

Resetting Your Spiritual Clock

As we envision OUR New Year and how we hope to live our lives moving forward, I have come to one central idea: There is no way to manage the expectations others place upon us other than to live our lives as best we can and then to speak up for who we are, for who we *know* we are. And doing that requires a clear mind and a nourished soul.

So how do we do these things? We clear our minds and nourish our souls through a discipline of thoughtful practice, which is most successful when we have a plan. Here is my list of nine ways to reset your spiritual clock:

Wake up with a prayer.

When you wake up in the morning, set the tone for your day – every day or even just once or twice a week – with a prayer. The one I'd suggest is the prayer we traditionally say upon waking up, in which we thank God for the complex functionings of our body. But don't just stop there – add in a word or two about your hopes for the day. There is nothing like a morning prayer to remind you that there is more to life than the minutiae in which we often find ourselves mired.

Allow yourself to laugh at something.

Whether it is a morning newspaper blown around your front porch or something silly we forget, laughing at the sometimes annoying details of our lives is a sure-fire way to gain control over them. And doing so doesn't hurt in setting you up for a much happier mood, as well!

Have a conversation with someone during which you just listen.

So much of our conversation with loved ones or even someone we just met is filled with the competition of sharing. Listening, really listening, is a central spiritual practice. When we listen to what someone has to say without interrupting them with our own story, we allow space for the person with whom we're speaking to share things that they would never had thought to share. "Attentive silence" is a great healer and becoming a spiritual person is also about healing – both you and those around you.

Have a cup of tea.

Tea, whether decaf, herbal, or otherwise, can help you slow things down. Our fast-paced world is often at odds with the contemplative nature of a well-considered (translation: spiritual) life. Making tea takes time and attention and usually draws your mind away from your seemingly overwhelming troubles. Try sharing a cup with a like-minded person for the added benefit of companionship.

Take a mini-vacation from your life.

It may sound odd, but it works: Close your eyes or just stare out a window and day dream. Imagining yourself being somewhere else twice a day, maybe more, will lower your heart rate and raise your spirits. There is no greater spiritual healing than that which comes from meditation or prayer, which usually works best in a new setting (real or imagined!).

Treat yourself to show you love you.

Try setting up a special treat for yourself every day that you know that you won't ever

miss. This is your time, your gift to yourself, to use as you please. You could go on a 10-minute walk, stop by the library for 15 minutes, or just read a chapter or two of your favorite book. No matter what it is, make sure that it is a treat and not an indulgence – you want to recharge your batteries, not reinforce bad habits.

Do something for the fun of it.

Most of our day – working or retired – is spent doing things that either are or feel like obligations. Bring a little whimsy into your life – this is different from a treat in that this is without any goal in mind or specific redeeming value. Fun is just that – it is “down time” from our everyday lives.

Listen to music that moves you.

No matter the time of day or your mood, music can fundamentally change your outlook. In a world that is more often than not focused on entertainment that is video or computer-driven, our souls are even more thirsty for a drink of imagination. And you really can't beat the nourishment that your soul gets from music. If you aren't doing it already, just for fun, try listening to a song or two that you haven't heard for a long time. “Rinse and repeat” – the more you practice this activity (within reason), the more likely each day will find you more and more grounded and spiritually centered.

Take stock of your blessings at bedtime.

For most people, unfinished business is the biggest late-night, anxiety-producer. Instead of thinking about what you failed to complete that day, try thinking about how lucky you are to have the life you have. Being grateful – no matter what time of day, actually – is a great sedative and spiritual practice. After all, who wants to live a life that feels like it is without at least a few blessings?!

It is my blessing for you, each of you, that these spiritual practices (or some of your own) will enrich your life, clear your mind, and nourish your soul in the coming year. Remember: Changing your habits is not an overnight process, so don't assume you'll feel different immediately. In the end, slow and steady makes you ready . . . for anything!

May you find all the nourishment you need in the coming year and beyond!

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