

Stepping Mindfully Through the Door to 2017

January was named for the ancient Roman god of gates, doors and beginnings. Always pictured with two faces—one looking toward the future, the other back at the past—Janus is a fitting symbol for the turning of a new year.

As we step through the doorway from one year to the next, it's natural to do as Janus does: look back and ahead. But this year, instead of just reflecting on the past year or making New Year's resolutions, consider using this first part of the year to take stock of your life.

Who are you? What do you believe? What do you really need?

These are questions worth examining, even if the answers might be scary or hard to hear. For when we discover who we really are, we stop living on auto-pilot and start to live with intention, focus and purpose. Our choices become clearer. We begin to make active choices in our life, instead of making excuses or passively living with the status quo.

Here are a few questions to get you started. Have a journal or some way to record your thoughts. (Writing by hand keeps you in touch with your breath and your heart.)

- What is aching to be expressed?
- What needs healing?
- What unique gifts, talents and skills do you bring to the world?
- How are you using them (or not)?
- Who do you need to forgive? How about yourself?
- What beliefs are holding you back or getting in your way?

- What can you let go of in your life?
- What makes you happy?
- Don't forget to consider the vital information that other "parts" of yourself are giving you. When you use only your head, your experience of yourself and the world is more limited.
- What is your body telling you?
- When someone yells at you, does your stomach tie up in knots? Do your shoulders stiffen when you've been too focused on fulfilling others' needs and ignoring your own? Notice the messages your body is giving you.
- Check in with your heart. The heart is the home of what is most alive in us. What does your heart have to say about your job? About

how you spend your days? Does it need more play time? According to your heart, what really matters?

- Listen to your intuition, your "gut."

Your intuition speaks volumes, but often gets ignored. What is this voice saying now?

- Don't forget to notice what you already have that is working. Acknowledge and give thanks for the gifts and the beauty and the miracles that are in your life right now. Write them down.

Tell the truth. Now is the time to start being honest about who you really are. Encouraging those un-lived parts of ourselves to emerge can provide an exhilarating sense of discovery and optimism for the New Year and beyond. *

"Without reflection, we go blindly on our way."

—Margaret J. Wheatley

10 Actions to Relieve the Winter Blues

After-the-holidays heaviness can affect people from all climate zones. If you find yourself feeling a little sad, low energy, bored and maybe even lonely, consider one or more of these 10 ways to relieve those winter blues. Notice that they all start with an action!

- 1. Exercise** regularly and maintain a healthy diet.
- 2. Keep** a regular sleep schedule.
- 3. Pamper** yourself—massage, beauty salon, spa. Paint your toenails.
- 4. Take** a vacation—even a weekend (even an afternoon) away can help.
- 5. Make** dates for special occasions with friends and family.
- 6. Do** things that make you laugh.
- 7. Tackle** a project you've been meaning to do, even if you can do only a bit at a time.
- 8. Participate** in activities that enhance your spiritual well-being.
- 9. Volunteer**—give something of yourself to others.
- 10. Create** something. Make art. Paint a room. Take dance lessons.

*The good news is that winter blues is not chronic; it will pass. However, if symptoms intensify and include signs of depression such as loss of energy, sleep disturbances, changes in appetite, feelings of restlessness, worthlessness or inappropriate guilt, please seek professional help. **

A Letter From

Olona L. Tobin, Ed.D.



At the turn of the new year, our thoughts typically turn to beginnings and endings, to the bigger picture.

- What do I want this year to be like?
- What am I committing to (maybe once again)?
- What am I wanting to let go of, and how can I do it gracefully?
- What is my heart telling me?
- What's holding me back?

That's what's in this newsletter issue. The feature article on page 1 looks at the value of self-reflection, while the page 3 article suggests journaling (and 6 different types of journals) as a way to peer into the heart and catch inspiration.

In fact, starting a journal at the beginning of a new year is a wonderful support to a year of personal growth.

The quiz this issue takes a different look at a topic that's frequently at the top of "New Year's Resolutions" lists. What would it be like if this year, instead of vowing to lose weight, you vowed simply to LOVE your body more?

The Top 10 on page 1 tackles a common barrier to positive, forward movement in the new year (and other times, as well), suggesting ways to sidestep the blues if they threaten to settle in after the holidays are over.

And finally, when divorce is on the horizon, consider the suggestions for how to minimize the trauma for children.

Feel free to share this newsletter and, as always, if you want more copies or have any questions about the articles, don't hesitate to call.

Do You Love, Accept and Appreciate Your Body?

In 2016, Sports Illustrated magazine featured a plus-size swimsuit model for the first time. A step forward in our cultural acceptance, for sure. Yet for many of us, the struggle to accept our body is far from over. Take this quiz to find out how well you love your body. (The more "true" answers, the more loving your relationship with your body.) Focusing on the ways our body serves us and how we can serve it helps us to accept—yes, even love—our body and stop obsessing about its appearance.



True False

- 1. I appreciate that my arms enable me to hold someone I love, that my thighs enable me to run.
- 2. I wear comfortable clothes that I really like and that feel good to my body, rather than try to hide or camouflage my body or to follow uncomfortable trends.
- 3. I judge myself as a whole person, not just as a body.
- 4. I do things that let me enjoy my body—dance, take a hot bath, walk, get a massage.
- 5. I act the way I would if I had a perfect body.
- 6. I notice that the appearance of people I admire is unimportant to their success and accomplishments.
- 7. I do things I enjoy and don't let my weight or shape keep me from them.
- 8. I tell my body at night how much I appreciate what it has allowed me to do throughout the day.
- 9. I exercise to feel good and love my body, not to lose weight.
- 10. I count my blessings, not my blemishes.
- 11. I think of my body as a source of pleasure.
- 12. I wear clothes only if they give me feelings of power, beauty and comfort.
- 13. I consider myself the expert on my body, not magazines.
- 14. I am as "in love" with my body as with an infant.
- 15. I think of my body as a tool, as an instrument of my life, not just as an ornament.
- 16. I act as though I am my body's advocate, not its enemy.
- 17. I listen to my body and take its needs and wishes into consideration when making decisions.
- 18. I refuse to waste time criticizing my body or worrying about my appearance. Instead, I spend my time on something more precious or productive.
- 19. When someone says, "You look great today," I enthusiastically respond, "Why, thank you so much!"

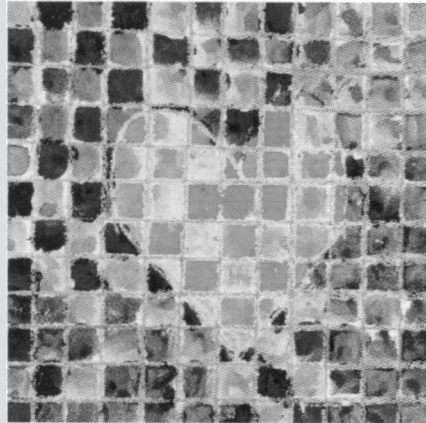
For more satisfaction, aim for lifestyle mastery, rather than mastery over body, weight, or appearance. Lifestyle mastery has to do with developing our unique gifts and potential, expressing ourselves, developing meaningful relationships, learning how to solve problems, establishing goals and contributing to life. *

Finding the Way of the Heart Through Journaling

For as long as humans have had stories to tell we've been writing them down. We jot notes, make lists and draft letters. And sometimes, when we need a best friend, a confidante, a place to take our secrets and our fears, or when we just want to record our thoughts, we write in our journals.

The journal is the self communicating with the self in an ongoing dialogue that follows the way of the heart. It is a place for safekeeping memories and working through emotions. It chronicles our growth and gives us perspective. Within the journal's safe pages, we can try out ideas and explore feelings. And since there's no right or wrong way to keep a journal, anyone can do it.

Select whatever format appeals to you: a special blank book, a spiral-bound notebook, loose-leaf pages or even the computer (though writing by hand is more physical; it keeps you in touch with your breath and your heartbeat).



Set a time limit. You don't have to write every day, but the more frequently you write, the easier it will become and the more productive you'll be. Twenty to thirty minutes is best, but if all you have is ten, you'll still receive the benefits.

And the benefits are many. Journal writing is good for our health; it relieves stress, can help boost our immune system, and improve our feeling of well-being. Research shows that insomniacs, the panic-prone and depressed, cancer patients, and people trying to lose weight have all benefitted through journal writing.

If you're not sure where to start, simply begin, "Right now I feel..." and follow your pen. It won't take you further than you want to go. In your writing, if you come upon something you'd like to discuss, or discover some feelings you'd like to explore further, don't hesitate to ask for help. *

What Is the Right Journal(s) for You?

While any kind of journal writing can be rewarding, certain types of journals can have very different benefits. Here are some you may want to explore.

A Story Book—Human beings are natural story-tellers and keeping a story journal can be especially helpful if you're depressed, struggling with a sudden crisis or unresolved tragedy, or living with a chronic ailment. Stories have a beginning, middle and end. Write your experience much as you would tell a story. Experts advise writing about the same episode several times; the retelling often gives new perspective.

A Worry Book—This format can benefit those who suffer from anxiety, stress, or insomnia. Draw a line down the center of a page. On the left, write some of the issues that are upsetting you and on the right list some of the steps you've taken to address the problem, or some solutions you can try.

A Daily Log—If you want to get more fit, spend less money, understand your body's rhythms, or chart your recovery from illness you can use this journal to keep track of anything from growing a garden to growing a child. In this journal, you simply record the facts: how far you walked or how long you exercised,

how much you spent on what, how your body feels, etc. You may also want to write some narrative in addition to the "facts."

A Brain Dump Journal—Clear out the creativity cobwebs with this journal. Commit to a certain number of pages or minutes each morning, then put your pen to paper and fly. Don't think too much, just record. You don't even have to worry about paragraphs or punctuation. This journal is great for surfacing feelings, ideas, etc. that normally might stay unconscious.

A Couple or Family Journal—Enhances communications, deepens emotional bonds, encourages trust and intimacy. The journal is left in a place where everyone has free access, anytime. Each person is encouraged to write, recording his or her thoughts or feelings, or in response to another person's entry. Remember to write compliments and encouragements as well as writing through problems and misunderstandings.

A Gratitude Journal—This can be especially helpful to those who are inclined to be pessimistic, depressed, over-stressed or in the midst of a crisis. And it's a journal which can bring anyone joy. Simply make a list of that for which you are thankful. From the smallest to the grandest, the very personal to the global. Every day write five to ten things you are grateful for. It doesn't matter if you repeat yourself. *

WHEN PARENTS SPLIT: How to Take the Trauma Out of Divorce for the Children

The world may feel as if it's falling apart for the 1.5 million U.S. children each year whose parents divorce. The homes they live in may be sold; they may have to change schools and say goodbye to friends; their lives are basically turned upside down.

Too often during this tumultuous time, parents are absorbed in their own emotions, and children are left to cope for themselves with the tremendous upheaval in their lives. It can be a huge emotional weight on children.

But it is possible for people who need to get divorced to do so in a dignified manner that won't cause trauma to their children and will address the emotional hazards of divorce in children before problems manifest themselves.

Here are some suggestions for divorcing parents:

Reassure your child. Kids often fear that

both parents will leave them after a divorce. They blame themselves for the split. They worry about where they will live and who will care for them. Let them know the living arrangements, if possible after they are already in place. Make sure the children know their parents' love for them will never change.

Use a "common divorce language." Reduce confusion and upset for children with wording that both of you will use to talk about the divorce.

Don't ask children to make decisions regarding visitation or custody. This is a parental decision, made, if necessary, with the

help of a mediator or the court. To ask children to choose between homes or whether they want to visit the other parent this weekend places a huge burden on the children and requires that they reject one parent for the other.

Don't criticize the divorced spouse in front of the children. Doing so is criticizing the

child also because they share half the genes of that parent. If you have nothing good to say, say nothing.

Don't ask the child to keep information from the other parent. This sort of complicity is confusing and burdensome to children and implies betrayal.

Respect and encourage your child's feelings. All feelings are OK. The more children verbalize their feelings, the better.

Fight out of earshot of your child. It's often difficult to do this, given the heightened emotions of divorce. Put your kids ahead of your emotions. If your partner won't agree to this, be prepared to leave or hang up if a conflict escalates.

Treat your ex as a business partner in the business of raising your child. Interact with your former spouse in a way that keeps the child's interest as priority.

Accept that your child needs to have feelings of loyalty to both parents. Don't try to win him or her over to your side. Work to minimize the child's feelings of being split or divided. *



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