

# The Ice Breaker

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“A spiritually optimistic point of view holds that the universe is woven out of a fabric of love. Everything that is happening is ultimately for the good if we’re willing to face it head on and use our adversities for soul growth.”

–Joan Borysenko, Ph.D

## Dealing with Uninvited Holiday Guests

Yippee! It’s holiday time and people seem to be energized with the decorating, the shopping, the baking, and all the other hustle and bustle of celebrating. Some people, that is . . . Others look ahead to the holiday season with dread and foreboding.

For many people, the holidays bring uninvited guests that can take all the joy out of the season.

### The unwelcome visitors

Long before Thanksgiving, some people look to the days ahead as a burden. They feel that they must ensure that family and friends have the best gifts, even if they are working with a limited budget. They may be exhausted at the end of a day’s work, but they will push themselves to bake into the wee hours to make everyone’s favorite goodie. They’ll put all their free time into planning, decorating, cooking, shopping, and have very little energy left for themselves.

At that point, **self-pity** shuffles into the kitchen and takes a seat at the table. Self-pity loves a hard-working person who thinks she’s doing a thankless job. Self-pity settles in and begins telling our holiday dynamo that no one appreciates the hard work, no one will offer to help, no one is working half as hard as she is, and if it all doesn’t come off as a stunning success, they will blame her for failing them.

Self-pity’s old buddy **resentment** will appear next, hovering over everything. He loves to take over where self-pity leaves off, encouraging the hostess to internalize some outraged judgments about her family, her friends, and her lot in life. Resentment can make the most ridiculous notions seem perfectly reasonable. The hostess begins to believe that she is not only overworked and unappreciated, she thinks that her family is putting her in this position on purpose!

Resentment is always followed by the most unwanted guest at family gatherings: **anger**. Once anger sets foot in the door, hopes for a peaceful holiday party are off the table. Anger can cause a person to simmer in silence, leaving the guests to wonder who or what is the cause of her obviously bad mood. On the other hand, anger can lead to snide comments, veiled insults, and finally, screaming matches, and sometimes violence.

It will be difficult later for the combatants to remember what actually led to the altercation: **stress**.

For a person who is chemically dependent and trying to maintain sobriety through the holidays, the uninvited guests described above can precipitate a relapse, just as they could at any other time of the year. Self-pity, resentment, and anger can lead right into justifications for drinking or using and down again into the spiral of abuse. The disease and its ever-ready tools of denial and shame will move in for the kill.

### What’s a person to do when these uninvited guests show up?

For starters, we might stop setting a place for them. Why do we set ourselves up for failure by

imposing ridiculous standards? Maybe we can enjoy the holidays just as much if we leave out a few of the time-consuming traditions. Maybe the big family dinner can become a potluck buffet, where everyone can bring a dish to pass. Maybe we can get everyone to draw names for gifts, instead of trying to buy something for everyone. Maybe we take the accent off gifts altogether, and make a family donation to a favorite charity.

Maybe we can take some of the craziness, the errands, the overspending, the overindulgence in goodies, the TOO MUCH of the present day holiday season, and restore the peace of that first Christmas over 2000 years ago.

Imagine it: the guests were animals, but they brought the gifts of their spirits and warmth, the host and hostess were of humble means, but they shared what they had. The guest of honor lay in a manger, new to the planet, full of great potential, Himself a gift to all the world.

No lights, no cards, no hustle and bustle, no trees, no socks and underwear wrapped in colorful paper, no tears, no fights, no hurt feelings, no self-pity, no resentment, no anger. . . **May we all have that measure of peace and serenity this Christmas!**

### **Word of the Month: Peace**

We all use words to praise, to express love, to hurt, to vent our anger, and to try to make others understand us better. We've chosen twelve words that we think can have both very positive and very negative connotations, and we'll take a look at both sides each month.

**“Peace is not a relationship of nations. It is a condition of mind brought about by a serenity of soul. Peace is not merely the absence of war. It is also a state of mind. Lasting peace can come only to peaceful people.”**

**–Jawaharlal Nehru (1889 - 1964)**

. . . and that's the dilemma, so few of us are truly peaceful people. We can want peace with all our hearts, but if we don't grasp what it is that brings peace and serenity to our souls, we can never achieve peace inside or outside of ourselves.

What a gift it would be, if we could simply *know* how to achieve it, if it came in a box we could open and *ah ha, that's what it is!* We would take it out and drape it around ourselves, feeling immediate, everlasting peace.

Ah, but it's not that easy, and one size does not fit all. One man's peace and serenity may be another man's road to ruin. There's no question that Spirit, a Higher Power, is at the center of finding peace, but there are many trails and lot of guides who want you to go exactly their way.

As in many other things in life, it might be better to start small, in a little corner of yourself, where you can speak freely and not be afraid of sounding foolish. If you are not accustomed to prayer and meditation, it may be hard to let go and allow yourself to speak to a spirit, even in the silence of your mind. As humans, we always complicate the process, thinking we need worthy words of piety and humility, but God accepts us as we are, and even if you rapped a prayer out like Snoop Dogg, the meaning would drown out the voice.

Speak to that Kind Spirit from the depth of your soul. Lay your burdens down at his feet and ask him to take them from you, or at least to give you a hand in carrying them. Tell him that you are grateful for what you have, even if you think you have nothing of any worth (in time, you may learn that the less you have in the world, the more you have in your heart). Speak for others, asking that they, too, can have the peace of the Spirit within. Then, take a good, long time to listen. Be still within that quiet place and see if you can hear a loving voice, more of a sensation than an actual sound, come from somewhere out of the silence. Do this often, and with hope for the peace to come.

**If man does find the solution for world peace it will be the most revolutionary reversal of his record we have ever known.**

**–George C. Marshall (1880 - 1959)**

It seems hopeless, sometimes, when we look at how our government, civic, and even church meetings can dissolve into a conflict of one sort or another.

Why are we humans so contentious? We have a long and violent history of not getting along, and as the centuries pass, it seems we will never get it right. Even those among us who have found an inner peace can be brought to fisticuffs when the situation seems to warrant it. What is it going to take for us to all live peacefully together?

Unfortunately, our quest for oneness with the Spirit can create a lot of the discord in the world. Religious, or Holy Wars have been with us throughout history, and it is shocking when we can find so many quotes throughout the Bible and other holy texts that speak against the judgment that makes these wars feasible.

In a nutshell, here is what is behind most of the “Holy Wars” in the world:

The Jewish people are widely believed to be the first to recognize “the one true God.” They are often referred to as “God’s Chosen People,” signifying a special relationship with God. If we were speaking in terms of computer software, to be Jewish would be to have “God 1.0”.

During the time Jesus spent on the planet, he said “I bring a new covenant,” and the belief in his identity as the Savior of man and Son of God spread throughout the world. He brought the world a new version of software: “God 2.1”

Just over 700 years ago, Mohammad brought a new message from God. “There is no God but Allah” (also translated as “there is no God but God”) and five pillars on which a new religion, Islam, was built. In computer software speak, the Muslims have “God 3.2”.

Not only are we using different “Godware”, we all believe that ours is the only one that works. When we add in the different denominations: the Catholics, the Lutherans, the Orthodox, the Sunnis, etc., faith and belief becomes a frightening and confusing subject.

If we are ever to have any kind of peace in the world, we’re going to have to leave it up to God to sort out who’s using the best software to stay in His good graces. My guess is that, as with computers, it’s not a question of how the software performs, it’s the quality of work the user produces.

## **The Origins of the Serenity Prayer**

Short in content, simple in its language, the Serenity Prayer has probably saved more lives and comforted more souls than nearly any other formal prayer, with the exception of the Lord’s Prayer, which

was authored by Jesus Christ.

In the movie *Billy Jack*, authorship of the prayer is mistakenly given to St. Francis of Assisi, but the actual author may be far less well-known.

Reinhold Niebuhr is the one most credited with authorship. He seems to have written the prayer for use in a sermon, perhaps as early as 1934, or perhaps in the early 1940s.

Elisabeth Sifton's book *The Serenity Prayer* (2003) quotes this version as the authentic original:  
*God, grant me the serenity to accept the things i cannot change; the courage to change the things i can; and the wisdom to know the difference.*

A query in the "Queries and Answers" column in *The New York Times Book Review*, July 12, 1942, asks for the author of the quotation; and a reply in the issue for August 2, 1942, the quotation is attributed to Niebuhr and printed text is quoted as follows:

*O God and Heavenly Father,  
Grant to us the serenity of mind to accept that which cannot be changed; the courage to change that which can be changed, and the wisdom to know the one from the other, through Jesus Christ our Lord, Amen.*

Niebuhr recalled that his prayer was circulated by the Federal Council of Churches and later by the United States armed forces.

The prayer became widely known when it was adopted in modified form by Alcoholics Anonymous; an AA magazine, *The AA Grapevine*, identified Niebuhr as the author (January 1950.)

The prayer's origin is often attributed to Friedrich Christoph Oetinger (1702-1782), but this attribution may be the result of a misunderstanding of a plagiarism of the prayer by Theodor Wilhelm, an ex-Nazi professor at the University of Kiel.

On the other hand, Dr. John Sasser has produced photographs of a Gasthaus, built in 1849 in Bergen-Enkheim, Germany, which contain the words of the serenity prayer above the windows of the first floor. Dr. Sasser notes that Dr. Niebuhr is quoted in the January, 1950 *Grapevine* as saying the prayer "might have been spooking about for years, perhaps centuries." He concludes, therefore, that Niebuhr was certainly not the original author.

Whatever its history, it cannot be denied that those words, on the lips of a person in deep distress, resonate down to the soul to bring peace and serenity.

As the old year draws to a close, many of us ponder the time that has passed. Did we have enough fun? Give enough to charity? Tell our loved ones how much they mean to us? After a little contemplation about the past year, we look to the year ahead, full of resolutions to do better than we did in 2007. The poem below may help us resolve to make the time pass without regrets.

## **Wasted Time**

**The time that I've wasted is my biggest regret;**

**Spent in these places I will never forget.**

**Just sitting and thinking about the things that I've done;**

**The crying, the laughing, the hurt and the fun.**

**Now it's just my and my hard driven guilt;**

**Behind a wall of emptiness I allowed to be built.**

**I'm trapped in my body, just wanting to run;**

**Back to my youth, with its laughter and fun.**

**But the chase is over and there's no place to hide;**

**Everything is gone, including my pride.**

**With reality suddenly right in my face;**

**I'm scared, alone, and stuck in this place.**

Now memories of the past flash through my head;  
And the pain is obvious by the tears that I shed.  
I ask myself why and where I went wrong;  
I guess I was weak when I should have been strong.  
Living for drugs and the wings I had grown,  
My feelings were lost, afraid to be shown.  
As I look at my past, it's so easy to see,  
The fear that I had, afraid to be me.  
I'd pretend to be rugged, so fast and so cool;  
When actually I was lost, like a blinded old fool  
I'm getting too old for this tiresome game  
Of acting real hard with no sense of shame.  
It's time that I change and get on with my life;  
Fulfilling my dreams for a family and wife.  
What my future will hold, I really don't know;  
But the years that I've wasted are starting to show.  
I just live for the day when I'll get a new start;  
And the dreams that I still hold deep in my heart.  
I hope I can make it, I at least have to try . . .  
Because I'm heading toward death, and I don't want to die!  
-author unknown