

ARE YOUR HOLIDAYS IN ALIGNMENT WITH REALITY?

BY KAITLYN VITTOZZI

In the yoga and fitness world there is lots of talk of being in alignment – making sure bones and muscles are properly ordered and stacked so you don't injure yourself while lifting heavy weights or while you are balancing on one leg. If car tires are out of alignment you may not steer straight, and could end up paying for new tires sooner than necessary because they will wear out faster.

Are there places you are wearing yourself out too quickly? Are misalignments causing you physical, mental, emotional, energetic, and spiritual wear and tear? While I do work with clients who suffer neck, back and shoulder pain from sitting in less than perfect posture at desks all day – a physical misalignment – I also inquire if that job is weighing on them unnecessarily mentally, emotionally, energetically, and spiritually.

While 2020 is uniquely, 2020: very possibly loaded down with grief and sadness, I would argue that that's not that different than what many Americans experience every holiday season. Bread winners who would love nothing more than to have their home look like a Hallmark movie, but they are too busy working to provide to get to enjoy the days with their children – and then poof it's January 2nd. Moms who are pulled in 50 different directions every day, physically depleted then add holiday shopping, decorating, baking and (zoom) parties on top of it.

There is good news, and potential for change. As Jenny Jaffe said in early April "You're

only being unproductive by the standards of the world that we lived in a month ago, and that world is gone."

While I know many folks are sad we can't have our normal way of doing holidays, this may be the time to create a better life and pace than you ever thought was possible. It will be hard work and practice at first, but perhaps much lighter a burden in the end.



Hear me out. I am not simply a new-age millennial minimalist anti-establishment single thirty-something here to tell you you're doing it wrong. I value family above all else, and November and December are my favorite two months of the year. The lights, the cookies, the glitter, the shopping holds a special place in my heart. But there were also years that the reality of my holiday season wasn't living up to my expectations and that left me devastated and depressed. When you are pushing through day-to-day, it is easy to get into a narrative about how

your day-to-day is going instead of being in the direct experience of living your life. Sometimes when I think holidays, I think of some perfect fiancé sweeping me off my feet while we look for a tree – but the reality is I'm single. So maybe you are thinking "Well if your fantasy is better than your real life, stay in the fantasy. Stay in the make-believe." But research shows otherwise.

If you look up Norman Farb's 2007 Mindfulness Study you'll see that our default narrative is likely to interfere with our direct experience – or what we're experiencing and living moment-to-moment.

Here is an example. Pretend it is New Year's Eve and you have a glass of wine in your hand, seated on the couch watching the snow fall. The default narrative might sound like this in your head – "Tomorrow I change my diet, I don't know how I let myself get to this size, that credit card bill is due next week I shouldn't have gone overboard on gifts.

Where is he right now I only sent him to the store for one thing he's so inconsiderate. Oh I'm empty already let me go pour more wine." Now go back to that same scenario, but you're living in the present moment (direct experience). This wine is delicious, is that pepper I taste? Look how elegant that house looks across the street in the snow. Your family member tells a joke and you're listening, so you laugh.

Which sounds more pleasant?

As a Phoenix Rising Yoga Therapist – we usually work through the following eight



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themes for transformation. Rarely are they linear in a personal growth journey, but they are all important.

- Befriend the Body
- Awareness
- Acceptance
- Choice
- Discernment
- Truth
- Truth in Action
- Flow

Obviously, our menu of options is a little bit different this year – celebrating anywhere exotic might be a little bit out of reach. I cannot tell you what your ideal holidays look like, but I would like to give you some food for thought on how you might figure it out and execute them.

1. Hard physical work. Go for a really quick walk or do some jumping jacks right where you are. Try to make yourself near breathless for a few minutes. If it's outside in the cold – even better, you're in the direct experience of feeling lungs pumping in the cold.

2. Pause and close your eyes, sitting or standing. And picture your favorite holiday moments. Simply watch them for a minute or two.

3. What do they make your body feel? Warm, fear, stress, joy, rigid, full. Name it.

4. What makes those memories and feelings so important to you? Either answer to yourself or journal about them.

5. What do you hate about the holidays? Pause, see if you can find the root source of that.

6. What are you going to do with that information?

While for some this takes years, these are

some of the first steps in turning your truth into truth in action.

My truth is that I love spending time with my family – whether it be December 25th or Tax Day. My action step is that I choose to be fully present to them when we are together – so I put my phone on silent and leave it in the other room whenever possible. It also stops me from saying “Wait what did you say?” to my poor parents every time we're together.

I dislike sitting still for a full day, and it hurts my back. So, on holidays, I take time for a walk with the dog or a few yoga poses in the other room. Got kids, pets, or family in the room you can't leave? Invite them along with you. Maybe sitting on the floor is your change this year.

Have you been wishing for smaller, simpler holidays for years? Try it on this year. Feel what you can say no to. Change the traditions if they're no longer in alignment with your truth.

The only constant is change, and once we accept that reality – life gets easier.

One last example. In my early twenties my boyfriend of five years broke up with me. I dreaded that first Thanksgiving apart. I loved my ritual of celebrating at my parents' house and then going to his. My mother knew, that my depression would probably sink the table as a whole. So she made a change. We started going out to dinner in the Finger Lakes each Thanksgiving – taking a drive, experiencing different scenery and foods we ordinarily would not order. While it was originally a last ditch effort to make me feel better, it had a surprise consequence of being less work for her, and something we all really started looking forward to.

For Thanksgiving 2019 we went to the

Krebs in Skaneateles. A nice hour drive from Rochester, with exquisite food and service. On the way home, we did something “spontaneous” (note – this is our reality, for some spontaneous might be flying to Marrakesh). We stopped at Bass Pro Shops in Auburn. None of us are hunters, or even that outdoorsy, and we are definitely not Black Friday midnight shopper types.

My sister and I laughed non-stop, trying on hats, buying silly gifts for our brother. It was so simple, but in hindsight we did not realize how extraordinary those experiences would seem a few months later. Not a single negative thought crossed my mind for those few hours. I was in the direct experience of flow.

We would have loved to replicate that in 2020, but it wasn't possible – but by practicing living in the moment quietly, at home, under 5 people – we accepted and loved the new moment-to-moment reality that was.

There can be beauty in unexpected untraditional holidays. One step toward your truth at a time.

Please let me know how you are mixing up your holidays this year!

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