

## WHAT DO YOU BRING TO THE TABLE?

I love gathering around the table for meals. Whether it is a special occasion such as Thanksgiving, a dinner party with good friends, Sunday night family suppers or lunch with a friend, I love the idea of “lunching” and “dinnering” for the sake of sharing a meal and having great conversation.

My childhood was filled with southern family dinners made with food created from fresh, flavorful ingredients and lots of love. Coming together represented not only a time to get nourished, but also a way to get fed physically, emotionally, relationally and spiritually. Yet these celebrations were, and are, not without typical family dynamics and life transitions resulting from births, deaths, marriages, divorce, re-marriages or simply extending a seat at the table for those needing a place to go. From year to year it seems the flow is constantly changing from the number of place settings and the names on the place cards to where we celebrate and the type of gathering, yet we continue to come together to commune. Sometimes when I am sitting at the table now, I look at my children, niece and nephew and think about the legacy being left for the next generation. I hope that this tradition of connection and communing will be passed on to future generations.

Communing starts with eating, drinking, telling stories, and then moves to sharing a part of ourselves and learning more about each other. It goes beyond just lunch or dinner... communing requires a more intimate communication, conversing with depth and intensity, or having an interchange of profound thoughts, ideas and feelings. It is about bringing our values, our beliefs, our experiences and, most importantly, our authentic self to dinner and then discovering what others are also sharing. As American writer Richard Bach wrote, “The bond that links your true family is not one of blood, but of respect and joy in each other’s life.” The happy memories created serve to keep us bonded and connected, offering joy to everyone around the table. Do you see the good and look for the joy?

As the holidays approach, often there is extra stress that is present when people come together to celebrate important rituals. Many times the experiences are rich with meaning, tradition and laughter, and a natural communing happens. But for some people, coming together around the table can also create anxiety, stress and downright dread. Whether you are the guest or the host, let your tasks be performed with total involvement and loving nourishment. Take it easy and let the mundane and seemingly simple tasks set the stage for bringing forth sacred connections, love, laughter, and joy to be experienced by everyone at the table.

The point is to intentionally and thoughtfully plan your gathering, and fully show up and be present, remembering to leave behind any unwanted dynamics or unnecessary stress. What are you providing and contributing to those assembled for the festivities? What are you bringing to dinner... and did you remember to include your best you?

### WHAT ARE YOU BRINGING WITH YOU? SOME THOUGHTS...

- Your authentic self
- Manners (after all, I am Southern!)
- Curiosity and active listening
- Caring and compassionate heart
- Favorite memories and best stories
- Laughter
- Respect and kindness
- Honoring past and present elders
- Old traditions and new rituals
- Thoughtfulness and a helping hand
- Open-mindedness as well as viewpoints
- Your latest experiences
- Boundaries, not barriers

Of all the qualities you can bring, make it a priority to be present. Savor the food as well as company by fully engaging with love, gratitude and joyfulness, by bringing and sharing your unique you, and by fully engaging in the experience. As Lao Tzu, Chinese mystic philosopher and founder of Taoism, said, “In dwelling, live close to the ground. In thinking, keep to the simple. In conflict, be fair and generous. In governing, don’t try to control. In work, do what you enjoy. In family life, be completely present.” As you gather around the table, arrive fully prepared to enjoy each and every moment with each and every person.

### WHAT ARE YOU LEAVING AT HOME? SOME THOUGHTS...

- Technology (iPods, cell phones, laptops and earphones)
- Past issues and emotional baggage
- Resentments and passive-aggressiveness
- Drama and unkind words
- Unrealistic expectations
- Controversial topics
- Judgments and close-mindedness
- Hijacking or dominating the conversation
- Blame and hurt feelings
- Envious eyes and jealous heart
- Boredom
- Your own agenda and self-indulgences

### COACHING QUESTIONS TO PREPARE FOR A GATHERING

Below are some inquiries to guide you in planning or attending your next gathering. Consider not only the ambience you want to create, but also the details you need to enhance the experience.

- What kind of gathering do you want to plan? Fun and casual or quiet and formal?
- If you could set the perfect table, who and what would you include? What meaning do you want to make of this event?
- Who is part of your tribe? Who do you want to invite to your table? Who or what makes you laugh?
- What contribution do you want to make to your family? Friends? Community?
- What do you want your guests, and yourself, to take away from this event?
- How have you withheld your true self from those around the table, and how do you want to change that? How do you want to show up?



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