

2 bah humbugs & hold the fa la las

There's a little Scrooge in everyone, psychiatrist David D. Burns says.

Having no joy in the present and no faith in the future, Burns says, this crotchety old fuddy-duddy emerges at Christmastime to paralyze holiday plans and pulverize year-end resolutions.

But everyone is his own Santa Claus, 100 Burns says. Most people realize this and simply obliterate old Scrooge in a round of tree-trimming and holiday good cheer, coming out on the other side of New Year's resolved to carry on.

Burns is a kind of Santa Claus himself. An assistant professor of psychiatry at the University of Pennsylvania, he's author of a book entitled "Feeling Good, The New Mood Therapy." It outlines techniques for combating depression without drugs.

Burns calls depression the "common cold" of mental disorders.

About 80 percent of Americans have it at one time or another, he says, with about 20 to 25 percent getting serious doses. The more serious cases can lead to suicide or other self-destructive behavior. These arise when the depression lasts two weeks or more.

He says depression is "a syndrome characterized by 'blue' moods, being down in the dumps, feeling like a failure, not 'as good' as others, attended by crying, irritability, trouble making decisions, difficulty sleeping, loss of appetite for food or sex, social overeating and

preoccupation with physical aches and pains."

That in itself is depressing. And Burns himself admits to being "less than joyous" during this time of year. But Burns has a method he uses to overcome his own blue moods and it is the same one he suggests for others.

"Don't measure your self-esteem by what you do or by what others think of you."

He says most human beings predicate their sense of self-worth on four value judgments:

- I must be perfect in everything I say and do.
- I must be loved by other people.
- I must have other people's approval.
- I must be successful.

HUMBUG, BURNS says.

The hardest one to overcome during the Christmas-Hanukkah period, he says, is the "I must be loved" statement. At New Year's, it's the "I must be successful" statement.

"Make a list of the advantages and disadvantages of the belief," he says. "Then go through the list and rewrite it. Do you really have to be 'successful'? Or are you doing all right, right now?"

"You will find that you're already worthwhile. The trick is to stop being dependent on external events and people for your feelings of happiness."

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