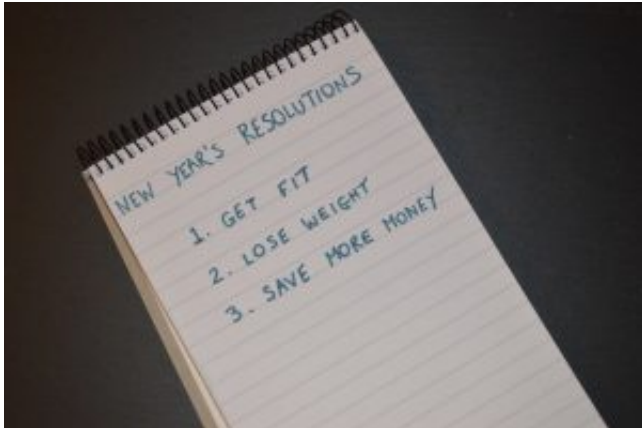


New Year Resolutions And The Power of Will



I am going to quit white sugar. I am going to learn to play the guitar. I am going to lose 10kgs. Sounds familiar? Traditionally the period of transition into the New Year is celebrated with such resolutions. Gym memberships surge in the first week of January, as do the crowds at gyms...only to taper off in the next few months, if not weeks.

The Winter Solstice marks an important moment of transition and renewal, and is celebrated every year through the northern hemisphere through the night of 20th December. The days begin to get longer after this date, and ancient traditions recognized this phenomenon as a symbolic victory of the sun over darkness, as an inspiration for the victory of man's inner sun, the human spirit characterized by goodness, beauty and truth. There are many religious parallels too, where devotees reflect on the wrongdoings over the past year, seeking and offering forgiveness. At the start of every year, it is said that the Romans made promises to the god Janus, after whom the month of January gets its name, as a means to introspect and identify areas for self-improvement. (1)

It is interesting to observe that Life operates in cycles...whether the cycle of life and death, breathing, the cycle of day and night, or that of the seasons. The beginning of every cycle brings with it an opportunity to reflect on the last one, to learn from it, correct, grow, and move forward. To utilize this and to make progress we can learn from our past failures so as to not repeat the same mistakes. We can also identify what we have done well, so as to apply the victories to other areas of our life. As the beginning of such a cycle, therefore, the New Year brings with it a special opportunity.

Furthermore, traditionally Life has been regarded as just, always offering opportunities in the form of right challenges, at the right time. Life many a times brings us to the same point again and again, to face the same challenge, or rather the same opportunity, in different ways, until we actually learn to deal with it. Upon resolving to develop a virtue, occasions begin to present themselves, to enable us to practice that virtue. We need to be ready to recognize them as opportunities and use them for growth. When we do learn to work with these opportunities, we grow, evolve, and we are able to make an upward movement, an upward spiral of life.

In order to work towards this upward movement, however, we need to be careful that we are not



dependant on the excitement of new beginnings, when we feel a surge of determination. At such moments, we are full of optimism, and sometimes merely setting a goal can make us feel good, and we may fall to the illusion that we have achieved something; but this is a fantasy.

Sometimes we may be inclined to forgive ourselves for not taking actual steps towards the goals that we set for ourselves, or for not persisting. At other times we may console ourselves by indulging in guilt. But making a resolution is not just an intellectual activity. Deciding to do something, is but the beginning.

We can learn to use our resolutions as a mandate of real change. The challenge is one of perseverance. The challenge is of actualizing the resolution by exercising the force of Will. After the initial wave of enthusiasm has passed, effort is needed to consistently remind ourselves of our goals and our reasons for setting them, ensuring that we are in constant movement.

Let me close with one final thought. Our times seem to be an age of posturing, and sometimes it is very easy for us to pay attention mainly to the external, or to focus on keeping up appearances. For example, instead of enjoying a view, one might try and ensure that an Instagram-worthy photo of that view is captured. Instead of enjoying another person's company we ensure that we have the perfect selfie with that person. It is as if one is preoccupied with keeping up appearances of a 'happening' life, rather than leading a meaningful, fulfilling, and happy life. Taking a memorable selfie or setting a goal of losing weight are not bad things. But might we consider more profound resolutions that relate not only with *doing* things better, but those that foster *being* better, becoming better versions of our selves – more authentic and more virtuous?