

**Simple Gifts**  
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*Hygge*. That's what we so often experience when we're together on Sunday mornings. Connection, coziness and fellowship. It's nice; its restorative; it's very conducive to happiness and relaxation.

*Hygge* is a Danish word that encompasses all of this and more. It's tricky to say; I listened to an online site where I could listen to several Danes say *hygge*. But it is a simple concept, and the Danish people credit their commitment to *hygge* with helping them achieve one of the highest happiness ratings of any country in the world. *Hygge* is largely about focusing on what most contributes to their happiness and well-being. Its closest translation would be, "all warm in the bosom of the house."

*Hygge* is finding joy in simple pleasures and communing with loved ones in a low-key, but meaningful way: sipping warm drinks, watching the snow fall, embracing (and making the best of) a cold evening. *Hygge* is the warm hearth, the comfy sofa, singing and laughing with friends; the kind of relaxed enjoyment that only flourishes when no one is trying to impress anyone. It warms and comforts, refreshes and rejuvenates the soul.

One can find *hygge* in solitary pursuits, such as curling up in a comfy chair with a good book, or going for a walk out in nature. *Hygge* is enhanced by simplicity and beauty in one's surroundings, having fewer things of high quality that you use and enjoy daily. It's about presence and openness, acceptance, and balance.

We all *hygge* naturally in the routine things we do for comfort, such as kicking our shoes off at the door, pulling down the blinds at night, running a bath at the end of a working day, or pulling on woolen socks first thing in the morning. Wrapping in a blanket; a mug of hot chocolate; watering the plants; listening to music while washing dishes. "Each of us," one article says, "clears a path to *hygge* in our own way through the actions that we repeat, like dancers who take time to rehearse the same series of movements until they flow through them with grace and ease."

All the sources I read agreed, though, that the essence of *hygge* is most fully found when together with other people. It's being with your tribe, sheltering each other, letting down your guard and feeling fully present to each other. It is laughter, play, lightheartedness, being informal and unrestrained, relaxing in the way you can be when no one is trying to impress. Sharing a meal is the epitome of *hygge*, nourishing our bodies and spirits.

Expressing love by doing small things is part of the vocabulary of *hygge*, like preparing a family member's favorite dish, putting a hot-water bottle between cold sheets, wrapping a gift with particular care. *Hygge* is the spirit in which we give and receive, reclaiming some human dignity in a culture of relentless activity and productivity, and creating space for loving kindness.

Modern life, with its pressures and enticements to over-schedule, can be isolating. *Hygge* is a great antidote to that. Here are some suggestions I found to help us embrace the long, dark days of winter with optimism:

- Get out. Don't be a shut in. Break out of your routine and seek warmth and companionship for cheap, good fun: a walk, a latte, singing at your place of worship. Get fresh air every day.
- Have frequent, low-key and unpretentious get-togethers. Use soft lighting, good music and comfortable chairs.

- Start or join groups: Book clubs, salons, card or game groups, Super Bowl or Oscar parties, cooking, knitting, whatever you enjoy doing can be more *hygge* if you do it with others.
- Share simple meals. Cook extra one evening a week, or on Sundays, and invite others to join you.
- Create a cozy feeling with warm seasonal lighting and candles instead of overhead lighting.
- Scuttle the clutter. Get rid of objects you never touch and that bring you no joy.
- Instigate and initiate. Contact friends, family and those you love and miss, with whom you've lost touch. Set dates; make plans; look forward to it.

As you may have noticed, none of this is new. We already know how to *hygge*. What we really need is our own permission to make these simple, soul-nourishing pleasures a priority in our lives. To listen to what our hearts really desire. To let our warm, animal bodies want what they want. To realize that when we make it a point to receive these simple gifts in our lives, regularly, we become more able to do our best work, think creatively, bless other people, and stand up to the challenges and pains that life throws our way.

We would do well to make it a priority. We need *hygge* to thrive as much as we need food and sleep. It is vital! Don't leave it for "when everything else is done." Get some *hygge*, welcome and embrace simple gifts, every single day. Resist the voices in your head that say it's silly or that you don't deserve it or that you don't have time. Claim the gifts that life offers. We all need a *hygge*.

'Tis a gift to be simple, 'tis a gift to be free. May we find simplicity and freedom, and may joy flow through us with grace and ease.

Amen and blessed be.