



Beyond Parody: Christmas Season Is About Tolerance, Love And Understanding

by Ty Bechel

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It is holiday time, which is when many people talk about, "it's better to give than to receive." I spend a lot of time reading people's comments on social media on various topics, and naturally, I see how people respond to addiction. I have to say, there is such a misunderstanding of the disease of addiction and how over 24 million Americans (or more) should or should not get healthy. Some people respond hastily with a hateful comment about another human being getting well. I wonder if they were harmed by someone in active addiction or are just so flagrantly flawed and everything is awful to them (a real Scrooge – pun intended). In the recovery community, the idea of Christmas and giving is built into our culture, sprinkled with discernment, tolerance, love, and understanding.

I repeatedly let people know either on the podcast I host, *Recovery Uncensored* or in speaking engagements that I know I do a lot of work to help others. Still, there is an entirely beautiful, imperfect, and loving group of people that make up the recovery community. The recovery community I am part of may be equivalent to the Island of Misfit Toys from the 1964 stop-motion animated Christmas classic film *Rudolph the Red-Nosed Reindeer*. The entire movie is, in my opinion, kind of like being in active addiction and being an outcast because we have been shamed into the shadows and convinced we have not worth (so far from the truth, we have so much worth). When Rudolph arrives on the island, he and Hermey are talking with Charlie-in-the-box. Rudolph realizes the island is for misfit toys and says, "Hey, we're all misfits, too. Maybe we could stay here for a while." However, King Moonracer doesn't let them live on the island, but he does accept them as friends, allowing them to stay the night and asks them to help the toys find children who can love them.

I work as a Lead Certified Peer Recovery Specialist (CPRS) at one organization and at Amare as the Executive Director and as a Recovery Coach. My two phones are usually going off day in and day out. I get calls from distraught mothers as their voice trembles from holding back the fear and sadness for their son or daughter. I will get calls from pastors to help with one of their congregation's members. I will get calls or texts from individuals in active addiction desperately asking for help. It is heartbreaking some days. I am an empath by nature and can absorb secondary trauma no matter how much I talk through the overwhelming feelings. It reminds me that the pain of those I help is real.

I sometimes think about Jesus and how he felt at times helping people with many different ailments. I have had people I help back out at the last minute for treatment or get upset with me and call me derogatory names. And let's get one thing clear, I am not a religious person, but I am quite spiritual and do believe in inter-faith movements to help the world move forward. Honestly, I really enjoy scriptures from Taoism, Buddhism, and the four Gospels from the Bible. But, helping people though they may "Judas" me, does not prevent me from helping them or their families. I think of Jesus' final words in Luke when he says, "Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do." And I believe many people, especially in the recovery communities, are wounded healers and understand what it means to help and guide their daily lives by the code of love and tolerance.

I worked with an individual that had struggled with drug and alcohol addiction for many years. The backstory of their life was enough to make me cry when I sat at home thinking of what they had been through as a child. I needed to help find them clothing, as they didn't have much. I sent out a few texts, called a few people, and put out an APB on social media for items from the checklist. Within 10 minutes, 3 people stepped up as more followed. We had the checklist met with an Amare board member and two people from the recovery community. All three of them rushed to get me the items, and the individual was in shocking awe at how quickly **WE** arranged it. I told them we are looking to change our communities led by love versus hate and shame. This is an idea recovery and finding a God in my life taught me over the years.

We don't give up on each other. We can't. Not any longer. The hate and anger must dissolve, or we will kill each other more quickly and not even know it. I don't know precisely how to erode the blockage of love and tolerance in many hearts, but I know how to do it in mine. Gandhi said, "The best way to find yourself is to lose yourself in the service of others." Humility taught me I am equal. Love taught me to hold my head up high in confidence. And a helping hand opened my eyes when I was in my time of

need. I forgave myself then learned how to forgive others. Life today is not perfect, but it is reasonably happy, and I learn something new every day because I choose to remain teachable.

Keeping to the theme of this column, this is not a parody by any means. It is so much more rewarding to give than it is to receive. I know because I feel it nearly every day. Merry Christmas, Happy Holidays, Happy Hanukkah, Kwanzaa blessings, and may the new year be blessed with a transformation, both individually and collectively for you, your families, and our communities.

In the words of the band, Yes, "Love will find a way if you want it to." And that is what truly makes the world go round.