

Often people unduly upset themselves around holiday seasons. It seems that there are two basic irrational beliefs for this. One, „everything should be perfect“ and two, „Everyone should behave appropriately“. The first question is usually, why irrational? Well, these beliefs are irrational because, simply put, they never happened. Therefore, becoming upset is programmed. Hence, irrational. Let me explain.

„I just want everything to be so...“, this statement, and many like it, is true for the most of us. If you are however feeling tense, anxious, stressed or under pressure you are taking this wish *too* seriously and thinking something more like „everything should be perfect“. In other words, you are irrationally demanding that either yourself or the universe make a perfect event happen and if it doesn't, then it's just terrible. Since a perfect event can't occur, I'll save you the philosophical discussion, you are bound to be upsetting yourself before, during and after the event. Even when the event goes well, it is still not perfect and you will be too tired to reap the rewards of having pulled off a nice, impressive or event great event. Beyond that, you yourself will have seen all of the little flaws that you were so hoping to avoid. So, it is important that you convince yourself that you would *prefer* to have everything go smoothly, but it is hardly *necessary*. And even if things go poorly, your world will not come crashing in on you - that we can even prove.

The other belief, „everyone should behave appropriately“, means that we wish that others, especially family members, would share the same desires to get along with one another and to show it in a behavior that we can recognize. Again, this belief is a pretty tall order. For example, suppose that you are invited to someone's house for a party. You probably consciously make an effort to compliment the host(ess) on the meal, preparations, decorations or whatever; because that is what people do. Later, you are the host and your mother-in-law comes over. She proceeds to ramble on endlessly about this illness or that divorce and completely neglects to compliment you on what a good job you've done. You become angry and hurt and wish that the horrible-old bat would never return. Maybe this even leads to an argument with your spouse; because he/she didn't stand up for you. Now, if you were to convince yourself that it is *unfortunate*, not *horrible*, that our mother-in-law, doesn't seem to possess the same manners as we do; and that we would have liked, yet not *needed*, her approval; and that although she may behave poorly in our eyes, it doesn't truly make *her* horrible; then you won't feel rotten! How do I know this?

I know this because about 60 years ago a psychologist named Albert Ellis tied several loose ends together and developed the first cognitive therapy - Rational Emotive Behavioral Therapy (REBT). I'll save you the details, but in general Ellis proved that humans are largely responsible for making themselves feel bad. Humans do this by thinking various self sabotaging thoughts, e.g. Irrational beliefs. If we change these beliefs into rational ones, i.e., flexible and preferential beliefs, we suffer less, despite the hassles of life. In order to change our irrational demands back in to preferential wishes, it usually requires some assistance and practice. Generally, ask yourself how horrible is this really - on a global scale? Do I really *need* this or do I just *prefer* to have it in order to make life more comfortable. One of the ways to integrate this new philosophy into your head is to take one of the rational sentences above and basically mediate on it. That means consider it from all intellectual angles, find arguments for or against them. Slowly you will start to *feel* that they are correct - you feel more relaxed and less dissatisfied. You can also purchase an Albert Ellis book to help you along the way. And of course there is always one on one help available to help you master your cognitive change.

Happy rational holidays!