

HOW'S YOUR NEW YEAR SO FAR?

By Al Sargent



reflection. Personally I think the time I spend reflecting on the events that had direct and indirect influence on my own section of the world warrant at least as much time as I'm willing to spend on it. At this point I find it more interesting to notice if I spend more time wishing things had been different or appreciating the things that turned out better than I could have hoped for.

"Seeing past events from an out of time perspective often makes it easier to evaluate how specific events have either caused grief, sorrow, and fear, or have brought joy, personal growth, and memories of love and connection to be remembered far into the future."

Looking back I can easily identify several events that led to something wonderful happening without any input or effort from me. My point here is that once I learned to make a fair accounting of what life had offered me in the past year, I became less compelled to complain and more likely to accept the challenges in stride.

My first conscious awareness that I had been placing too much importance on what didn't go the way I wanted it to was after a round of golf. It's common for players to sit around a table at the 19th hole doing a golfer's version of "the one that got away." One player might complain that if he hadn't gotten a bad bounce he would have shot two strokes better than he did. Soon after, another player would share with the group that he would have made a par on the 13th hole if the green had been smoother. About this time the player who shot the best score of the day might remind his buddies that if a buzzard had a piano there would be music in the air.

Having watched similar scenarios time after time, it occurred to me that the same players who were complaining didn't mention the "good" breaks they had during the round. More often than not, the number of "bad" breaks and "good" breaks equal out leaving the player with the score that matched

As holidays go, The New Year is one of my personal favorites. One of the major reasons I put New Years on my list of good holidays is because it's the only holiday that seems to continue long after the actual day. It's common to have someone wish you a happy new year clear into mid-January.

Another thing I like is the perception most people seem to have that the New Year marks and stabilizes a single point in time. Once a person is able to "stop time", the ensuing sense of control creates an opportunity to reflect on the events of the past. Seeing past events from an out of time perspective often makes it easier to evaluate how specific events have either caused grief, sorrow, and fear, or have brought joy, personal growth, and memories of love and connection to be remembered far into the future.

"The tendency for many people is to focus on the unexpected hurdles that seem to pop up just when things are starting to go the way they want them to. As important as it is to learn and to grow from the challenges life has to offer we can also learn a lot about life from the joy we experience."

Of course I have little access at best to the thoughts and feelings of others at such times of

their overall performance.

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The same thing often happens when reflecting on events from the past. The tendency for many people is to focus on the unexpected hurdles that seem to pop up just when things are starting to go the way they want them to. As important as it is to learn and to grow from the challenges life has to offer we can also learn a lot about life from the joy we experience.

Taking time to reflect on how things are different from a year ago can only be done from a dissociated (observer) position. The sense of neutrality that comes with a cleanly dissociated perspective invites curiosity. This curiosity tends to hold the events of the time frame that has been frozen in retrospect as a marker of progress or other change.

Regardless of the balance between positive and negative events of the previous year, the perceptual filter of an individual will be influenced more based on the individual's current state of mind. If January through mid December brought challenges of sadness and despair and yet the Holiday season was met with good fortune and a spirit of connection, the person will likely look back and say, "Things are looking up." If on the other hand the past year had been magical up until New Years Eve at which point a major challenge fell into a person's lap, the unfortunate victim of the other shoe being dropped might begin the New Year asking, "What else can go wrong?"



In either of the preceding scenarios recounting and evaluating is more accurately assessed with the linear capabilities in the left hemisphere of the

brain. After the left hemisphere has gathered the facts, the right hemisphere begins to create possibilities for the future. It's at this point that a determination is made that will focus on one of two general directions for change. Decisions can be made to correct personality flaws and to quit bad habits, or a person could resolve to enhance life by furthering their education (mind), exercising more (body), and to do more charity work (spirit).

Since most people would agree that a balance of mind, body, and spirit leads to a full and rewarding life, it makes sense that removing negative aspects of life, as well as enhancing the positive aspects of life are equally valuable.

Living a well-balanced life includes setting goals that will leave a person in a state of mind that is as good or better than the way things currently are. The problem is that often a goal is so rigid that reaching the goal creates stress by either becoming a full time job, or leaving the person with a feeling of failure for having one piece of cake. Adding flexibility to a goal increases the odds of staying on course long enough for the change to become a habit.

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There is a presupposition in Neuro Linguistics that states, "There is no such thing as failure, only feedback." Another statement I believe is equally insightful comes from Michael Grinder. Michael teaches that, "Recovery is more important than perfection." I like to think of the two statements together because simply recognizing that there is no failure, only feedback tends to leave me without a follow-up to the next step. It does serve to help me avoid getting down on myself and leads me to a more resourceful emotional state, and at the same time it leaves me feeling just a little bit reactive.

When I add the thought that recovery is more

important than perfection, I get two added benefits. First, I'm reminded that the need to be perfect can be the most debilitating of all needs. There is a big difference between a need to be perfect and striving to be as near perfection as we can. The need to be perfect is a destroyer, whereas, the striving toward perfection can serve as a positive motivation to make our best effort at achievement.

The second benefit to the recovery concept is that the word "recovery" presupposes action, which puts a person into a proactive stance. When you think about it, if our society really required perfection there would be no erasers for pencil's and blackboards, no delete and back-space keys on a computer keyboard, no whiteout or correction tape, and the word "oops" wouldn't be in the dictionary.

It's true that the New Year represents a traditional point in time to reflect and to make change. Now that the New Year is already a couple of months old, remember that anytime is a good time to reflect, evaluate, create, and refresh. It usually takes a little time to remember to write 2002 on your checks and it usually takes a little time to remember to follow any Resolutions you might have made.

If you have slipped away from changes you believe will be useful in your future, re-evaluate those changes to be sure that you have built in the fact that you are a human being that isn't expected to be perfect. If you are holding onto other changes that are causing stress, make sure you are not doing something because someone else thinks it would be best for you. Be kind to yourself as you design any action plan and add changes to your life that will bring joy and fulfillment during the change process.

I wish you all the best this New Year has to offer.

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