

## Turn New Year's Resolutions into Revelations by Kristi Nelson

There is no other time of year that stirs our cultural and personal interest in self-improvement more than the shiny, clean slate of an impending new calendar year. For many of us, January 1st beckons with vast possibility; we are encouraged to front-load the year with an abundance of hopes lost and built up since the last New Year. It is the legitimated time for new beginnings, big dreams, lofty goals, and resolutions that can make us feel like this is *deja-vu* all over again. How many of us could simply cross out an old date and write "This year" at the top of dozens of lists of resolutions we have made over the years?

New Year's resolutions tend to be about wanting more of something we desire and/or less of something we do not, and while they surely have their noble side, they also often emanate from subtle and less subtle forms of perceived lack, scarcity, comparison, self-flagellation, and judgment. The "should" and "should not" messages we send ourselves when we make resolutions can be harsh and incriminating. These are qualities we may want to endeavor not to perpetuate and strengthen when we make our commitments this year.

How about making "the means more of the ends" by putting gratefulness rather than scarcity at the center of the resolutions we make this year? How about bringing a more gentle form of motivation, rooted in appreciation, celebration, and acceptance, to our goals? How about letting gratitude guide us?

Here are some ideas about ways we could consider integrating Grateful Living practices into our resolutions:

### Let Gratefulness Inform Your Longings

Unabashedly write your "usual" list of resolutions (more of this, less of that) to which you would like to bring attention for the New Year.

Now, try imagining a centerpiece of gratefulness, or a source of "great-fullness," for each of them. How would each of your longings shift if you used "gratitude for what already is" as an impetus for changes that you want to make?

Try writing the list again with a more grateful focus and see if it feels different and/or more feasible to pursue your longings with this energy.

### More Grateful Awareness

Make a list of things for which you would like to be and feel more grateful in the coming year. These can be:

aspects of your life you would like to stop taking for granted

blessings you want to keep in your daily awareness

privileges you want to be sure to leverage for the greater good

opportunities that appear even in challenging times

daily gifts of the body and being alive, etc.

### Share Grateful Sentiments

Write a list of people with whom you would like to share grateful sentiments this year, and become energized by the intention to write them, either by eCard or by mail. How many people could you thank? Try including people:

with whom you have lost touch

who have been caregivers for you or your loved ones

who are role models or mentors

who have had significant influence in your life

you may need to forgive or ask forgiveness

you know your gratitude will bring joy or healing

you see every day but forget to thank

### Do Something: Grateful Living in Practice

Turn your love and gratitude for treasured things and people in your life into a list of actions that you will take this year to nurture, protect, and preserve them:

Cook for someone who would appreciate the help

Pick up trash when you are walking in an area whose beauty you love

Volunteer for an organization doing work you respect

Donate to a cause whose work you appreciate

Shop at places whose values you admire

Write a letter about an issue you care about in your community

Treat yourself, each day, to a meaningful gesture of kind self-care...

Bringing a grateful balance to our resolutions can make them revelations in our lives, not

just a long list of “shoulds.” Revelations reveal things to us in enlightening ways. Every day we can remind ourselves of the truth of what we already have, and already are. That, itself, is revelatory.

The simple practices of grateful living are ones that we know, from research and lived experience, hold the key to greater well-being and contentment. Crafting our resolutions as a balance of both appreciation and aspiration is a really worthwhile exercise, and one we hope you will join us in exploring as you greet the shiny, clean slate of the coming year, and every new day within it.

A cautionary note: Even when making these kinds of lists that put gratitude more at the center, we have to stay vigilant in our self-awareness. The mind wants to make grateful living another “should,” and a way for us to fall down on how we think we are supposed to be. Grateful living actually wants you to make your resolutions grounded in perpetual learning, compassion, and insight. If you feel like you are failing at your commitment to live more gratefully, stop and take a deep breath. Look around you. Look inside yourself. See the opportunity; let yourself notice that you are already grateful enough...

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