

Swimming into the New Year
Julie Terraciano, MFT
Californian Counseling Institute
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For many of us, including friends, acquaintances and clients, the new year can bring both the challenge and the opportunity to make changes in our lives. We have come to think of the beginning of the year as a marker for possible change. We throw out, pare back, and try on new habits, all in an effort to become more who we think we really are or would like to be.

What are we made of...who are we really? Are we the sum of our daily habits, the longing of our nighttime and daytime dreams, the best efforts that we give forth in work and in play? I think that when we ask ourselves to change patterns we are looking for our essential and most vital selves.

We are all familiar with vows to lose weight, exercise more, stop smoking, write more, send thank you notes, read more, drink less, stay in touch with friends and family, learn a language, get back to the piano, breathe more consciously...the list goes on. Why do any of us come up with any of these ideas? Is it the effect of the dark, cold, and this year, storm-filled days of winter, that make us more reflective and, seemingly, more determined to change things? Or is there an ever-present calling to be the healthy beings who began our lives, full of promise and hope?

One of my best habits is swimming. I have been doing that consistently for 25+ years. Those who don't partake in this exercise cite its seemingly boring nature and the facts that half the year we do, indeed, scurry from locker room to heated pool, that it doesn't do anything for bone density, that it takes too much time and so on. I can say that doing my laps, four times a week, is somewhat boring. And yet, it is both the meditative part and the cardio-vascular part that allow me to withdraw, think, dream, zone out, solve, create and gain energy for the rest of my living.

Perhaps, as importantly, I have learned from this good habit of swimming regularly, that other good habits are possible...for me, for friends and for clients. I have often said, that if we can "throw ourselves out of bed"...or whatever the more seemingly comfortable default pattern may be... before we have a chance to think much about whether it is dark and cold outside or whether we do or don't really feel like doing the exercise, task or deed at hand, we can get over the hump from wanting to incorporate the habit to having it reside in our being.

All of us face challenges that seem daunting at times. How do we communicate more effectively with difficult family members or friends? How do we find the time to have fun with our children? Why does the year just seem to roll by, leaving many of us using the excuse for being out of touch with each other, as well as with ourselves, in phrases like: "it's been crazy around here!"; We get inundated with voicemails, e-mail, junk mail, Christmas "newsletters", demands in our work, family and social life so that many do give the excuse/cry for help (?): "it's been crazy around here".

In reality, we all do live one day, one step, one breath at a time. We don't have to subscribe to or incorporate the frantic pace that our culture seems to manipulate us into accepting. We can look at each day, and more moments, as time when we choose to move inward, reflect, smile and reclaim our most vital and essential selves.