

# WHAT DO YOU BRING TO THE TABLE?

BY DARCY SIMONSON AND SHEILA SORNSIN, THE GRATEFUL GODDESS

**G**rocery stores are bustling in preparation for a holiday season stuffed with opportunities to feast in the company of family and friends. Although the kitchen is full of delectable food designed to create a perfect holiday experience, sometimes family dynamics can cause us to leave the table with a sour taste in our mouths. Perhaps the reason this happens is due to the wide range of unsavory, and often sugar-coated ingredients, that are thrown into the family pot – ingredients such as sarcasm, bitterness, resentment, anger, jealousy, abandonment and

blame, sprinkled with a dash of duty, obligation, stress, apathy and a fistful of finger pointing.



Godess of Giving artwork © Darcy Simonson

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We may show up at our relative's home with the agreed-upon dish, but what are we really bringing to the table? While the holidays offer an opportunity to extend gratitude, acknowledge others and recognize the rituals of our faith, they can also resurrect feelings from the list of unsavory ingredients above. Fortunately, not everyone suffers the effects of difficult family dynamics, but most of us will admit that there are kin who rub us the wrong way, despite what we believe to be our best attempts to get along. It might be a passive-aggressive sibling whose stealth slams go undetected by everyone but the two of you; an embarrassing uncle with a knack for making your skin crawl; or a gossipy aunt who follows you around until you break down and contribute a word to her verbal cesspool. But just because that's the way it's always been, doesn't mean that's the way it must al-

ways be. There are ways you can contribute to creating loving relationships and peace, if not on earth, at least around the dinner table:

**1** Try to detach from what is happening around you, so that you can observe from a fresh perspective. Allow whatever is, to be. This may take a bit of discipline, but when you are able to remove yourself emotionally from a situation and observe it from a place of non-judgment, you will likely see the absurdity behind what has created the dynamic, and be able to find an opening for forgiveness, compassion, or empathy and from there be able to instigate change, if only in yourself.

**2** To effect change, examine who you are. In the mirror you'll find that finger you wag at others is pointing back at you. Think of the world as a giant mirror, with every situation, interaction and relationship reflecting how you think, behave and what you believe. Sometimes you'll see incredible beauty, which you may acknowledge in others and unknowingly possess. Other times, it reflects what you deny within yourself and project onto others, which is then projected back to you through them. The reflection offers us an opportunity to recognize and shed what we don't like in ourselves and expand what we do. For example, if you're fed up with your competitive sister always trying to one-up you, examine in the mirror that she is holding up why that bothers you. Do you feel inadequate? Why? Is it really you who is competitive? What do you gain by playing the game? Do you hear

your father's distant voice whispering a perceived favoritism? When you look honestly into the mirror and root out the rot, you can cultivate relationships from the only truth, that of present-moment reality and release the distorted reality which you likely created in childhood.

**3** How do you contribute to the family dynamics? Take responsibility for the role you have played in creating, aiding and abetting the challenging relationship. Then, accept the responsibility of creating change. Gandhi said, "Be the change you want to see in the world." There is no better place to begin than at home. Release the resentments, anger, jealousies and memories that don't serve your highest good in the relationship. That may be easier said than done, but it doesn't negate the fact that if you want things to improve, and ultimately create a genuinely joyful relationship, you must take responsibility for having helped create the problem. Forgive yourself and others and move forward. Remember that forgiveness doesn't mean condoning what has been done, but releasing the situation so as to

reclaim your power. From that point you can start feeling like a victor, rather than a victim, and take responsibility for the rest of your life. World leader and teacher in the New Thought–Ancient Wisdom tradition of spirituality, Michael Bernard Beckwith, reminds us that another way to look at forgiveness is to think of it as, "Thank you for giving me" this experience from which to grow. Gratitude is a tremendous healer, as when you acknowledge the experience as a learning opportunity, you can find the gift in it and release the pain.

**4** Humor is extraordinarily helpful in dealing with funky family dynamics. You can't control every situation or behavior that erupts around you, but you can change how you perceive and react to it. Comedian Jeff Foxworthy must love family gatherings – they are a well-spring of comedic material and none of it eludes him. Whether you're laughing inside or outside, remember that someone is likely laughing at you, too. Don't fret, join them! Being able to laugh at our fallibility is a kindness we should all afford ourselves; its gift is the

freedom to be who we really are. We can then extend that freedom to others, and when we accept their humanity and laugh at our own, even the sourkraut tastes a little sweeter.

## Recipe for Loving Relationships:

- (L)laughter, with others and at ourselves
- (O)bservation, without judgment
- (V)ictor, thoroughly coated in responsibility
- (E)xamination of self, as reflected by others

Mix ingredients in the family pot. Sprinkle with good humor, forgiveness, compassion, and a little sugar. Dollop equal amounts on each plate. Eventually, everyone will at least sample what you offer.

Musings of Modern Goddesses reflects the observations and philosophies of Darcy Simonson and Sheila Sornsin, co-creators of The Grateful Goddess.

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