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New calendar, new beginnings

by Carol Meyer

Eco Catholic

I like the Christmas season, with its unique high spirits, days of leisure, and surcease from normal workloads. But you can't beat the feeling I get in early January when the decorations are put away and things return to normal. I've had my fun and relaxation, and now it's time to get moving with renewed purpose. It's almost like there is a palpable, collective energy in the air whispering, "Arise. It's a new beginning."

So hope emerges, oozing out of the fresh pages of a colorful new calendar. The past is gone, the future allures, silently beckoning with a finger to come try again. Whether written or not, most of us make some sort of new year's resolutions, in spite of the fact that we usually don't keep them for very long, if at all. Is there any way out of this pattern of zeal and determination morphing into laziness and the comfortable old status quo?

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I am here to support your desire for self-improvement. I am the Angel of Encouragement drowning out the voices that tell you not to bother trying. I am Lady Wisdom offering advice on how to make this year different.

1. Remember that it's not about will power, but about motivation! So the trick is to motivate yourself sufficiently. For instance, don't just say, "I'm going to stop eating sweets." Read a book with graphic details about what harm sugar is doing to your body, and then remember that when you're tempted to reach for a doughnut. Do whatever it takes to keep your motivation fresh and strong (new facts, pictures of the desired outcome, celebrating achievements, association with folks with the same goals, etc.).

2. Know there is power in your firm intention. You have to be 100 percent committed for something to work. If you are half-hearted, figure out why and get all parts of yourself on the same page. Use strong

positive language about your resolutions. The worst possible thing is saying, "I'll try." Ugh! That means you won't do it. Your mind is powerful. Say, "I will!" with conviction. Tell yourself change is easy and enjoyable.

3. Ask God for help in deciding what resolutions to make, and then write them down, specific and positive. Post them, read them often, and imagine the joy of them being realized.

4. Think of your new year's goals as promises that you make to your own spirit. Author Carolyn Myss says that your commitment when truly made with integrity, constantly transfers power to you, even if you are not conscious of it. Wow!

5. Give no energy to guilt or discouragement if you mess up. Stay peaceful and rejoice in whatever progress you make, which is better than nothing, right?

6. Know that God and the universe are fully on your side, wanting your highest good, so accept the divine strength and help that is constantly poured out on you.

7. Recall these words of Somerset Maugham, "It is a funny thing about life; if you refuse to accept anything but the best, you very often get it."

Finally, a word on what kinds of resolutions to make. Expand your horizons. Don't just settle for the ever-popular, usually self-defeating, "I'm going to lose weight and exercise more." It's a fine goal if you are prepared to learn a whole new healthy way to eat and you get a personal trainer or join a regular exercise class, and it really is your highest priority.

But how about resolutions concerning your spiritual growth, your service to others, your care for the Earth, and your bold striving for your heart's deepest desires?

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I've always found that when my resolutions are born out of soul-searching and are truest to my highest self, that's when the whole universe conspires to aid me. Some years back, I was meditating sporadically. Then I decided to make regular meditation one of my new year's resolutions. That's all it took. From then on, it was a given, a firm decision in faith, which released me from my former wishy-washy position of having to decide whether to do it or not. Soon there was a freedom in the habit, much as I brush my teeth every day without a mental dialogue or negotiation.

So I know resolutions can work. I pray they do for you. God knows that we and the world can use some self-improvement, so let's get busy! If you are ready to make and change and it is congruent with your being, it will indeed come about.

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