As for the New Year being happy,
Let it be swathed in mystery!
That’s my wish for the New year.
– ISSA

What do you wish for this new year?
More money? Less weight? To get pregnant or have your novel published? Issa wishes for life to unfold as a mystery, and so he will get his wish, for there is no other possibility. We don’t know what will happen this coming year. We don’t know what will happen this next moment. We try to assert control over our destiny, but our future lies outside our control. We may get some satisfaction, some comfort, from accomplishing our goals, but the real challenge is to be comfortable with mystery. The mystery is that you don’t know what’s going to happen and the comfort is “that’s OK.” What a relief it is to give up control of the universe. Life unfolds, moment by moment, and we watch it mindfully, attentively, because it’s fascinating. We’re part of this mystery—each of us. Our own unpredictability is what makes the mystery so mysterious. So Issa wishes for life to be the way it is. And he wishes for us to simply be ourselves. This is truly a wondrous and extraordinary wish for the New Year.

Thank you, Issa.

year’s end—
what made me think I needed a harmonica
Carolyn Hall
As we approach the New Year we are in transition – it’s time to come to closure with 2012, with all the joys and sorrows that came our way, and to begin a new year, 2013, with the mystery of things to come. Many of us are naturally inclined toward introspection and reflection at this time. We become aware of our struggles and losses, our mistakes, our moments of joy as well as the kindness of others who crossed our paths. We have an opportunity to consider our good fortune in celebrating the gift of another year of life.

Reflection should be more than a sentimental experience. If done properly, it can inform our decisions and choices for the year ahead. It can help us live in a more conscious and deliberate way as we consider what was left undone and what needs to change.

So I encourage you to take time and pause before jumping into goals and resolutions. Whether you take a few minutes, or an entire day, invest some time in looking back and reflecting on your life. It’s a great investment in the next year of your life.

The following suggestions are adapted from *Naikan: Gratitude, Grace & the Japanese Art of Self-Reflection* (Stone Bridge Press) by Gregg Krech – (p.172-175)

1. Reflect on your mother, father or other people who have supported you during the past year. You may have received things during an earlier time period, but still benefitted from them during the past year.

2. Do Naikan reflection on someone with whom you’ve had difficulty, conflict, or tension during the past year. This is often the type of self-reflection we don’t feel like doing. We have our story – we are the good guy and they are the bad guy. Sincere reflection allows you to change the story.

The basic format of Naikan reflection is simple: You look at a specific person for a specific time period. You then consider three questions, writing down your answers in three separate columns on paper:

What did I receive from _____?

What did I give to _____?

What troubles or difficulties did I cause _____?

In general it is useful to spend 45-60 minutes for each period of reflection.
3. Make a list of up to one hundred things you’ve received this past year without providing any compensation or consideration. These could be things you received as gifts, things you stole, or things you used without payment.

4. Reflect on your speech this past year. In what ways have you spoken critically, harmfully or inappropriately about others? How did this cause harm or trouble?

5. Write thank-you letters to those who have cared for you and served you this past year. Be specific and personal. You can end the year by thanking those who have supported you and they can begin the year by knowing your gratitude for their efforts.

6. Write down each of your main roles in life (Father, husband, son, worker) and for each role consider what is most important for you to do in the coming year.

7. Sit quietly and reflect on the possibility that this year will be your last year of life. What is important for you to do if that turned out to be true?

8. Have a family meeting with parents and children. Create a “map” on poster board of the highlights of the past year. Include graphics, drawings and photos. See if you can capture the year on a single poster. Then discuss who and what made those highlights possible. Finally, use your year-in-summary to discuss what you want to do or accomplish as a family in the new year.

9. What have you learned this past year – skills, knowledge and life lessons? Who taught you? Make a list of all the people and objects that helped you learn and grow – personally, professionally and spiritually.

- Pema Chodron

Don’t try to resolve your reflections and tie them all up nice and neatly into a package of goals or resolutions. Just sit with the questions and consider your life and your conduct this past year. Sit with your reflections for the first few days of the year before you come to any conclusions about what needs to be done in the coming year.

Best wishes for a wonderful new year filled with good health and many new adventures and mysteries.
Making a Poster of the Past Year

by Gregg Krech

A great way to come to closure for the year is to capture the year on a single piece of paper (a poster or flip chart works nicely). The result is a concise map of the year that captures some of the key moments, joys and sorrows of the past year. If you have a partner or family, this can be a great exercise for everyone. First, have each person in the family spend some time privately responding to the prompts listed below. Then get together and capture your items on paper. You don’t have to answer every item and you may have things to add to this list. Just use it as a starting point. When you’re finished, take a photo of the result and you’ll have something to share with your grandchildren in years to come. The more immediate value of this process, however, is that it will stimulate thoughts and ideas of how you wish to live your life in the coming year.

Reflect on the following items:

1. Favorite trip or vacation
2. Memorable moment with each of your family members – Mom, Dad, siblings, spouse
3. Most important accomplishment (personal – professional)
4. Most important thing left unfinished
5. Healthiest lifestyle change you made
6. Most supportive person outside your immediate family and an example of what they did to support you.
7. Favorite gathering (conference, party, etc. . .)
8. Creativity – Something you created yourself (a poem, a knitted scarf, a painting)
9. Favorite book you read
10. Most important contribution you made to someone else’s life
11. Favorite Song
12. Biggest regret
13. Favorite gift you received
14. Most important learning (something new from 2012)
15. A time when you made a fool of yourself (and you can now laugh about it)
16. Greatest sadness or loss
17. Something about someone else’s life that made you happy
18. Greatest physical accomplishment
19. Favorite Breakfast
20. Best movie

Happy New Year!
Making New Year’s Resolutions Stick: Q&A with an Expert on Change

By Maia Szalavitz

John Norcross, a professor of psychology at the University of Scranton, is one of the world’s leading experts on how people change addictive behaviors. Over the past 30 years, he and his colleagues have studied people who successfully quit smoking, cut back or quit heavy drinking, lost weight or started exercising regularly — including those whose lasting change began with a resolution to start on Jan. 1. He outlined some of his strategies in his book, Changeology, and discussed how to make resolutions work.

What are some of the most important things you can do to make your New Year’s resolutions stick?

First it’s believing that it can be done. There’s a lot of cynicism surrounding New Year’s resolutions and it’s unwarranted. Our research indicates that somewhere between 40% to 46% of New Year’s resolvers will be successful at six months. That’s probably a bit higher than the proportion who actually succeed, because calling people every couple weeks [the way we did for the research] tends to help and thereby increase success.

The second key [to success] is being realistic. Many people confuse fantasy with reality. Resolutions are supposed to be specific and realistic and measurable. In the book, we talk about the acronym SMART, which stands for Specific, Measurable, Attainable, Realistic and Time-sensitive.

What are the five steps toward lasting change that you lay out in the book?

I. Psych Stage

Over last 30 years, we’ve been investigating how people change on their own, including several studies on New Year’s resolvers. It occurs quite naturally over a series of steps. It begins with psych, which is becoming motivated, specifying the goal and understanding motivation. [We see it as] the two-headed llama: being disgusted with our problem but also drawn toward the new goal. So, rather than just harnessing the power of one, we tell people to do both.

II. Prep - the Second Stage

That’s planning, starting to practice the new behavior. You can’t just root out the old. So if the goal were, say, to reduce drinking, what behavior will replace it? At this stage, you also begin to arrange for a support system and make a public declaration [of your goal]. Like any other lengthy journey, you have to do a fair amount of planning.

III. Perspire

It’s Jan. 1, you’re actually changing your behavior. Our research has demonstrated that it’s not [insufficient] willpower, it’s rather a series of learned skills that distinguishes successful resolvers from unsuccessful ones.

If you give people huge drinks, they drink more; with a massive buffet and large plates, people eat more. When you package smaller snacks, people don’t complain.

“Typically, it takes several months to stabilize and solidify any new behavior. It’s not a 100-yd. dash; it’s going to take some time.”
**Making Resolutions Stick (continued)**

**IV. Persevere**

That’s overcoming slips. There will be obstacles and slips. One of my favorite results from any of our studies is that a majority of successful resolvers said that their first slip actually strengthened their resolution. [We had thought] this is failure. But 71% of resolvers said that their first slip strengthened their desire to change. It’s an erroneous belief that slips lead inevitably into falls.

**So what should you do if you slip?**

Most immediately, tell yourself that a slip does not need to become a fall. [Instead, think], “This can be my wakeup call and I can immediately get back on track.”

**V. Persist**

We should mention here the importance of [supportive] relationships. These are wonderful at any time, of course. But while we want people to get their “change team” up and ready early on, in the early stages, most people can make it [without much help]. When people really need [support] is a couple of weeks into the New Year. That’s when you really need support, and that’s when slips start coming on.

**How long does it typically take to make a change that sticks?**

Typically, it takes several months to stabilize and solidify any new behavior. It’s not a 100-yd. dash; it’s going to take some time. If anyone said you could succeed by taking one whack at calculus or playing the piano for a few weeks, [you wouldn’t believe them]. When it comes to behavior change, people have been promised miraculous results. Our minds are not set realistically about what behavior change takes. On one hand, it’s very encouraging that people can now harness the science of change. On the other hand, we need to be a tad more realistic.


---

**Whatever Happens, Happens**

*Nature is like the hurricane. Whatever happens, happens. We don’t want that in our life, however. We want a hurricane that takes other houses, but not ours. We constantly seek a safe little haven in the middle of the hurricane of life. There is no such place. Life is really about simply living and enjoying whatever comes up. Because we have ego-centered minds, however, we think that life is about protecting ourselves. And that keeps us entrapped. An ego mind is self-centered. It spends its time thinking about how it’s going to survive, be safe, comfortable, entertained, pleased, non-threatened at every juncture. When we live this way, we’ve missed the boat. We’ve lost our center.*

Charlotte Joko Beck

---

**Leap after Leap**

*Living is a form of not being sure, not knowing what next or how. The moment you know how, you begin to die a little. The artist never entirely knows. We guess. We may be wrong, but we take leap after leap in the dark.*

Agnes DeMille
Who doesn’t like to be comfortable and safe? How sweet are the moments in which we are cozy and relaxed, not challenged by temperature, hunger, thirst, mosquitoes, noise, biting wind, pain, or anxiety. Aaahhh. Very nice. It’s great to enjoy these moments of comfort and ease. But when comfort becomes our guiding principle in life, dominating our airwaves and determining our choices, we are in jeopardy of losing our vitality. In the quest to keep our world safe and predictable, and in our effort to avoid discomfort and challenge, we are also limiting our potential exhilaration and vibrancy. They go hand in hand—the feelings and sensations that arise when taking on a challenge or adventure—and the feelings and sensations that arise when finding our way through. That is an extraordinary ride that heightens our sense of being alive and that inspires others around us.

We don’t need to adapt very much to our circumstances when we are comfortable, when our desires and preferences are met quite well by the environment. But when we dive through the comfort cocoon in order to accomplish something meaningful, beautiful, or important to us, we can experience something extraordinary. WE are the ones that need to adjust. Rather than adapting the environment to meet our own preferences and desires, WE must adapt to the needs of the situation. When we rise to the challenge, whatever it may be, we discover and develop our own reservoirs of strength and vitality.

Comfort zones gradually shrink over time, requiring us to huddle yet closer to that center of gravity, with its promise of peace and comfort. But the world is calling to us. The oceans called Roz Savage and she took up that challenge—an unfathomably ambitious calling that she chose to answer. Roz began the process of discovering this calling when she wrote two obituaries—the first was the obituary that would be most likely to result if she stayed on her current life track. The second was the obituary that she would be thrilled by and immensely proud of. The rest is history.

So let’s take some time to write an obituary for ourselves that we would be immensely proud of. Fill in your storyline, between now and your death, with whatever makes your heart sing the sweetest song, whatever awakens the spark of fierce and passionate energy within you… Travel up to the time of your death and turn around. What do you want to see? Who do you want to be?

— Linda Anderson Krech

Breaking Out of the Comfort Zone

We’re in this together. We are all hopelessly intertwined with each other—those who make our clothing and computers on the other side of the planet; those who came before us and created our alphabet, our government, our roads. Even when we feel most lonely, we are being sustained by silent, distant, invisible supports of every kind.

The mission of the ToDo Institute is to bring fundamental truths, such as this, into the heart of our lives. Our work helps to counter the mainstream tug toward greed, self-preoccupation and negativity. Our programs plant seeds of wisdom and cultivate responsibility, kindness and appreciation. May our children and their children benefit from the rippling effects of these efforts.

Our world needs this work. Will you invest in it?

It is your support that fuels the efforts of the ToDo Institute each day. And there’s a larger team around us including printers, web site specialists, course advisors and carpenters—many of whom work for wages far below the norm because they believe in our work. It is your partnership that enables us all to make a difference in the lives of individuals and the world at large. We promise to translate your contribution into practical strategies for helping the world.

In November we conducted an all day program, called Living Fully with Illness, at Benedictine Hospital in New York, along with our colleague, Barbara Sarah. It was attended by more than thirty people trying to cope with cancer, AIDS, and other serious illnesses. A professional filmmaker volunteered to film the event. If we have a few dollars left after paying the electric bill, we can get this film on DVD and on the Internet. This is just one of many projects/ideas that are hoping to be born.

We’re making every effort to keep this good work alive, but we need fuel in order to continue.

Please make a generous year-end contribution today.

You can donate online at
https://www.crowdtilt.com/campaigns/the-todo-institute-yearend-campaign

Call 800.950.6034 (or 802.453.4440)
Or you can send your check to:
ToDo Institute, PO Box 50, Monkton VT 05469

In appreciation for our partnership,
Linda Anderson Krech
ToDo Institute
The Three Hungers

There are three hungers that people are trying to feed throughout their lives. The first is to connect deeply with the creative spirit of life. Sooner or later, most people come to recognize that there is some sort of creative energy that infuses all life. They feel a hunger to touch that energy and to be touched by it. That doesn’t mean that you have to be a creative person in a classic sense – to make your living as a painter, a dancer, a writer or an actor. It could mean finding ways to infuse the workplace with more creativity and more playfulness.

The second hunger is to know and express your gifts and talents. The people I have met in my 30 years as a career counselor are always absolutely sure that they have some unique talent. They may not know what it is yet. They may not know how to express it. It may have nothing to do with how they earn a living or what they do at work. But they know that they have something within them that they have to contribute. The healthiest seniors I’ve met continue to explore their gifts and abilities, long after they’ve left the workplace.

The third hunger is to know that our lives matter. Everyone wants to leave behind some kind of legacy, some kind of personal mark. It doesn’t have to be great or magnificent. But human beings know that at one level, we each have a unique thumbprint, and we all want to leave that print behind for others to see that we’ve been here. We can be successful, make a lot of money, reach a certain status, but it will be success without fulfillment. Fulfillment comes from feeding these three hungers.

- From an interview with Richard Leider, author of The Power of Purpose

The Joy of Bread and Water

Geshe Tenzin Wangyal Rinpoche

One of my first experiences of culture shock in America was at my friends’ house. We were hungry and we opened their big refrigerator at 11 o’clock at night. You only see these huge refrigerators in the U.S. And it had a deep freezer also. We didn’t go that far – the fridge was enough. There was so much food in there! And the person who opened the fridge said, “Oh, there’s no food here; we’ll need to go to the store.” For a moment, I was in total shock. At first I thought maybe something was wrong with my eyesight. How is it possible that we are looking at the same fridge, and this person is seeing no food where I’m seeing so much! Of course, when we went out to shop, I saw they bought a few things that were missing. Where I grew up, whatever was leftover from breakfast became lunch, and with the leftover lunch, we made dinner. If an onion was missing, we didn’t skip the whole dinner plan!

So we can make use of this example. When you open a fridge, it is like you are opening your life. When you open your life, you have the opportunity to see that life is full. Or you can open it and see, “An onion is missing; my life is empty!” It is so powerful, the absence of that onion! Clearly in our lives we have experiences like this, the feeling of abundance or not, regardless of what we have or do not have.

One of the greatest experiences I had in my life was with a few Tibetans who had just come out from Tibet, who were even poorer than we were at the monastery. They didn’t have anything. But I went to visit their room, and they said, “Oh come in!” They were so happy that I was visiting them in their room. They said, “Let’s have something.” Of course it was the opposite experience of looking in the fridge. There really was nothing, just one plate of leftover fried bread that was a week old and some boiled water. They offered it to me saying, “Have something!” At first when they said, “Have something,” I thought there would be something. Then they got out the dried bread and a glass of water and offered it to me. But the amazing thing was the joy. There was so much joy and generosity through offering that dried bread and boiled water. It was truly an amazing experience.
Saturated with information but often bereft of meaning we feel caught in a never-ending swirl of duties and demands, things to finish, things to put right. Yet as we dart anxiously from one activity to the next, we sense that there is more to life than our worldly agendas. Our uneasiness and our frantic scrambling are caused by our distorted sense of time, which seems to be continually running out. Western culture reinforces this conception of time as a limited commodity: We are always meeting deadlines; we are always short on time, we are always running out of time.

— Brother David Steindl-Rast, O.S.B. from The Music of Silence

The Wall Street Journal recently reported on an Internet search firm executive whose two children, ages nine and fourteen, presented him with a “Family Miles” program—a system of rewards for staying home more, resisting a ringing telephone, and “getting home on holidays and breaks without being days late.” He responded to the wake-up call by learning to let the phone ring during meals and by working fewer weekends.”

— (Quoted in the book Values Shift, the New Work Ethic by John Izzo, Ph.D. and Pam Withers.)

Last New Year’s Eve, my spouse asked me what I wanted to get done in 2004. He wondered what I wanted to achieve, and what projects I wanted to start. It is a natural question as a New Year rolls around, yet my reaction was not what he expected. I said something like, “I want to do less not more.” Considering all of the things I need to do in my life this struck him as an odd answer.

Most of us have experienced that without focused direction we can easily flit away our time and look back at a year where, as CS Lewis puts it, “not only did I not get done what I should have done but I didn’t get done what I wanted to do either.”

But now I’m rethinking the tradition of setting goals even as I continue this ritual myself and can’t imagine not taking out a blank sheet of paper on the morning of the 1st and contemplating the New Year in front of me. I am filled with vigour for the task and have high hopes for the faithful execution of each and every goal I carefully write out. I verify that each one is specific, realistic, controllable by me, and time measurable. I write them in my day timer so I can read them everyday.

I don’t take this process lightly. My husband and I spend part of New Year’s Eve writing out our eulogies (we’re a real fun couple) albeit it with a glass of champagne. And at the end of every year I look at my goals from the previous New Year noting with pride what I have achieved, rather like adding another notch to my belt for each goal completed. Yet often I am disappointed with myself for the failures that appear year after year on my list although they had seemed achievable when I wrote them.

And for me this is the crux of the matter. In North America we have a way of life that promotes goal setting, hard work, long hours, anything is possible, and the just do it mentality. We now

Continued on Page 9

“When we become driven exclusively by our goals, we lose sight of what else is important. The goal becomes a commodity to be chased at all costs.”

— Dr. Barbara Moses
A new year is upon us, or so it seems. It’s time for resolutions—a contest between will and habit.
A time for making plans. A time for dreaming of what we wish will happen.

*The first dream of the year;*
*I kept it secret,*
*And smiled to myself.*

— Sho-u

For human beings we make the change of years black and white. We like well defined borders to time and territory. 2013 becomes 2014. One moment, this; next moment, that. How long will it take us to get used to writing the checks correctly—a contest of attention and habit.

Nature prefers gradual transformation. Comings and goings are less precise. The sun sets and leaves a fading residue of daylight behind.

There’s a new calendar on my wall. The emptiness of the little squares on each page gives me a sense of leisure, as if the new year has brought a reprieve from all tasks and appointments.

*New Year’s Day;*
*I do not hate*
*Those who trample on the snow.*

— Yayu

Continued on Page 6

**Living on Purpose**

*A Distance Learning Program*

Many of us desire to live a more purposeful life. We want to use time well, to put energy toward that which truly matters, to leave behind a positive legacy, but when we step back and take an honest look at how we’re living—we’re not satisfied.

We’re pulled off course by feelings of fear, anxiety, or depression. We procrastinate on doing what we know we need to do, or we’re confused about what our purpose should really be. This course is designed to help you get on the path to a more purposeful life.

We’ll draw on the principles of Morita and Naikan therapies while incorporating ideas from Viktor Frankl, Stephen Covey, and William Damon. This is a course about direction—about finding direction, setting direction, and staying on course.

Please join us for this journey of *Living on Purpose* to begin the new year.

The course provides 16 credits towards the ToDo Institute’s Certification program.

**cost:** $78 for To Do Institute Members ($93 for non-members)

**call** 802/453-4440 or email todo@todoinstitute.com

Register by January 8, 2014
Most spiritual traditions prescribe some kind of Sabbath, time consecrated to enjoy and celebrate what is beautiful and good—time to light candles, sing songs, worship, tell stories, bless our children and loved ones, give thanks, share meals, nap, walk and even make love.

It is time to be nourished and refreshed as we let our work, our chores and our important projects lie fallow, trusting that there are larger forces at work taking care of the world when we are at rest.

Sabbath time is a revolutionary challenge to the violence of overwork, because it honors the necessary wisdom of dormancy. If certain plant species do not lie dormant during winter, the plant begins to die off. Rest is not just a psychological convenience; it is a spiritual and biological necessity. Perhaps this is why, in most spiritual traditions, “Remember the Sabbath” is more than simply a lifestyle suggestion.

I make a plea for renewed Sabbath-keeping. As a nation, we cannot live like this, endlessly rushing about in a desperate frenzy, never stopping to enjoy the blessings of family and friends, unable to taste the fruits of life. We can change society by beginning a quiet revolution of change in ourselves and our families. Let us take a collective breath, rest, pray, meditate, walk, sing, eat and take time to share the unhurried company of those we love. Let us, for just one day, cease our desperate striving for more, and instead taste the blessings we have already been given, and give thanks.

- Excerpt from The Sabbath by Wayne Muller

Sometimes our light goes out, but is blown again into instant flame by an encounter with another human being. Each of us over the deepest thanks to those who have rekindled this inner light.

- Albert Schweitzer

WHAT REALLY MATTERS?

If you were to die today, what are the things you would most regret not having done or said? Is there something you really want to finish for your family? Is there someone important in your life whom you haven’t taken the time to connect with? We put people and things on hold, assuming we will have a tomorrow. The reality is that life is shorter than we think. Begin this New Year by checking to see if how you spend your time reflects your most important values and purposes. In taking time to reflect and write out the things you would most regret should you die today, you might even remove some things from your to do list and thus make room for the things that matter most.

THE ENERGY OF PRESENCE

I had always been a great believer in commitment, in every aspect of life that mattered to me. Total commitment to marriage, to family, to country, to coworkers and firm, to neighbors and fellow human beings. ... Unfortunately, though, commitment, particularly in the business world, had come to equal time. Too often, your commitment was routinely measured by how many hours you were willing to work. How much time you would take away from your family. If you gave away huge amounts of your time, than it followed that you had exhibited commitment. Time alone was the bellwether.

In fact, it’s not about time... Commitment is about depth. It’s about effort. It’s about passion. It’s about wanting to be in a certain place and not somewhere else. Of course, time is involved; it would be naive and illogical to suggest otherwise. But commitment is best measured not by the time one is willing to give up, but, more accurately, by the energy one wants to put in—by how present one is.

- Eugene O’Kelly
Non-reversible Decisions

I think the power of non-reversible decisions comes through most clearly when we think about our most important choices. A friend told me how his minister had shocked the congregation with a sermon on marriage in which he said flatly that, yes, the grass is always greener. What he meant was that, inevitably, you will encounter people who are younger, better looking, funnier, smarter, or seemingly more understanding and empathetic than your wife or husband. But finding a life partner is not a matter of comparison shopping and “trading up.” The only way to find happiness and stability in the presence of seemingly attractive and tempting options is to say, “I’m simply not going there. I’ve made my decision about a life partner, so this person’s empathy or that person’s looks really have nothing to do with me. I’m not in the market - end of story.” Agonizing over whether your love is “the real thing” or your sexual relationship above or below par, and wondering whether you could have done better is a prescription for misery. Knowing that you’ve made a choice that you will not reverse allows you to pour your energy into improving the relationship that you have rather than constantly second-guessing it.

- Barry Schwartz

None of us has the power to make someone else love us. But we do have the power to give away love to other people. And if we do, we change the kind of person we are. And we change the kind of world we live in.

A Fresh Start?

Actually, making mistakes is unavoidable, and the mistake is less important in most cases, than what the individual does after he has made the mistake. If he is discouraged, demoralized and beset with guilt feelings, he cannot face the situation as it is. But if he is a courageous person, the predicament may often lead to benefits which would never have been possible without the original mistake. What is needed is not concern with what we have done wrong, but the determination to meet the demands of the moment.

- Rudolf Dreikurs

If you fell down yesterday, stand up today.

- H.G. Wells

Once we face the facts - then face them again and again - once we know we’ll never be perfect or find a perfect purpose, we can wade right into reality and construct a life.

- Linda Anderson Krech

Letting Go

At one time or another each of us confronts an experience so powerful, bewildering, joyous, or terrifying that all our efforts to see it as a “problem” are futile. Each of us is brought to the cliff’s edge. At such moments we can either back away in bitterness or confusion, or leap forward into mystery. And what does mystery ask of us? Only that we be in its presence, that we fully, consciously, hand ourselves over. That is all, and that is everything. We can participate in mystery only by letting go of solutions. This letting go is the first lesson of falling, and the hardest.

- Philip Simmons

None of us has the power to make someone else love us. But we do have the power to give away love to other people. And if we do, we change the kind of person we are. And we change the kind of world we live in.

Amen.

- Anonymous

Impermanence

The average human being thinks that happiness lies in stability, in tying up all the loose ends and having things under control. But actually, happiness lies in being able to relax with our true condition, which is basically fleeting, dynamic, and fluid, not in any way solid, not in any way permanent. It’s transient by nature.

- Pema Chodron

Birth and death in each moment.
If you wish to be a cat, chase a mouse.
If you wish to be a child, throw a snowball at the moon.
What are you waiting for?

- Ho Sen
Yayu likes a fresh, glistening carpet of snow and he is irritated by those who spoil it with their tracks. But on New Year’s Day he rises above such pettiness and appears somewhat surprised at his own temporary tolerance. I am more irritated by tracks on my calendar than footprints in the snow. I make a point of waiting until January 2nd to fill in the calendar so I can enjoy, for one day, the apparent openness of my life—a contest between illusion and reality.

New Year’s Day:
My hovel
the same as ever.
— Issa

We yearn for changes this new year. Better health. Less weight. More of this. Less of that. Much of what we desire involves some combination of grace and greater self-discipline. We yearn for a fresh start. But, alas, the new year cannot offer a fresh start—only a new numeral. We take our karma into each new year. We carry our baggage from station to station.

In a new bucket
the same water
looks so fresh!
— Issa

I stared at my toilet bowl on New Year’s Day before I flushed for the first time. Suddenly the water swirled and plunged and in the blink of an eye it’s gone and here comes fresh, clean water filling the bowl like an underground spring. Would you like to flush your karma down the toilet like this? All the unpaid bills, the unfinished projects, wounded relationships and bodily defects. A bit of pressure on the lever and it’s gone forever. Toilets give you a real fresh start. But a new year gives us the ritual, the inspiration, perhaps even the energy. We take our lives into this new year complete with accumulated blessings, pains, and a vehicle for traveling through life that needs more maintenance with each passing year.

Birth and death in each moment.
If your wish is to be a cat, chase a mouse.
If your wish is to be a child, throw a snowball at the moon.
What are you waiting for?
— Ho Sen

Zen Master Dogen said that we are born and die in each moment. Perhaps a moment offers us the fresh start we want. We need not wait for a new year. Why be so patient? Rather than make a resolution to write a haiku poem just write one right now:

Me? Write a haiku?
You have got to be kidding!
Okay, here it goes.
— Joan Manley

Even if what you do isn’t perfect, go ahead and do it anyway. Imperfections are what distinguish that which is made by the artist’s hand from factory goods.

I’m not a haiku.
I have too many syllables
in my second line.

There is a Japanese maxim — Seven Times Down, Eight Times Up. We fall down, we get up. Down. Up. Down. Up. If you are down, you need not make a “resolution” to get up. Just look for help. By the time you look, help has already arrived. It arrived when you were born. Before you were born. You don’t need to create artificial rewards yourself. Getting up is its own reward. Falling down is the greatest reward. Grace disguised.

We reflect on this past year, on our life, our unrepeatable life, and how many of us can say that we truly appreciate the grace by which we live and go about our day to day tasks.
In Asia a Buddhist monk begs for enough food to get by for the day. We don’t see this kind of begging in America. But in almost any city you will pass people on the streets asking for money. Most of us don’t have to beg for our food. We work and earn money. But how hard it is to remember that just having work, being able to work, is a gift. Even being able to beg is a gift, as Ryokan realizes while the snow prevents him from walking into town to ask for alms. Being able to wash a dish or scrape ice from my car window. Picking up my children’s toys or wiping snot from their noses. How long before I lose the capacity to do such “chores.”

Bassho delights in life’s mystery, which he finds everywhere—a weed, a toad, a snowball. He understands quite well the transient nature of existence. Nothing stays the same. Next to the warm fire his snowball will quickly melt. But he has a child’s heart and that’s why we want to play with him. I long to throw a snowball at Bassho. His laugh is my daughter’s laugh.

Can you embrace this new year? Can you discover the poetry in your own heart? Can you rise above your pettiness and willfulness to allow things to be as they are without making them into what you want them to be? Our minds and bodies were designed to engage the world. Let’s experience life—experience it with a passion that exhausts us. The Way isn’t always clear. Nevertheless, let’s go!

We rowed into the fog, and out through the fog . . .
O how blue,
How bright, the wide sea!
— Shiki

The new year offers us mystery. Uncertainty. What’s going to happen? We think we can know, but we can’t. We fool ourselves into believing we have control. But we don’t. We assume that we will have a whole year. But we just don’t know. Only the wisest among us don’t know and know they don’t know. When we abandon our desire for security, our need for control, what are we left with? Just the present moment.
The New Year: We Begin Again

We tend to enter a new year with hope. Hope that things will get better. That our health will improve. That our suffering will diminish and that life won’t be such a struggle. It seems reasonable to enter a new year with hope, but I wonder if such hope serves as a distraction from appreciating the life we already have. The monk Ho Sen wrote the following New Year’s haiku:

Another year passed —
Empty rice sacks remind me
how lucky I am

We would expect that if Ho Sen’s rice sacks were overflowing he would feel very fortunate. If you have excellent health, or great wealth, or a wonderful home… it’s not really that hard to be grateful. And yet even with such obvious blessings, we easily turn our attention to other areas of life where we struggle and hope things will improve. But Ho Sen is reminded of his good fortune by empty rice sacks. Would we be able to look at an empty bank account, or an empty refrigerator and be reminded of our good fortune?

As we begin the new year it is easy to forget how lucky we are to be alive. It is easy to take our life for granted – to feel entitled to another year as if another year of life was nothing very special. It is easy to get caught up in our own suffering and express hope that things will somehow change. But can we rise up to the challenge of relaxing into our life just as it is? Can we discover gratitude for our life just as it is – for the struggle as well as for the joy? Our life is an adventure. This year is a new chapter in a mystery where we never know what’s going to happen. New opportunities. New challenges. Uncertainty.

A new year. We go forward. We fall. We get up. We begin again.
Rethinking Goals
Continued from Page 2

equate this expression with “running shoes,” and for many of us this is an accurate way to characterize life in much of western society, running from one task to another. When we fail to live up to this standard we assume rightly or wrongly that we have failed. Yet the question I ask myself now isn’t about success or failure but rather whose goal-setting standard am I using and what kinds of goals are being measured.

Additional Resources for Starting the New Year

Do We Really Need Goals?
(excerpt)

Gregg Krech

There are some good arguments against setting goals. First, they can be nothing more than a strategy for procrastination. Some people confuse setting goals with actually working towards achieving them. Beware of using goal-setting as simply a way of putting off what you know you need to do. Second, some people take a very down-to-earth view that goals are unnecessary. Michele Pfeiffer, in the movie, The Fabulous Baker Boys, says she never makes New Year’s resolutions because, “You do what you do, right?” On the other hand, what you do may be different if you take time to step back from your life and reflect on how you are living. That’s why a retreat, or a long vacation, often gives you a different perspective on your life and work. And then there are those who prefer flexibility and spontaneity and don’t want to be handcuffed by clear, identifiable goals. There’s a story about Charlie Brown in which he is shooting arrows into a wooden fence and after each shot he runs over to the fence and draws a bull’s-eye around the arrow. Lucy comes along and says, “Hey, that’s not how you practice. You’re supposed to draw the target and then shoot at it.” To which Charlie Brown replies, “If you do it my way, you’ll never miss.”

(Reprinted from Getting on Track: Setting Goals for the Year that Aren’t Totally Self-Centered, Thirty Thousand Days Journal, Vol. 9, No.1. The full text of this article can be found in the Internet Library of Japanese Psychology)

www.todoinstitute.org/library.html

Continued on Page 10
Every one of us has an aching need for a goal worthy of our complete dedication, for an ideal so lofty that we can keep our eyes on it no matter what circumstances come our way. Much of our boredom and restlessness comes from not having a direction in life; we are like someone all dressed up on Saturday night with nowhere to go. If I may say so, most of what we call goals are not real goals at all, because they give us no all-encompassing sense of purpose in life. But when we have an overriding goal, we find that many of our problems fall away of their own accord. Everything falls into perspective: we know what to do with our time, what to do with our energy, and it is easier to see all the little choices that confront us every day. Shall I eat what appeals to the taste buds, or what conduces to sound health? Shall I spend time doing my own thing, or doing work which benefits all those around me? Shall I move away from people just because their ways are not my ways, or shall I try to live in harmony with everyone around me? When we have our eyes on the goal of life we see these choices everywhere, all the time, and we begin to cultivate the will and wisdom to make the choices which will help us to grow to our full stature.

- Eknath Easwaran

As an example, let’s take the goals of finishing a university degree, having an organized home and office, working our way up the career ladder, going to the gym three morning’s a week, making a million dollars, and caring for the garden. It’s not that these goals aren’t useful or worthy — rather they are limited to a view of success mostly defined as “progress” by contemporary western standards.

I’m picturing our rock garden now. I have specific steps related to caring for the garden—the planting, the care and feeding of tender shoots, the weeding, the maintenance of mature plants, the clean up and so on. The garden takes hours of care. I notice, however, there is no goal to just sit in the garden beside the fragrant rosebush for 30 minutes twice a week. Why not?

As bright busy adults we don’t consider the reflective aspects of our lives even worthy of goals; we attempt to fit them in when we have time. Whether it is sitting in the garden, listening to music, practicing yoga, doing Naikan, or some other form of contemplative practice, we become almost apologetic to “take the time” for ourselves. Yet Socrates said, “the unexamined life is not worth living.”

As children, my sister, cousins and I did examine our lives at the beginning of each year. We made resolutions that were more about developing our character, eliminating bad habits and cultivating virtue than making a precise list of what we wanted to achieve for the New Year. In retrospect, I think that we were expected to do what we needed to do to be a good student or do a good job. Character development, however, was not taken for granted. It seemed to require work. Perhaps now it is the opposite. Our good character is simply assumed and we consider our goals for success the ones we need to work on.

My resolutions were often to be kind to my sister, not to be saucy to my Mother, to always tell the truth, to do my best, to be helpful to my Grandmother everyday. These resolutions would be written out and my sister and I would compare our lists and read them off to our Mom. By making them public the pressure was on to try and live up to them. Although we didn’t keep all of them, or even keep one of them all the time, we didn’t forget them either. The exercise seemed more like a gentle measuring stick, as opposed to a policeman’s club, which reminded us that these traits were important to strive for, and very difficult to cultivate on a consistent basis.

Of course we need goals to grow our business, finish our thesis, and complete our manuscripts. But we don’t want to achieve those goals at the expense of our relationships with others. I want to make sure my goals include time to reflect, time to cultivate healthy, loving relationships with spouse,
What has happened to me has been the very reverse of what appears to be the experience of most of my friends. Instead of dwindling to a point, Santa Claus has grown larger and larger in my life until he fills almost the whole of it. It happened in this way.

As a child I was faced with a phenomenon requiring explanation. I hung up at the end of my bed an empty stocking, which in the morning became a full stocking. I had done nothing to produce the things that filled it. I had not worked for them, or made them or helped to make them. I had not even been good — far from it. And the explanation was that a certain being whom people called Santa Claus was benevolently disposed toward me. . .

What we believed was that a certain benevolent agency did give us those toys for nothing. And, as I say, I believe it still. I have merely extended the idea.

Then I only wondered who put the toys in the stocking; now, I wonder who put the stocking by the bed, and the bed in the room, and the room in the house, and the house on the planet, and the great planet in the void.

Once I only thanked Santa Claus for a few dollars and crackers, now, I thank him for stars and street faces and wine and the great sea. Once I thought it delightful and astonishing to find a present so big that it only went halfway into the stocking. Now I am delighted and astonished every morning to find a present so big that it takes two stockings to hold it, and then leaves a great deal outside; it is the large and preposterous present of myself, as to the origin of which I can offer no suggestion except that Santa Claus gave it to me in a fit of peculiarly fantastic goodwill.
Ten Changes That Will Start You Off on the Right Track in the New Year

BY GREGG KRECH

There is nothing particularly special about the beginning of January. We could just as easily make resolutions, set goals and reflect on our lives on any time of year. But psychologically it helps to have a point where one segment of our life comes to a close and a new segment begins. The New Year often brings an energy for change—a yearning to move forward rather than remain stagnant. Here are ten ways to help you get off to a good start in the New Year.

1. Exercise

Probably the most common New Year’s resolution is to exercise more. Not only is exercise good for your body, it’s an essential element of good mental health. But good intentions won’t build up much of a sweat. There are two keys to making your exercise idea a reality. First, you need a specific plan. What are you going to do and when are you going to do it? If your plan is to start doing yoga, when (day, time) and where (place) will you be doing yoga? Second, you need to base your actions on your purpose rather than your feelings. Stop trying to motivate yourself or psyche yourself up. A more effective strategy is to learn to accept and co-exist with your feelings while you channel your effort towards your stated purpose. In other words, stop working on your mind and let your body do the work.

For more strategies on exercise and mental health, ToDo Institute members can download our booklet, Moving Bodies: Exercise and Mental Health.

2. Simplify - Reduce Your Stuff

Having lots of stuff won’t give you happiness or fulfillment. The price of your stuff goes way beyond the credit card payment that comes the following month. Stuff requires time—time for buying it, time for assembling it, learning what to do with it and (eventually) fixing it. Stuff also requires space. It requires space in your life while you own it and it requires space in a landfill when you disown it. The more you spend on stuff, the more hours you have to work to pay for it, and that leaves fewer hours for things that are important other than stuff (playing with your kids, for example). U.S. citizens account for about 5% of the world’s population. We use about 30% of the world’s resources. Americans like stuff. But if you’re like me, you probably have too much of it. So start off the year by getting rid of some of it. Our family has a stuff policy in which we get rid of two objects for every non-consumable object we acquire. The result? I buy less stuff (so do my children), since I have to think of things to get rid of. And, inevitably, my life feels a bit lighter at the end of the month. So lighten your load and sell or give away some of your unnecessary stuff.

3. Set Direction

Generally, when I begin a workshop I ask participants to identify their three most important accomplishments of the past year. I am often struck by how many people will have difficulty finding three things they have accomplished. Some say, “it was an accomplishment just getting through the year.” Our lives are very precious and there are so many important and meaningful things we can do. It is a shame to mindlessly get stuck in a rut and have accomplished little by the end of our lives beyond having stayed alive this long. So consider your priorities and dreams and focus on a direction that gives you something meaningful to work towards during the upcoming year.
4. Learn to do Something New
The mother of my colleague Trudy is now eighty-five years old. Each year on her birthday she identifies something new she wants to learn. At age seventy-five she learned to swim and continues to swim each week. At age eighty she learned to paint with watercolors. We are living in an age of information where we learn more “about” things and less how to do them. We can go on the internet and within moments get information on the nutritional composition of maple syrup and the relative quantities of syrup produced by Vermont and Quebec. But we no longer know how to actually make our own syrup. Learning to do something keeps life interesting... and keeps us humble.

5. Reduce or Eliminate TV Time
If you don’t have a television set or you watch one show per week, then give yourself a point and move on to number six. For the rest of us, this is an opportunity to find one of the most elusive treasures of life—time. Even if you only watch an hour a day, you’re still watching more than 350 hours per year. That’s the equivalent of about 44 eight-hour days. Think about what you could accomplish if you freed up that much time. Television also works against healthy attention skills and exercise. If you’re trying to cut back on TV but are having difficulty, try putting the television in a closet and bring it out only when there’s a show you’ve planned to watch. Just the extra time and effort it takes to set up the TV gives you an opportunity to make wiser choices about what and when you watch.

6. Improve Your Attention Skills
Skillful attention is really an art and this art is the foundation of the Japanese Psychology that we teach at the ToDo Institute. Most of us are much too self-focused and it takes conscious effort and practice to learn how to shift our attention and notice what we’re missing. You can develop better attention skills through practice. In fact, that’s the only way to develop your attention. So give yourself an attention exercise each day, or each week—something you can consciously work on. This is a no risk investment with a wonderful return.
Every April the ToDo Institute conducts its month-long Working with Your Attention Distance Learning Course. This is a unique opportunity to practice living mindfully with daily exercises and experience guidance.

7. Give Yourself Away
I was on my way home from Vietnam two days after Christmas. At the airport in Saigon I had to stop at a booth to pay a $12 departure tax before being allowed to go to the gate. I had just paid the tax when I heard a commotion at the other end of the table. A man from France was arguing with the airport “tax collector.” It seems that he didn’t have enough money for the tax and was claiming he didn’t know there would be a tax. The tax collector behind the table was firm about not letting him through until he paid the tax. Without hesitation, my friend Steve reached into his pocket, pulled out a $10 bill and offered it to the frustrated passenger. At first he refused it, then offered to send Steve the money once he got home. Steve just smiled and said, “Consider it a Christmas present.” This reminded me of David Dunn’s great little book, Try Giving Yourself Away. So this year, consider taking on a role in which at least part of your time is devoted to helping others have a better life.

8. Make Time for Self-Reflection
Most of us have busy lives. We go from one thing to another, checking off items on our to-do lists and palm pilots. But just as there are natural cycles of day and night,
and sun and rain, we must create a natural cycle of action and reflection in our daily lives. Without the latter we find ourselves living a life that is out of balance. So build in some time for quiet self-reflection in your schedule. The Japanese approach called “Naikan” is a method of self-reflection that can be done anytime—early morning, before bed, even in the car driving home from the supermarket. Consider going on a retreat this year or do some solo camping in the mountains. Self-reflection is the vehicle for cultivating gratitude and gaining clarity on how you need to live. Self-reflection gives you perspective and keeps you from getting caught up in your day-to-day life without seeing the bigger picture. So this year, balance your busy life with some quiet time.

For more information on Naikan reflection, read Naikan: Gratitude, Grace and the Japanese Art of Self-Reflection (Stone Bridge Press) by Gregg Krech.

9. Finish Something That Has Gone Unfinished

Few things create more psychological clutter than a collection of unfinished projects. A book half written; a bedroom half painted; the reorganization of the upstairs storage closet that was almost, but not quite, completed. And what ever happened to the will you started to draft? Make a list of all your unfinished business and set aside a small block of time each week, even 30 minutes, to work on a single project. If you stay with it, eventually you’ll finish it.

10. Take a Risk

During the past 25 years author Richard Leider (The Power of Purpose, Berrett-Koehler, 1997) interviewed more than 1,000 senior citizens. He asked them to look back on their lives and talk about what they had learned. Many said that if they could live their lives over again they would take more risks. They said they felt most alive when they took risks. Frequently I find that people who are unhappy or struggling with depression acknowledge that they’re not doing what they really want to do with their lives. But to make positive changes would involve risk, often giving up security, comfort or a nice salary. Are there changes you would like to make but you’re held back by the associated risks? At the end of your life, when you look back, will you regret having played it safe? If so, maybe this is the year to venture into uncharted territory and go after your dream.

Statistically, most people won’t keep their New Year’s resolutions—at least for very long. It’s difficult to break free from the momentum of the past, which tugs us repeatedly into maintaining the same habits and lifestyle. So you need to create new momentum that will work in your favor. Perseverance is the key. Each time you get off track, just get back on track one more time. Don’t strive to make it a happy year. Strive to live a good life according to your own ideals. We only have about Thirty Thousand Days to take advantage of this life and this body. You’ve used up quite a few of those days already. Treat them as if they were precious. Once they’re gone, there’s nothing you can do to get them back.

Gregg Krech is a leading expert in Japanese Psychology and the Director of the ToDo Institute in Vermont, a non-profit center for purposeful living. He is the author of many books, including A Finger Pointing to the Moon: A workbook for establishing direction and focus in daily life. He currently lives in Vermont with his wife, two children and their Golden Retriever, Barley. Each January, he conducts the distance learning course, Living on Purpose, which starts on January 9th.
Seven Factors That Predict Healthy Aging

“To know how to grow old is the masterwork of wisdom, and one of the most difficult chapters in the great art of living.”

— Henry Amiel (1874)

In George Vaillant's recent book, Aging Well: Surprising Guideposts to a Happier Life (Little, Brown and Co., 2002) he shares his conclusions about healthy aging. He knows a lot about it. He's directed the Harvard Study of Adult Development for the past 35 years arguably the longest study of aging in the world. The study has followed 824 men and sixty women for more than 60 years. Vaillant claims that there are seven key indicators of a person's life at age 50 that are pretty good predictors of where they will be (or if they will be) at age 80. As the study participants are now reaching age 80, Vaillant characterizes the most successful group as the Happy-Well. These individuals were, by age 75, still physically active, happily married, had rewarding friendships, did not take psychiatric medication and were very satisfied with their lives. The opposite category were people characterized as the Sad-Sick. Here are the seven indicators that, at age 50, most successfully predict where you'll be thirty years later.

1. Not Being a Smoker (or Quitting When You’re Young)
   Not being a heavy smoker before the age of 50 was the most important single predictive factor of healthy physical aging. Among those with college educations, heavy smoking (more than a pack a day for thirty years) was ten times more frequent among those who died prematurely than among the Happy-Well. Yet if a man stopped smoking by about age 45, the effects of smoking (as much as one pack a day for twenty years) could, at age 70 or 80, no longer be discerned.

2. Adaptive Coping Style
   The second most powerful predictor of being among the Happy-Well was an adaptive coping style. An adaptive coping style refers to "mature defenses" our ability to turn lemons into lemonade and not turn molehills into mountains. Such a style was common among the Happy-Well and virtually absent among the Sad-Sick. An adaptive coping style did not predict the men's objective physical health in the study. But it often did keep objectively disabled men from feeling subjectively disabled.

3. Absence of Alcohol Abuse
   This is the only factor in the study that powerfully predicted both psychosocial and physical health.

Continued on Page 16
Alcohol abuse was defined as multiple alcohol-related problems (with spouse, family, employer) or evidence of alcohol dependence. The study reveals that alcohol abuse is a cause rather than a result of increased life stress, of depression, and of downward social mobility.

4-6. Healthy Weight, Stable Marriage and Regular Exercise

These three protective factors were also important to healthy aging. Obesity, like smoking, was bad only for physical health. Good marriages and exercise were good for both physical and psychosocial health.

7. Years of Education

Although length of education is often viewed as merely a manifestation of social class and intelligence, its association with healthy aging depended upon neither of these factors. The components of education that appeared to correlate with physical health in old age were self-care and perseverance not IQ and parental income. When the men in the Harvard study were compared to a group of college-educated inner city men, parity of education alone was enough to produce parity in physical health even though the Harvard-educated men had the advantage of childhood social class, IQ, higher income, and jobs that had more status and prestige.

According to Vaillant, the above seven factors allow us to predict healthy aging thirty years into the future. 106 Harvard men enjoyed 5-6 of these factors at age 50. At 80, half of these men were among the Happy-Well and only eight of them among the Sad-Sick. Conversely, 66 Harvard men possessed fewer than four protective factors at age 50. At age 80, not a single one of them were among the Happy-Well. About 33% of them belonged to the Sad-Sick at age 80. Also, factoring out acts of God, these 66 men still in adequate physical health at age 50, but with fewer than four protective factors were three times as likely to be dead thirty years later as men with more protective factors. A similar long term study of women (referred to as the Terman study started at Stanford University) showed that these same factors were also important to the aging of women. Eighty percent of the women in this study who were classed among the Sad-Sick or Prematurely Dead had enjoyed three or fewer protective factors at age 50.

Vaillant concludes, "The good news is that most of us, if we start young and try hard, can voluntarily control our weight, our exercise, and our abuse of cig-arettes and alcohol, at least by the time we are fifty... we can improve our relationships with our most significant other and use fewer maladaptive defenses... Whether we live to a vigorous old age lies not so much in our stars or our genes as in ourselves."

Vaillant has made a valiant attempt to take an academic study and report it in a way that provides sound, common sense advice to readers. And many of its conclusions, like those above, are not necessarily surprising. Perhaps one of the most interesting conclusions is that by the time you are age 50, many of the factors thought to be developmentally important like birth order, death of a parent, happy vs sad childhoods, even the genes we inherited, are relatively unimportant factors in where you go from there. If you're interested in learning the lessons of aging from those that have gone before you, this book is an excellent map.

Material from the book Aging Well by George Vaillant, M.D. and the Boston Globe (December, 2001) was incorporated into this essay.
Those of us who think the world needs saving from environmental destruction, rapacious greed, decaying morals, drugs, crime, racism, whatever keep very busy crusading for our favorite remedies. School vouchers. Carbon taxes. Campaign reform. The Endangered Species Act. A lower capital gains tax. Strong regulation. No regulation. You know, that long list of mutually inconsistent Holy Grails with which we like to hit each other over the head.

There’s one solution to the world’s problems, however, that I never hear the frenzied activists suggest.

Slowing down.

Slowing down could be the single most effective solution to the particular save-the-world struggle I immerse myself in—the struggle for sustainability, for living harmoniously and well within the limits and laws of the Earth.

Suppose we weren’t in such a hurry. We could take time to walk instead of drive, to sail instead of fly. To clean up our messes. To discuss our plans throughout the whole community before we send in bulldozers to make irreversible changes. To figure out how many fish the ocean can produce before boats race out to beat other boats to whatever fish are left.

Suppose we went at a slow enough pace not only to smell the flowers, but to feel our bodies, play with children, look openly without agenda or timetable into the faces of loved ones. Suppose we stopped gulping fast food and started savoring slow food, grown, cooked, served and eaten with care. Suppose we took time each day to sit in silence.

I think, if we did those things, the world wouldn’t need much saving. We could cut our energy and material use drastically, because we would get the full good out of what we use. We wouldn’t have to buy so many things to save time. (Have you ever wondered, with all our time-saving paraphernalia, what happens to the time we save?) We wouldn’t make so many mistakes. We could listen more and hurt each other less. Maybe we could even take time to reason through our favorite solutions, test them, and learn what their actual effects are.

Said Thomas Merton, who spent his time in a Trappist monastery: “There is a pervasive form of contemporary violence to which the idealist . . . most easily succumbs: activism and over-work . . . To allow oneself to be carried away by a multitude of conflicting concerns, to surrender to too many demands, to commit oneself to too many people, to want to help everyone in everything, is to succumb to violence. The frenzy of the activist neutralizes his work for peace. It destroys the fruitfulness of his own work, because it kills the root of inner wisdom which makes work fruitful.”

A friend in India tells me that the onslaught of Western advertising in his country is a cultural blow, not so much because of the messages of the ads but because of their pace. The stun-the-senses barrage of all TV programming, especially ads, is antithetical to a thousands-year-old tradition of contemplation. I can imagine that. I have been driven crazy by the somnolent pace at which things get done in India. Don’t these people know that time is money?

What they know, actually, is that time is life, and to go zooming through it is to miss living.

Slow . . . d o w n. Do that first. Then, quietly, carefully, think about what else might need to be done.

The only problem with this cure is that I can’t prescribe it for others, because I have such trouble following it myself. It’s so easy to get swept up in the hurtling pace of the world. Like most of the other world-savers I know, I’m way too busy to eat well, sit quietly, take a vacation, or even, some days, think.

Slow down. Good advice. Too bad I don’t have time to take it. I have to go save the world.

Donella Meadows (1941-2001) was a pioneering environmental scientist and writer whose book, The Limits to Growth (1972) sold millions of copies and was translated into 28 languages. She was a leading voice in the "sustainability movement" and taught at Dartmouth college for 29 years. In 1997 she founded the Sustainability Institute which included development of an ecological village and organic farm in Hartland Four Corners, Vermont.
There’s a story about a farmer who came to see the Buddha to tell him about his numerous life difficulties. He told the Buddha about his troubles with his farming – either drought or monsoons made his work always difficult. He told the Buddha about his wife, for even though he loved her, there were certain things about her which could use some fixing. Likewise with his children – yes, he loved them, but they certainly weren’t turning out quite the way he wanted. So he told the Buddha all of this, and when he was done, he asked the Buddha how the Buddha could help him with his troubles.

And the Buddha said, “I’m sorry, but I can’t help you.”

“What do you mean? You’re supposed to be a great teacher,” railed the farmer.

To which the Buddha replied, “It’s like this: all human beings have 83 problems; it’s a fact of life. Sure, a few more problems may go away now and then, but soon enough a few more will come. So we’ll always have 83 problems.

To which the farmer indignantly responded, “Then what’s the good of all your teaching?”

To which the Buddha replied, “My teaching can’t help with the 83 problems, but perhaps it can help with the 84th problem.”

“What is the 84th problem?” asked the farmer.

The 84th problem is that we don’t want to have any problems.”
When someone’s suffering seems to have no end, when it is too much to bear, we can lose faith in our ability to make any difference at all. But it is exactly at these times when faith is most needed. How do we cultivate a faith that enables us to take positive action in the world against even overwhelming odds? Where can we place our faith that enables us to work to make a difference—especially when it seems that no matter what we do, it’s not enough?

When I’m at the ragged edge of an anxious night, when I’ve tried hard to help someone and am drained by frustration and grief, when the suffering I encounter threatens to pull me down into futility, I need to begin by reminding myself of what I am not seeing in the picture of suffering right before me.

For my fortieth birthday, my friend Carol gave me a small picture book. In the center of its vivid red cover was the one-word title — *Zoom* — and the author’s name, I. Banyai. Curious, I opened the book and on the first page saw an abstract image of something red and pointy. The next page showed a colorful rooster, whose comb was the image I’d just seen. *This is a book with no words in it, about a rooster, I mused. How very peculiar to receive this as a gift when I’m turning forty, not four.* Carol smiled, urging me to go on. I turned the page and saw a picture of children looking through the window of a house at the rooster. *Oh, I thought, it’s not a book about a rooster; it’s about some children who live on a farm.*

As I turned more pages, the children and the house diminished in size until they proved to be pieces in a toy village being arranged by a little girl. *Oh, now I understand, I thought. It’s a book about a child, and she is the central figure.*

---

**Faith in Action**

BY SHARON SALZBERG

---

**Continued on next page**

---

We grow in love when we grow in gratefulness. And we grow in gratefulness when we grow in love. Here is the link between the two: thanksgiving pivots on our willingness to go beyond our independence and to accept the give-and-take between giver and thanksgiver. But the “yes” which acknowledges our interdependence is the very “yes” to belonging – the yes of love. Every time we say a simple “thank you,” and mean it, we practice that inner gesture of “yes.” And the more we practice it the easier it becomes.

- Brother David Steindl-Rast
Five Principles for your Spiritual and Mental Health

By Gregg Krech

1. Learn to Coexist with Uncertainty

Most of us want a sense of control over our lives so we fool ourselves into thinking we know what’s going to happen. It’s challenging, but ultimately helpful, to anchor ourselves to the reality of the present moment and acknowledge that the outcome of the situation is unknown at this time.

2. Pay Attention to Details

Whether it be food, sex, sports or nature – life becomes interesting when we notice the details. Through details we become absorbed in the world around us and, at least for a little while, forget ourselves. Details are the doorway to living with passion and fascination.

3. Lead with the Body, Not with the Mind

It is absurd to have the mind attempt to fix itself. It is more sensible to let the body take action and allow the mind to follow. Feeling tired, we get up. Thinking anxious thoughts, we make a presentation. Feeling scattered and confused, we allow the body to sit in quiet meditation.

4. Either Change Your Circumstances or Accept Them

We consistently find ourselves in circumstances (relationships, jobs, etc.) that fall short of our ideals. How could it be any other way? Either change your situation or accept the limitations and difficulties that the circumstances present. But complaining about the situation only brings frustration and resentment.

5. Cultivate Gratitude through Self-Reflection

Within our busy lives we must find a space for quiet self-reflection. Through self-reflection we have an opportunity to appreciate what we normally take for granted and to come to understand, more realistically, the extraordinary effort that is made to support our life.

Faith in Action

Continued from previous page

in this story; the other figures were just her toys.

A page later, the girl playing with the houses turned out to be part of an illustration on the cover of a book being held by a boy. And so on it went. As I turned the pages, I came to conclusion after conclusion about what the book was really about. Okay, now I get it. This is a story about a boy who is on an ocean liner holding a book with a cover picturing a child playing with a miniature village. But when the entire ocean liner turned out to be part of a billboard posted on the side of a bus, my confidence in my interpretations collapsed.

The bus proved to be part of a scene on a TV screen being watched by a cowboy in a desert, which turned out to be the illustration on a postage stamp, which was on a postcard in the hands of a group of people standing on an island beach. Before I could try to reach another conclusion about the subject of this book, a turn of the page showed the island as seen by a pilot in a small plane. Several pages later, through swirls of clouds, I saw the earth, a jewel-like globe floating in infinite space, then simply a distant white dot. Opened to an immensity of perspective, my vision included every image in an expansive sweep of vision, but was not limited by any one of them. I looked up at Carol and said, “I feel like God!”

There is a far bigger picture to life than what we are facing in any particular moment. To see beyond the one small part in front of us and to think that’s all there is, we have to look past our ready conclusions. When we see only the suffering before us and our actions in response to it, it is no wonder we might conclude that what we do seems inadequate. We may think the final result of something we’ve done is visible on page four of the story, or page seven. But as we turn page after page, we step outside our own limited perspective and realize that there is more to come. Both the suffering and our efforts to address it are woven into an immense but hidden flow of interaction, a dynamic process of action and consequence that doesn’t stop with us and our particular role.

We don’t know the ultimate unfolding of any story; certainly not enough to decide that what we do has no effect. When we stand before a chasm of futility, it is first of all faith in this larger perspective that enables us to go on.

Sharon Salzberg is a renowned meditation instructor who has been practicing and studying Buddhism for more than thirty years. She is cofounder of the Insight Meditation Society and the Center for Buddhist Studies in Massachusetts. This essay is reprinted with permission from the book Faith: Trusting Your Own Deepest Experience (Riverhead Books, 2002)
A new year, a new slate of resolutions.

Perhaps the biggest resolution at New Year’s is to get fit — start exercising, start eating right, and all that jazz. But resolutions never last. As you might already know, I’m not a fan of resolutions. Instead of creating a list of resolutions this year, create a new habit. Habits last, and they lead to long-term fitness (and more). They require more patience, but they are worth the wait. As some of you know, fitness habits are what started me along the path to changing my life. I quit smoking, started running. Then I started eating healthier, became vegetarian (now vegan), quit the junk food addiction, started doing other types of workouts (bodyweight, weights, Crossfit, anything that was fun). And six years later, I’m nearly 39 years old and in the best shape of my life. I have less bodyfat than any time since high school, more muscle than ever in my life, and I can run and hike and play longer than ever before. That’s not to brag, but to show you what can be done with some simple fitness habits.

Reshaping Through Habits

The appealing thing about many fitness programs is that they promise quick results. You see testimonials from people who have gone through the program and lost 30 lbs. and gain a washboard stomach in just 4 weeks! That’s all complete crap. First, most people won’t achieve those results. Second, and more importantly, if you do get quick results, you’ll reverse those results very quickly … because you haven’t created new habits. You’ve just done something intense and unsustainable for a short period of time. That’s nearly worthless. You should be focused on long-term results, and more importantly on a healthy lifestyle. A healthy lifestyle starts with changing your habits and ends with long-term results.

Exercise & Mental Health

by Frank Sabatino, D.C., Ph.D.

What about the issue of depression we talked about? … The drugs that are often used, like Prozac, Paxil and Zoloft may have potential negative effects and what’s interesting about this is that consistent activity programs are consistently shown to be at least as effective as those medication programs without any of the problems that occur with them. Well, what does that mean? Generally, consistent endurance activity will have an effect on modifying mood, elevating mood, for two reasons. One reason is there’s an increase in metabolism and body temperature that tends to have a mood elevating effect and there’s a release of a very important opiate – beta endorphin — it’s an opiate. But those are very short term — they may occur for a few hours. In other so called clinical states of depression there are some long term changes that can be improved with exercise but it must be consistent and continued for a minimum of 6-8 weeks from the data that has been accumulated. Exercise and activity will modify two important chemical neurotransmitters – norepinephrine and serotonin.

What’s interesting about these neurotransmitters is that they are activated directly by consistent endurance training. And over a 6-8 week period they are as effective, if not more, in regulating, elevating and balancing the activities of these neurotransmitters than any of the depressant medications that are used. These drugs all have the potential alternative effects of causing some upset and imbalance in brain chemistry where the exercise does not. Now as you are more depressed, you are usually less motivated to do anything, so you may need somebody to take their feet, stick them in both cheeks of your butt and move you around the block. And that sounds cruel and crass, but it is not and I’ve done it. There are times when you just have to get that person up and moving. Because that movement is an incredibly beneficial way to deal with this issue.

A Compact Guide to
Creating the Fitness Habit

by Leo Babauta

What about the issue of depression we talked about? … The drugs that are often used, like Prozac, Paxil and Zoloft may have potential negative effects and what’s interesting about this is that consistent activity programs are consistently shown to be at least as effective as those medication programs without any of the problems that occur with them. Well, what does that mean? Generally, consistent endurance activity will have an effect on modifying mood, elevating mood, for two reasons. One reason is there’s an increase in metabolism and body temperature that tends to have a mood elevating effect and there’s a release of a very important opiate – beta endorphin — it’s an opiate. But those are very short term – they may occur for a few hours. In other so called clinical states of depression there are some long term changes that can be improved with exercise but it must be consistent and continued for a minimum of 6-8 weeks from the data that has been accumulated. Exercise and activity will modify two important chemical neurotransmitters – norepinephrine and serotonin.

What’s interesting about these neurotransmitters is that they are activated directly by consistent endurance training. And over a 6-8 week period they are as effective, if not more, in regulating, elevating and balancing the activities of these neurotransmitters than any of the depressant medications that are used. These drugs all have the potential alternative effects of causing some upset and imbalance in brain chemistry where the exercise does not. Now as you are more depressed, you are usually less motivated to do anything, so you may need somebody to take their feet, stick them in both cheeks of your butt and move you around the block. And that sounds cruel and crass, but it is not and I’ve done it. There are times when you just have to get that person up and moving. Because that movement is an incredibly beneficial way to deal with this issue.

Thirty Thousand Days

21 • Special New Years Edition
Let’s say you change one habit at a time, one per month or so. You’ll have 12 new habits every year. Even if you only formed 6 habits that stuck and that you loved, you’d be amazed at what kind of changes those 6 habits would create in your life and fitness. If you did 6 habits a year for three years, you’d be transformed. If you don’t have the patience to change one habit at a time, or focus on enjoying your new habits rather than getting quick results, you should stop reading now.

Which Habits to Choose

Which habit you choose first matters very little in the long run. You will be changing many little habits over the course of the next few years, and the order of those habits is unimportant. What matters is that you start. My favorite habit is daily exercise, but if you’re looking to lose weight 

2. Do one habit at a time only. You increase your odds of success with just one habit at a time, for many reasons: habits are hard to form because they require lots of focus and energy, having many habits means you’re spreading yourself too thin, and if you can’t commit to one habit at a time, you’re not fully committed.

3. Make it your top priority. People often put off fitness and diet stuff because they’re too busy, too tired, to stressed out by big projects or the holidays, etc. But in my experience, those are great reasons you *should* be exercising. So make your new diet or exercise habit one of your absolute top priorities for the day. If you don’t have time, you need to make time.

4. Enjoy the habit. This is extremely important, and most people ignore it. If the habit is fun, you will stick with it longer. And even better, if you are enjoying it, you immediately win. You don’t need to wait for a bunch of pounds lost or other results — you get instant results because you’re enjoying the change. I find activities I enjoy, I join challenges or races to make exercise fun, I enjoy a conversation with a friend during a run, I eat healthy foods that are delicious (berries — yum!) and focus on savoring those foods. Focus on the enjoyment, and don’t make the habit change a big sacrifice.

Final Recommendations

Many people set fitness goals for the year. I’ve done it myself, but lately I’ve found that I can get fit without them. For one thing, when you set goals, they are often arbitrary, and so you are spending all your effort working towards a basically meaningless number. And then if you don’t achieve it, you feel like you failed, even if the number was arbitrary to start with. You can create habits without goals — I define goals as a predefined outcome that you’re striving for, not activities that you just want to do. So is creating a habit a goal? It can be, or you can approach it with the attitude “it doesn’t matter what the outcome of this habit change is, but I want to enjoy the change as I do it”.

So enjoy the habit change, in the moment, and don’t worry what the outcome of the activity is. The outcome matters very little, if you enjoy the journey. The journey to fitness can have an infinite number of paths, and setting your path in advance by setting goals is limiting. Allow yourself to change course on a whim, without guilt of not achieving a goal, and you’ll find new paths you’d never have anticipated when you set out. But the most important step of the journey is the first one. After that, the most important step is the one you’re presently taking. So take that step, and enjoy it.

Leo Babauta is the author of The Power of Less and the creator and blogger at Zen Habits. He is an expert on productivity and simplicity. http://zenhabits.net/
Resolutions Cannot Take the Place Of Practice
BY GREGG KRECH

It may not come as a surprise to hear that New Year’s resolutions don’t work – at least for more than 90% of those who make them. You’ll hear a lot of discussion about how to make better resolutions: write them down, be specific, make them realistic. But this doesn’t really address the more fundamental issue – we need to have the self-discipline to make changes in the way we are living. And most of us are living a feeling-centered life, rather than a purpose-centered life. No matter how skillful we are at making resolutions, this fundamental issue still has to be addressed. As long as our lives are tossed to and fro by the tides of our feeling states, we remain relatively incapable of doing what we say we will do.

So to make important changes, we need to shift to a more purpose-centered life. Living with more purpose isn’t just about keeping a few New Year’s resolutions -- it’s about putting our energy towards what truly matters and making wise and conscious choices about how we use our time. And it’s about taking action.

It really takes a lot to keep our lives well-managed. Most of us would like to get our lives to a place where things are organized and stable. But life itself is working in the opposite direction. Life inherently promotes instability and disorganization. I’ve been studying and teaching Japanese Psychology for the past twenty-five years. Unlike most of Western Psychology, the ideas underlying Naikan, Morita Therapy and Kaizen draw from the wisdom and principles of Eastern Philosophy. There are really four key skills that we can all learn to live a more fulfilling and meaningful life. These skills work alongside the laws of impermanence and the changing nature of life. The skills are:

1. **Acceptance**
   We must learn to accept much of life, because much of life is beyond our control. This includes our internal experience (thoughts, feelings), our past, and the behavior of other people.

2. **Co-existing with Unpleasant Feelings**
   We have to learn to take action in a constructive and appropriate way even when we don’t feel like it. This is the essence of self-discipline.

3. **Attention**
   Our experience is what we pay attention to. Most of us put very little energy into developing skillful attention. But it can change the way we move through the moments of our lives.

4. **Self-reflection**
   Our relationships are generally what we most value about our life. But relationships get strained and can often be filled with conflict and stress. The ability to reflect on ourselves is the key to maintaining healthy relationships, as well as cultivating a general sense of gratitude for all we have and for our life itself.

To develop these key skills we need to make a commitment to practice. Practice means we are devoted to incorporating these skills into the very fabric of our daily life. They become part of our spiritual lives and they become part of our trips to the supermarket as well. Without the development of such skills, New Year’s resolutions have very little value, even if we manage to achieve them.

What we must really resolve to do is to live a life built on a foundation of mindfulness, gratitude, compassion and purpose. Such a life has meaning built into each day. It is inherently fulfilling. We can think about goals and accomplishments for the coming year, but they cannot replace the development of a solid foundation that is created by sincere and ongoing practice.
Prayer for Friends
by Michael Leunig

We give thanks for our friends.
Our dear friends.
We anger each other.
We fail each other.
We share this sad earth,
this tender life,
this precious time.
Such richness. Such wildness.
Together we are blown about.
Together we are dragged along.
All this delight.
All this suffering.
All this forgiving life.
We hold it together.
Amen

From The Prayer Tree. © Michael Leunig. All Rights Reserved
For more of Michael Leunig’s writing see his website www.leunig.com.au
I have lived with passion and in a hurry, trying to accomplish too many things. I never had time to think about my beliefs until my 28-year-old daughter Paula fell ill. She was in a coma for a year and I took care of her at home, until she died in my arms in December of 1992.

During that year of agony and the following year of my grieving, everything stopped for me. There was nothing to do -- just cry and remember. However, that year also gave an opportunity to reflect upon my journey and the principles that hold me together. I discovered that there is consistency in my beliefs, my writing and the way I lead my life. I have not changed, I am still the same girl I was fifty years ago, and the same young woman I was in the seventies. I still lust for life, I am still ferociously independent, I still crave justice and I fall madly in love easily.

Paralyzed and silent in her bed, my daughter Paula taught me a lesson that is now my mantra: You only have what you give. It's by spending yourself that you become rich.

Paula led a life of service. She worked as a volunteer helping women and children, eight hours a day, six days a week. She never had any money, but she needed very little. When she died she had nothing and she needed nothing. During her illness I had to let go of everything: her laughter, her voice, her grace, her beauty, her company and finally her spirit. When she died I thought I had lost everything. But then I realized I still had the love I had given her. I don’t even know if she was able to receive that love. She could not respond in any way, her eyes were somber pools that reflected no light. But I was full of love and that love keeps growing and multiplying and giving fruit.

The pain of losing my child was a cleansing experience. I had to throw overboard all excess baggage and keep only what is essential. Because of Paula, I don’t cling to anything anymore. Now I like to give much more than to receive. I am happier when I love than when I am loved. I adore my husband, my son, my grandchildren, my mother, my dog, and frankly I don’t know if they even like me. But who cares? Loving them is my joy.

Give, give, give -- what is the point of having experience, knowledge or talent if I don’t give it away? Of having stories if I don’t tell them to others? Of having wealth if I don’t share it? I don’t intend to be cremated with any of it! It is in giving that I connect with others, with the world and with the divine.

It is in giving that I feel the spirit of my daughter inside me, like a soft presence.