

Your New Year's Resolutions: Are They "Same Old Same Old" Or Self-Respectful and Intentional?

In the immortal words of John Lennon, another year is over and a new one's just begun.

Isn't it interesting how we, as a society, agree that this is the time to give ourselves and our lives a complete and total new makeover? We have decided that at this time of the year we will revisit the year we're leaving behind, dissecting it to see what worked for us and what didn't. And on top of that, we need to make sure that we meet all of our "resolutions" quickly and perfectly or else we have failed – no pressure there!

While there is nothing wrong with re-assessing yourself from time to time and exploring changes you would like to make, the problems come when you allow yourself to over-identify with the "hype" of the season. It is one thing to make the overblown and often unrealistic New Year's resolutions that you think you *should* make at this time of year, and quite a different process to take stock of where you are, in present time, to see what you might like to be doing differently so that you can live your best life.

RESOLUTION vs. INTENTION

My dictionary defines *resolution* as "the action of solving." It stands to reason, therefore, that if we are looking at making resolutions, we will be focusing on problems in our lives that need to be solved. We will be looking at what we think is "wrong" with us and how to "fix" ourselves. Common examples of resolutions might be losing weight or going to the gym more often because we see ourselves as being too heavy. Whatever our resolutions are, the perception will be that something is wrong with us and we need to fix it.

An *intention* is different. My dictionary defines intention as "the determination to act in a certain way". This has nothing to do with seeing yourself as a problem that needs to be resolved; instead, intentions are about becoming aware of different ways that you would prefer to be in your life. Some examples of an intention might be to become more patient with the people in your life, to treat others with more kindness, or to feel like you're making a positive difference in the world.

In my experience, most New Year's Resolutions stem from problems that people think they need to solve about themselves. Most commonly, these resolutions are often about decreasing "addictive behaviours" such as alcohol and/or drug use, over-eating (or under-

eating), smoking, over-spending, gambling, spending too much time on the internet, or being in relationships that are not healthy.

It is important to understand that addictive behaviours are generally used to avoid facing what is really going on in our lives. In order to avoid a variety of life tasks, or to avoid having to experience their true feelings, many people create destructive and self-sabotaging distractions for themselves. If you think this may be the case in your life, you might want to try doing something different this year.

HOW ARE YOU FEELING ABOUT YOURSELF?

This year, instead of looking at something about yourself that you need to fix or improve, why not explore how you would prefer to feel about yourself? For example, if quitting smoking is something you would really like to do in 2009, focusing on the increased self-respect you will feel when you accomplish this may be more helpful than shaming yourself into it by telling yourself that you "should" quit or how weak you are for continuing to smoke.

In the same way, ask yourself how you feel about yourself when you consistently distract yourself by drinking too much, over-eating, over-spending or staying in a relationship that is emotionally or physically abusive for you. Would those inner feelings change if you were to begin taking better care of yourself? How can you best honour and respect yourself? What do you need to do (or not do) to feel that sense of inner peace and self-respect, and how can you translate that into an intention for self-caring change?

IT CAN HELP TO TALK IT OVER

Becoming aware of how you would like to feel about yourself and beginning to make your changes from that place will help you to be more realistic when deciding upon your intentions. This self-awareness will also give you more incentive to actually follow through on the steps you will need to take to reach your goals. You may well find that this kind of inner change brings your intentions to fruition more swiftly than trying to "fix" yourself from the outside in.

When you are on the threshold of inner changes, it can be useful to talk about your thoughts and feelings with a supportive friend, family member, colleague, or perhaps with a skilled professional who can help you make sense of what is going on inside of you. Remember to be gentle with yourself, as you are more likely to make your intended changes when you stop shaming and guilt-tripping yourself.