

REFLECTION FOR THE NEW YEAR

goals, intention, & identity

I made this journal to help you dig even deeper into the teachings of my Yoga Church Sunday Sermon “Who Sets Your Goals.” I pray it’s useful for you!

Let’s begin with a quote worthy of meditation:

“Through observing nature and through intense self-observation and inquiry, the ancient yogis were able to codify the conditions that must be present for realizing our intrinsic wholeness. Although such realization can occur spontaneously, more often than not it is the result of a sustained commitment to practice over a lifetime. This is not to imply that yoga is a goal which we strive toward, or that there is some kind of chronological progression toward ‘self-improvement.’ Rather, it is the recognition that each individual can achieve understanding only through her own exploration and discovery, and that all of life is a continual process of refinement which allows us to see more clearly.

When we clean the windshield of our car, we suddenly see the road ahead as bright and defined. The road, the image before us, is exactly as it was before we cleaned the window. The trees are the same green, the sky the same vivid blue, and the markers just as defined, only now we see what is there. We start to be able to see the potholes in the road ahead and to avoid them. We start to remember such dangerous roads and steer our way clear to safer routes in the future.

In the same way, yoga is not about self-improvement or making ourselves better. It is a process of deconstructing all the barriers we may have erected that prevent us from having an authentic connection with ourselves and the world. This tenet is an extremely important one because the effort to change and improve ourselves is fraught with the risk of subtle self-aggression that only produces more unhappiness. We cannot strive toward something that we already are.”

—Donna Farhi

**We cannot strive toward something that we already are.
We cannot strive toward something that we already are.**

This is such an important truth. But one that's easily forgotten... Why?

The first four Yoga Sutras read:

1. And now the teaching on yoga begins.
2. Yoga is the settling of the mind into silence.
3. When the mind has settled, we are established in our essential nature, which is unbounded consciousness.
4. Our essential nature is usually overshadowed by the activity of the mind.”

{Reflection Question #1}

What are the activities of your mind?

The yoga sutras have an answer, but right now I'm looking for YOUR answer. I'm asking you to spend some time investigating the HABITS of your mind. What does your mind spend most of its time thinking about?

— PAUSE —

Before you move on to the next question, take a moment to shift your attention. Move away from the cerebral and into the somatic. In other words, get out of your head and into your body!

***Become aware of the fact that you're an embodied creature. What sensations do you feel? What's happening in your feet? Your hips? Your belly? Your chest? Your back? Your shoulders, neck, and jaw? Would a little movement feel good right now?**

***Become aware that you're a breathing body. Feel the movement of air at your nostrils. Bring your hands to your bottom ribs and notice the movement as your diaphragm muscle expands and contracts. Allow your breath to become quiet and easeful.**

From this state of connection with your body and breath return to your previous reflections. Re-read what you wrote about the activity of your mind. Hold these reflections (and a connection to your body) as you move on to question #2.

{Reflection Question #2}

Who do you take yourself to be?

Where do you find your identity?

How do the HABITS of your mind shape your self understanding? How do the thoughts that you think over and over and over again impact your sense of self?

Remember Donna Farhi's wisdom:

“Yoga is not about self-improvement or making ourselves better. It is a process of deconstructing all the barriers we may have erected that prevent us from having an authentic connection with ourselves and the world.”

{Reflection Question #3}

What barriers have you erected that prevent you from having an authentic connection with yourself and the world?

Or, as I asked in the sermon: What habits of thought, feeling, and behavior keep your essential nature hidden from you?

What practices would help you deconstruct the barriers you've built? What practices would help you shift the habits that keep you disconnected from your Self?

{Reflection Question #4}

What habits of thought, feeling, and behavior **support** your connection to your highest Self?

What practices would help you **strengthen** these habits?

AS YOU WORK TOWARD GOALS THIS YEAR, SET THE INTENTION TO REMEMBER...

A goal is an objective. It's something to be achieved. When you set a goal you either succeed or fail. These are the only options with a goal. Either you meet the goal—in which case it's no longer a goal but an achievement. Or you don't—because you gave it up, changed it, or simply failed.

THIS IS FINE! GOALS ARE GOOD!

But only if you work toward your goal with the intention to remember your essential Self (which has nothing to do with success or failure).

**We cannot strive toward something that we already are.
We cannot strive toward something that we already are.**

I'll close with one of my favorite verses from the Gita:

“Thou hast a right to action, but only to action, never to its fruits; let not the fruits of thy works be thy motive, neither let there be in thee any attachment to inactivity.

Fixed in yoga do thy actions, having abandoned attachment, having become equal in failure and success; for it is equanimity that is meant by yoga.”

—Bhagavad Gita 2.47-48

Blessings to you in the New Year!

Much love,

Summer