

# Looking Forward, Looking Back



The month of January is named for the Roman god Janus, the god of doorways and gates, responsible for ushering in new beginnings while placing past endings firmly behind. Janus is depicted with double faces, one looking forward and another looking back, a perfect depiction of what the new year represents: a time for purposeful reflection and introspection, and a time to set positive intentions for the upcoming annum. By **Mira Khreino**





"Many resolutions are a reflection of an internal struggle"

## Resolution Déjà Vu

It would be easy to make the same resolutions again and again — and most of us do. Join the gym, spend more quality time with family and friends, become more organized, and eat healthier. We've all been there! With the best intentions, we make the same resolutions year in and year out, expecting a different outcome. "This year will be different," we repeatedly convince ourselves. A common definition for insanity is doing the same thing over and over again expecting a different result, yet we make those same resolutions once more, expecting a different outcome.

So let's agree that, in order to succeed, something has got to change, or shift. The shift we are referring to here is a change of internal perspective and a change in the way we relate to ourselves. Instead of actually making resolutions this year, spend the time trying to understand 1) the real reasons behind the resolutions you've been choosing, 2) what has prevented you from accomplishing them, and 3) if those resolutions are truly important to *you* in the first place.

By exploring the driving forces behind your resolutions, you get to know yourself and your internal motivators a little better. As difficult as it may be to accept, you may realize that many resolutions are a reflection of an internal struggle. They are most often set to accomplish a sense of internal peace, personal acceptance, self-esteem, or self-confidence. If looked at carefully, they serve as a mere veneer that masks deeper

internal discontent. By seeing the deeper issues with which you may be struggling, you give yourself the chance to work through them, either making peace with them and accepting them as part of yourself or overcoming them. This will allow you to step into the New Year with more clarity, insight, and understanding of how you operate and of what is truly important to your happiness.

Begin this process by taking a moment to appreciate your starting point — where you are now, the things you have, the things that are important to you, the people who support you, what you want to work towards, and what you feel are potential challenges and obstacles. By truly understanding where you are and where you have come from, and by looking back at the journey you have taken so far, you will better understand where you are going and what that future might entail.

As you reflect back on the year past, jot down a list of the challenging times you faced, as well as how you dealt with those difficulties and what lessons they taught you. By doing this simple exercise, you prevent those experienced hardships from passing in vain without teaching you anything. When you put your memories down on paper, you consciously highlight your coping skills and strategies and demonstrate to yourself the life lessons learned from experiencing adversity. Remember, if we don't learn from our experiences, we are likely to make the same mistakes time and time again.



## Reflecting On The Past

Reflecting on the past year(s) is of ultimate importance before moving forward into the next. How would we ever learn without looking back on our mistakes? How are we ever to appreciate our skills without noting the times we demonstrated them? How can we grow without remembering how we stood up after a fall? By looking back, we become aware of the choices we have made, our behaviors, and our reactions to specific circumstances. In other words, by looking back, we mature. We become cognizant of what we have prioritized versus what we have neglected, and can then acknowledge that these decisions have led us to become the people who we are today, leading the lives we live.

In order to look forward with clarity, we need to look back in honesty. Anger and regret can cloud our memories of past events, so be mindful to put them at bay. Reflect with the sole purpose of learning, appreciating, and moving forward as the best version of you. Looking back highlights your strengths as well as the areas where you struggle and falter or feel uneasy. As you reflect, acknowledge that our life lessons are hidden in our struggles. Remember that it is not what happens in life, but how we react to what happens. Our mindset and outlook determines our path more than any event that we may encounter. The decisions we make at those times show us much about ourselves.

We all have aspects of ourselves that we would like to work on, improve, make peace with, explore, nurture, and process. For some, it may be the creative, others the active; some the spiritual, others the physical; some the social, others the romantic. If there is an area in your life you struggle with, explore it with honesty. The only way to discover what lies beneath the smiles is frank reflection and self-analysis. Instead of running away from and ignoring these messier qualities, or masking them with yet another resolution, this year make that shift. Travel a little deeper within, gain more clarity and understanding of your inner self, and take control of your life!





## We're All In This Together

Get the entire family involved in setting the goals for next year. To include your children in the process of looking back to look forward, start by naming all of their accomplishments, the big and the small. Look at their academics (excelling in a specific subject or project); creativity (playing a musical instrument, art, or writing); organizational skills (handing in assignments on time or keeping a room tidy); sense of responsibility (doing chores or feeding the dog); relationships (kindness towards siblings, sharing toys, or making friends); physical changes (growing or losing teeth); sports and activities (horseback riding, ballet, or basketball accomplishments); spiritual growth (feeling thankful or taking the high road); and their overall outlook and attitude (choosing to be one way instead of another).

Next, look at the future together. Let your child set their own goals and resolutions instead of you making them on

your child's behalf. Try to steer away from picking goals for your children because you disapprove of the way they do things. Instead, discuss and explore with them if they think there is a better way to do things and encourage them to find solutions for themselves. For example, if a child finds it challenging to keep their book bag organized, refrain from pushing them to promise to keep their book bag tidy. This kind of goal not only potentially sets your child up for failure, but also does not give them the tools to keep the bag tidy for themselves. With such a goal, there is no focus on the reason the bag is disorganized in the first place, the negative effects this is causing, or whether or not the untidy bag poses a problem to the child.

Always encourage your children to talk with you about how they are progressing with their goals (weeks to months later), which you can respond to by monitoring and providing feedback on how you think they are doing. Support your child towards success.

*"In order to look forward with clarity, we need to look back in honesty"*







## Rethinking Last Year's Failed Resolutions

If you plan for next year to be more than a repetition of the year before, past successes and failures alike need to be appreciated. By gaining a fuller picture of what has worked for you in the past and what has not, you give yourself the chance to work with yourself to ensure better success. For example, if you are a black-or-white, all-or-nothing kind of person, slowly cutting back on a vice might not work as well for you as quitting cold turkey. If, however, you are the type of person who makes adjustments in small increments, then partially replacing bad habits with healthier ones might be a more productive strategy. With the right plan for your personality and an understanding of what doesn't work for you, you will get to exactly where you want to go. Here's a look at the top 10 most common resolutions and tips on how to get them right this time around:

### 1. Lose Weight

If your goals revolve around weight loss, make sure you are very honest about why it is that you would like to lose weight. Your honesty will help you discover the the root of your problem. If you want weight loss to be in the cards for the new year, ensure it is done very healthily in small increments, and that you maintain a healthy weight range. A strong, healthy body is more important than anything else; we seldom appreciate how important our health is until it is negatively impacted and our strength impaired. We have one body, carrying our vital organs, for our whole lifetime. Treat it well and with respect for a long, healthy life.

### 2. Stick To A Healthy Lifestyle

What we eat is a conscious choice, and sometimes it is difficult to make peace with the choice to ply our bodies with preservatives, artificial coloring, and artery-clogging oils. When possible, choose organic. The polluted air we breathe, the water we wash in, and the chemicals in our cosmetics and in the plastics we store our food in are all inadvertently damaging our health. Let's not add insult to injury by making unhealthy food choices as well, especially when diet is so easy to control. Eat your greens in abundance, try new foods, and have a variety of colors on your plate. If possible, avoid additives, preservatives, colorings, E-numbers, sulphates, and high-content salt and sugar foods. Keep your food in glass containers instead of plastic and use paraben- and alcohol-free deodorant. Care about what goes in and what goes on your body.

### 3. Save Money

If we regard money and happiness as one and the same, then financial struggles will pose a much greater challenge than necessary and have a severe negative impact on our overall happiness. If your resolution is to make money, think of the driving reason behind that. Is it to buy specific services? Is it to be like your peers? Does your own self-worth revolve around how much you have? If saving is the issue, then stop compulsive purchases by understanding what need they cater to. We don't need half of the things we think of buying, so leave a couple of weeks between wanting to buy something

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and actually getting it. Forgo credit cards for debit cards to prevent yourself from going into debt. Also, set up a monthly transfer from your monthly wages into a separate savings (or “do not touch”) account. While you're at it, why not set up a direct debit to your favorite charity? Spending your money on worthwhile causes will make you feel better and allow you to support someone in deeper need than yourself.



#### 4. Get Organized

Mess and clutter can appear in many forms. Letters, accumulated emails, clothes, an untidy home, and unresolved interpersonal issues can all constitute mess. And mess means stress. By de-cluttering, you get rid of things you do not need and allow space for the things you do. On an emotional level, ask yourself, does having this thing or person in my life serve me? Does it nurture me and make me happy? If not, consider letting it go. On a practical de-cluttering level, create three piles titled Keep, Throw, and Charity; this will help you get organized. Chores can sometimes be a real drag, but that drag does not disappear if you ignore it. By keeping on top of your mess, for example, by keeping a tidy home, you will have more free space, find things easier, and be more likely to invite over company. A clean and tidy home is known to be better for your overall health.

#### 5. Look On The Bright Side

Positive thinking has been related to better overall health and increased life span. That is not to say that we should flee or ignore unpleasant situations, but rather that we should strive to be more optimistic about the outcome of a situation and address it calmly instead of tackling it with a negative mind frame. Self-fulfilling prophecies are self-imposed; you determine the outcome due to your mindset. Positive thinking can also make us feel more resilient, less stressed, more able to cope with challenges, and more capable of dealing with adversity by equipping us with skills and mechanisms for dealing with life's ups and downs. Start today. Instead of looking in the mirror and seeing a fault in your complexion, find something positive to say to yourself.

#### 6. Cut Back On Technology

Most of us are guilty of being unhealthily attached to our smartphones. Every little buzz, ring, and vibration creates an instant impulse to pick the device up. In actuality, most messages can wait — so let them! While you are chatting with a friend, be considerate enough to put your phone away and put it on silent. Make a pact with yourself to not use the phone for the next hour, really valuing the time you are spending together and being fully present in the here and now. Unhealthy attachments to your phone, a sense of urgency to respond to messages, and a lack of quality social interactions are all common results of excessive smartphone use.

#### 7. Be Honest

Dare to be honest — honest about your feelings and emotions, honest about your thoughts, and honest about what is important and valuable to you. Sometimes this needs courage and sometimes it will come easily; either way, the real you and your unique thoughts and feelings deserve expression. Be truthful with yourself and be truthful with others. Don't compromise on who you are because you feel the person who you are interacting with cannot handle it; that is something they will need to make peace with.

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#### 8. Read More, Watch Less

Reality TV — as entertaining as it is — does little to enrich your life or your body of knowledge. If you are not the type to read novels, then pick up a book of short stories or, if that isn't for you, a book of poems. Books are available on every topic. If that is too much of a commitment, then subscribe to a magazine with quality, informative articles. That way, you enrich yourself, open up your mind, gain knowledge, and can have more to say than just comments about the weather, dirty nappies, and your rude boss at your next dinner. Get an interesting hobby and just turn the television off. Find something that interests you and explore it.

#### 9. Spend More Time Outdoors

The fresh air does us a world of good. If you find yourself cooped up at home, go out for a walk instead. Whenever possible, spend time in nature — that may take the form of deserts instead of green pastures, or the Dead Sea instead of a freshwater river. Either way, you are connecting to nature and Mother Earth. Get a dog and take it out on walks, get into gardening and spend more time among the plants in your green space, or even organize trips to greener areas. The enclosure of four walls is much more boring than the world out there.

#### 10. Rest Up

Sleeping well improves overall function and performance, memory, concentration, creativity, and alertness. It gives us a sense of emotional and physical wellbeing. There's a reason we never hear someone complaining that they got a good night's sleep! Sleep also improves the appearance of our complexion and reduces dark circles. Sleep, along with drinking plenty of water, maintaining a healthy diet, conducting a moderate amount of exercise, and a positive outlook contribute to a healthy lifestyle and increased life expectancy.







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### A New Chapter

Looking back, we see the past year, engraved with our memories, achievements, challenges, and the lessons we have learned, flavored with the friends who have celebrated our ups and supported us through our downs. Looking forward, we see the beginning of a new year, coupled with insights as to how we would like to lead our lives, an ignited verve to work, a willingness to try, and a determination to succeed. Make a self-request for 2015 to not

be afraid to make the most of the opportunities that lie ahead. Every day can be a new start. We don't need December 31 to pop up on our calendars to seize the opportunity to make a positive change in life. Live each day to the fullest. Be thankful and grateful for all you have and all you do not — those things we wish for that don't come true might not serve our best interests or might provide lessons within the struggle. And lastly, Happy New Year! May it be a blessed year for all. ■