little easier and a whole lot kinder?

What do you want to let go of this holiday season?

*“Look at other people
and ask yourself if you
are really seeing them
or just your thoughts
about them.”*

– Jon Kabat-Zinn





Honor the ones that you've lost



If you've lost a loved one, the holidays can be one of the most painful times of year. With so much pressure to feel merry, it can be hard to know what to do with your grief. Giving yourself permission to feel your sadness is important. Find a way to do this that works for you. Perhaps you go for a few extra therapy sessions this month. Or, maybe you create a new tradition to honor the memory of your loved one, like lighting a special candle.

How do you want to honor the memory of your loved ones over the holidays?





Be Generous



Volunteer your time at the local family shelter or meal delivery program. Donate money to your favorite charity. Bake banana bread for the neighbors. Listen to a friend who's going through a hard time. Ask someone who is overwhelmed if you can support them. How might you help bring some holiday cheer to someone who isn't feeling so cheery?

How do you want to give back this season?



*“When I started
counting my blessings,
my whole life turned
around.”*

– Willie Nelson



Practice Gratitude.

Take some time to think about all that you're thankful for in your life this holiday season. For each thing, take a deep breath, and for each person you are grateful for, send a quick text or note. (You just might make someone's day during the busiest time of year!)

Write down a list of everything and everyone!

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Be open to change



Life happens and all too often not how we expect it to. Sometimes we need to shift our plans. Maybe everyone got sick in your family and you'll need to stay home instead of attending a holiday party. If feelings of disappointment arise, take a bit of time to sit with them and offer yourself some compassion, then open yourself to new possibilities like enjoying a movie or cozying up with a book. If feelings of guilt arise, take a moment to express the loss that you're feeling to the people who are impacted by the change and then try to let it go. We can't control everything.

How can you support yourself when plans change?





Find nourishing ways to connect with others

You may find parties and big gatherings overwhelming and not the most optimal way to feel connected with your dear ones. Connecting with others is proven to relieve stress, boost well-being and support mental health. So be sure to create some opportunities for the sort of connecting that is meaningful and fulfilling for you. Bake cookies with your kids. Go for a walk with a friend. Sip tea with a loved one. Wrap presents with someone who makes you laugh. Whatever you do, don't go the busy holiday season alone. It's so much more fun to wait in line with a friend.

How do you want to connect with others over the holidays?

*“Taking care of yourself
doesn’t mean me first;
it means me too.”*

– L.R. Knost





Moderation



Indulgence is often encouraged and celebrated during the holiday season. While this can be fun in the moment it can often leave us feeling crappy later. Sometimes we can make space for the not so fun consequences, while other times it might be stressful if you're hungover when you're set to meet your new partner's family for the first time. Cultivating awareness around what the right balance of food and drink is for you can help you to feel your best physically, emotionally, and mentally during this busy time of year.

Where in your life would moderation support more peace and joy?

23 *Practice beginner's mind*

Even though you've experienced the holidays many times before, it's important to remember that this is the first time you're experiencing this moment with these people at this time. Beginner's mind is a mindfulness practice that invites us to meet the moment with openness and wonder. Naturally, when you see a certain family member, a set of thoughts, views, judgments, and assumptions will arise. While some of this may be true, it limits us from opening to the bigger mystery of the ever-changing person. As a practice, you can notice the thoughts that come up, take a deep breath, and say to yourself, I don't know. Let go of your views and allow this moment to be fresh. If, in the end, the person doesn't really surprise you with their actions, remember that you are not the same person and that you have the power to respond differently.

How will you reach out this month?



Be Present



The greatest present we can offer each other is our presence. So many people suffer in the world because they don't feel seen, heard, or understood. Listen deeply and with compassion. Be curious. Ask questions. When you notice yourself getting distracted, gently bring yourself back to the conversation.

Who in your life would you like to be more present with?



Practice receiving fully

While we might easily feel delight when we give a present, it can be challenging to feel that same spark of joy when receiving a gift. Many of us feel awkward around accepting a gift. This year we challenge you to move a little slower as you open your presents and allow yourself to take in the moment. Include your body and heart in the process. Feel the emotions that arise as you open the gift; savor the tactile experience; and think about the person who spent time, energy, and money to get this gift for you. Without rushing, soak in the offering and take a moment to look the person in the eyes and say thank you.

What did it feel like to give yourself more space to practice receiving?



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Get Outside

Take a deep breath of fresh air. Smell the trees. Feel the sun on your face. One of the most powerful ways to de-stress is to spend time outdoors. Eating, drinking, and socializing can be hard on your overall well-being, so give yourself a break with the restorative effects of nature. If it's cold, throw on some layers and go for a hike. If it's hot, find a natural body of water and go swimming. Notice how a little time in nature makes you feel.



What's your favorite way to spend time outside?





Play



Tap into the child within and connect to a sense of wonder. Let go of all of the things you should do and explore the possibilities of play. Go tobogganing. Play a game. Color. Daydream. Paint. Go on an adventure with your dog. Be your favorite movie character at dinner. Experience something new. Start a water fight. Dance. Sing. Get crafty. Let go of needing to be productive and even good at whatever you choose to do. Instead, give yourself time to be spontaneous and unleash your imagination. Notice how a little fun transforms your body, mind, and spirit!

What did you love doing as child? Can you bring a little bit of that back into your life?

“Always jump in the puddles! Always skip alongside the flowers. Never turn down a good pillow fight.”

– Terri Guillemets



28 *Rest*



Spend the night in. Make popcorn. Watch a movie. Read a book. Meditate. Do a puzzle. Take a night off from work, to-do lists, and making things happen. Move slow. Breathe deep. Take a long bath. What would be really nourishing for you? Do that. Every time you notice your mind getting distracted about the things you could or should be doing, take a deep breath and say, I give myself permission to reset and rejuvenate.

What's your favorite way to rest?



Reflect

Set aside some intentional time to look back over the past year. You might light a few candles post-meditation and journal in quiet solitude, or you may prefer this exploration in the good company of friends, perhaps as you contemplate over tea in the early morning light, or you may make a ritual out of it, burning notes of what you want to let go of in 2020. Here are some questions to explore:

What were the highlights of this past year?

What was challenging for you in 2019?

What did you learn in 2019?

Who was important to you in 2019?

What did you let go of in 2019?

*“The future is always
beginning now.”*

– Mark Strand





Open up to a new year

To resolve or not to resolve? There is no wrong or right, although both camps will often have you believe otherwise. If you resolve to do anything in 2020, we advise doing what's right for you. Whether you set any intentions for 2020 or not, it's worth taking a moment think about the year ahead.

What are your hopes for 2020?

What do you want to cultivate in 2020?

Who do you want to spend time with this year?



Open up to a new year

How do you want to feel in 2020?

What will help or hinder your efforts to live well in the year ahead?

Do you want to make intentions/commitments/resolutions? Why or why not?



31 Celebrate

You've survived (and maybe even thrived) for another circle around the sun!!! Congrats! That's worth celebrating. As we all know, being human can be hard work. There are bills to pay, lunches to make, lessons to learn, goodbyes to breathe through, hurts to heal, and battles to fight for a better world. Amidst all of this, there were moments this year that you found yourself smiling, laughing, dreaming, connecting, loving and grateful. Take this day to celebrate the goodness and beauty of your life.

Go out dancing.

Play games with friends.

Meditate.

Take a yoga class.

Sing around a fire.

Enjoy.

