

## **“Tyranny of Choice” Contributes to Stressful Holidays**

Psychologist Barry Schwartz of Swarthmore College believes that the marketplace, especially at holiday time with its emphasis on buying gifts, can present us with a bewildering and ultimately debilitating array of choices. With so many choices available, he says, we are more likely to feel that anything that falls short of perfection is a failure. We may feel driven to spend too much time, money, and energy seeking ever further for the “perfect” gift. This is exhausting. In addition, since we are human, we do fall short of perfection, and thus we are set up to feel like failures.

How to counteract this? Remember that research about happiness shows that a sense of being connected to others is what tends to promote true happiness and contentment. This connection can be with people, animals, the divine, nature, or the universe. Research also shows that once one reaches a very modest income that allows for basic needs to be met, increased financial wealth does not correlate with increased happiness.

So try to resist the powerful messages in our society and media that insist that ever more material things will lead to happiness. Remind yourself that this is a false idea, no matter how heavily promoted. Often our most positive memorable moments are made up of very simple components – a walk, a prayer, a song, a conversation, an exchanged smile or laugh, shared tears, a good meal when we slow down enough to really taste the food. Try to focus on what truly gives you, and your family, a sense of well-being, contentment, and connection, and spend some time and energy focusing on those activities during the holidays. Exercise choice from the inside out – starting with recognizing what truly satisfies you, and choosing from there, rather than being driven by market messages to seek the “perfect” gift from a massive array of possibilities.