

The New Year typically finds many of us reflecting on where we are in our lives and thinking about improvements we'd like to make. Most of the time, our resolutions center around things like losing weight, exercising more, eating better, or taking time for ourselves, etc.

Most of us start out with commitment and resolve only to find ourselves back where we started in a matter of weeks or months. All we really achieve in this cycle is an increased sense of frustration and guilt because once again, we didn't keep at it and follow through with what we told ourselves we were going to do - and then we're left feeling awful about ourselves.

It's time to stop that insanity.

***The longest spiritual journey ever undertaken is the 18" between your head and your heart.***

Ask most people what they want for their life and the "thinking" answer comes easily. They'll tell you they want to be happy, or have a life surrounded by love. They want to be more authentic, live wholeheartedly, or be successful. They want to have more time to pursue their passions or their dreams.

So, if it's so easy to identify the want, why do most people find it so hard to integrate and live it?

I've found it to be 3 simple things: ***intention, definition, and action.***

✦ ***Part One: "Laying the foundation with intention."***

Perhaps this year, instead of *goal oriented resolutions*, we focus on *process centered intentions*. Instead of setting a goal to loose weight, we instead focus on the positive 'mind and spirit' changes we want to make within ourselves by setting aside the time to look at who we are and how we live each moment – asking ourselves if where we are emotionally and spiritually is where we truly want to be, and if not, how we can be better people in our relationships with ourselves, with others and with the world in which we live.

***There is, within all of us, a life we want to live. To experience that life, we have to become the person who will live it. (Ralph Marston)***

Take a look back at 2011.

Grab a piece of paper and start making a list, acknowledging yourself for what you did well.....

- 1.) What did you create?
- 2.) What challenges did you face with courage, grace and strength?
- 3.) What promises to yourself did you keep?

- 4.) What are you most proud of?
- 5.) What made you laugh out loud?
- 6.) What brave choices did you make?
- 7.) Who did you forgive?
- 8.) What brought you the most joy?
- 9.) What did you love the most about your year?

And then acknowledge your struggles....

- 1.) What disappointed you the most?
- 2.) What made you cry?
- 3.) What did you grieve?
- 4.) What was the hardest lesson you had to learn?
- 5.) What was the hardest thing you had to let go of?
- 6.) Who do you need to forgive and why?

This list is the starting point for your intentions for the New Year, and will help you determine what you want to bring with you into 2012 and what you want to let go of.

The wonderful thing about *process oriented intentions* is that we cannot fail. If we find ourselves responding in ways that aren't in alignment with our intentions, we can learn from the lesson and use it for our spiritual growth knowing there is another fresh and new moment right behind that one, filled with possibilities and opportunities to do it differently or better – to do it in a little kinder and gentler way, to be a more compassionate person – to ourselves and others.

These *intentions*, unlike most *resolutions*, provide a gentle guiding light that keeps us headed in the right direction as we make our way forward onto creating the life we want to live and being the person who will live it.

***“What we think, we create. Our biology becomes our biography.” (Caroline Myss)***

A recent study by the National Science Foundation found that the average person processes roughly 60,000 thoughts per day, and that the majority (roughly 80%) of those thoughts we think are negative and critical.

We have a constant dialogue going on inside our head. Conversations (so to speak) with ourselves about ourselves – whether consciously or unconsciously. These conversations repeat themselves over and over until they become embedded in our psyches, eating away at our self-love, self-esteem and sense of worth.

## **Part Two: “So what does that mean exactly?”**

And if those 60,000 thoughts and the constant chatter isn't self defeating enough, we also live in a world of ambiguity – of fuzzy little buzz words and catch phrases and affirmations that keep the thoughts in our head separate from aligning with the desires of

our hearts. The constant chatter keeps us from being able to dig deeper, mindfully and consciously laying a foundation to identify whatever it is we're searching for so we can recognize it when it gets here and we have it.

*(For the sake of this week's exercise I'm going to use "happy" as an example, but you will use whatever word for whatever it is YOU want for your life in the new year....)*

What do I want for my life in 2012? ***"I want to be happy."***

Okey dokey - but have you stopped to think about and define what exactly that means to YOU? How do you DEFINE happy in the context of your life?

In other words, what exactly would "being happy" look like, or feel like or how would it play out in your life if you had it and were happy?

Most of us don't know because we haven't spent time past the initial "want." Or if we have thought past the want, there is an internal voice that comes up with a hundred excuses for why it won't or can't happen, and feeling defeated before we even start, we turn on ourselves with the critical and negative self talk.

***When we don't clearly define whatever it is we want, we cannot recognize it when it gets here or we're already living in it.***

***First things first: Write it all out – IN DETAIL.***

***Choose your word for what you want, get a sheet of paper and begin writing.....(this is where you will identify, define, qualify and quantify your word for yourself)***

***(Step One) Define it - pick up a dictionary and look it up:***

♦ hap·py adj \ha-pē\

***Definition of HAPPY (Merriam-Webster Dictionary)***

1: favored by luck or fortune : fortunate

2: notably fitting, effective, or well adapted : felicitous

3a : enjoying or characterized by well-being and contentment b : expressing, reflecting, or suggestive of happiness c : glad, pleased d : having or marked by an atmosphere of good fellowship : friendly

4 : enthusiastic about something

***Does that fit your own personal definition of "happy"? (If not, create your own definition.)***

***(Step Two) Now write a statement about happy using the definition you've created:***

*(Example) I want to be happy – **and for me, being happy would be** feeling fortunate (blessed by my life and the people in it), effective (what I say and do makes a difference and matters), well adapted (going with the flow of my life not all caught up in worry and fear all the time), felicitous and friendly (acting happy to be happy), being content (focusing on what I have not what I don't), and marked by an atmosphere of fellowship (being a friend and having friends.)*

***(Step Three) Where does happiness already exist in my life?***

What makes you feel happy or brings happiness into your day? Make a list of at least three things: (Example):

- 1.) I feel happiest when I give myself quiet time to rest and rejuvenate.
- 2.) I feel happiest when I am around other positive happy people.
- 3.) I feel happiest when I'm writing or doing my art

***(Step Four) What ACTION step(s) can I take to recognize and/or embrace the "happy" already in my life? (List the top three and be SPECIFIC):***

(Example):

1. Get a journal and each morning spend at least 15 minutes writing out my intention to be happy for the day and name one thing that makes me happy or brings me happiness that I will do that day.
2. Write a gratitude list (in my journal) of at least 3 things that brought happiness into my life each night before I go to bed.
3. Connect with and spend time with at least one happy person each week.

***(Step Five) What are three things I do to sabotage my own happiness that I am willing to let go of today? (Example):***

- ◆ Focusing on what I don't have or what is making me unhappy.
- ◆ Playing victim and holding other people responsible for my happiness/unhappiness.
- ◆ Letting mean, angry people get to me, and not only taking responsibility for their unhappiness, but feeling guilty when I'm happy and they aren't.

***(Step Five) What will I do to actually let go of the things that sabotage my happiness? (Example):***

- ◆ When I find myself starting to make that “list” in my head, I will stop myself and refocus – consciously replacing that negative list with at least three things that I DO have in my life right now that DOES make me happy.
- ◆ Remember that my level of happiness is my responsibility and a choice I make. .
- ◆ Remember I am not responsible for another person’s happiness, and although misery loves company, I don’t have to keep it company – I can detach myself.

*(Step Six) PUTTING IT INTO CONSCIOUS ACTION:*

Note: it takes 21 days of conscious and consistent cognitive “restructuring” (replacing the old thought with the new one) to reprogram an old belief, thought, habit or behavior.

Keep this list where you will read it each and every morning and evening for (at the very least) the next 21 days, and I guarantee that you will begin to see changes in your thoughts, attitudes and yes, your life – changes that will give you the foundation, guidance and clarity you need to follow through and make the changes that YOU want to bring into 2012!