

## Your Personal Coach

Kathleen Brehony, Ph.D.

**Dear Kathleen,**

**My family is steeped in tradition. Every year at holidays we do exactly the same things. We've taken a "family vacation" together and my mother insists that we continue to do this, even though our kids are teenagers and have no interest in heading to the coast of Maine to the family compound for a month in the summer. My siblings and their kids, aunts, uncles, cousins are all there. It's a pain to get everyone together, and I have to use all my vacation time to make it happen, which leaves nothing for other activities. How should I handle this?**

**-- Over Family Vacations**

Dear Over,

Are there any extra rooms at the family compound? This humble columnist likes the sound of those words together "coast of Maine" and "family compound." Sounds kind of fancy and relaxing at the same time, like a place where staff might serve cold lemonade at the tennis courts. You're not part of the Bush family, are you? Still, this is not the way you would like to spend your vacation, and that's what matters.

Traditions and rituals serve a wonderful role helping us learn how to live, but sometimes we have to change. We have to question the old ways of doing things in order to find even better ways. Sometimes we have to question authority, put our foot down, and find our own path.

Let me give you an example of a way in which tradition doesn't work. An ancient Zen teaching story says that once upon a time there was a spiritual teacher and his disciples who were always interrupted in their evening meditation by a noisy cat. The cat would saunter into the temple, test his claws on the meditation cushions and then begin to meow, meow, meow. The monks loved the cat – they fed him regularly and gave him lots of love. They certainly didn't want to hurt him so they gently tied him with a rope to a post where his constant talking wouldn't disturb their contemplation. Years later, when the teacher died, the cat continued to be tied up during the meditation session. Years after that, the poor old cat died and so another cat was brought to the monastery and tied up during meditation. Centuries later, learned descendants of the spiritual teacher wrote scholarly treatises about the religious significance of tying up a cat for meditation practice.

There's wisdom in knowing when to hold on to traditions that serve us while being able to get rid of those that don't. For example, you may want to keep to your family traditions around holidays and serve your great-grandma's fabulous pumpkin pie, but you may also want to ditch grandma's refusal to take risks or try new recipes. Today, ask yourself what old beliefs serve you and which ones keep you tying up a good cat for no good reason.

Consider a shorter amount of time on your "family vacation." Let's not throw out the baby with the proverbial bathwater. It's a good tradition – I think – for extended families to spend time together. Even though your teenagers may have other plans, in the long run, they will benefit from having spent time with their grandparents, cousins, etc.

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It's wonderful for families to get together, but how about a week instead of a month? This allows you to spend family time, please your mother, and still use some of your remaining vacation time to pursue other interests. That could be the best of both worlds, yes? Tennis anyone?

Send your personal coaching questions to [kathleen@fullpotentialliving.com](mailto:kathleen@fullpotentialliving.com) or call 473-4004. Kathleen is a personal and executive coach, clinical psychologist, and writer. (©2003 Kathleen Brehony. All Rights Reserved.) All of the "Your Personal Coach" columns are archived at [www.fullpotentialliving.com](http://www.fullpotentialliving.com).