

“Are you a Turtle or a Hare?”

What is your pace of change? What is your acceptance of change? What is your pace for acceptance?” What happens when things don’t go the way you planned?

In a few short days, another year will begin (I have no idea what happened to this one). One of the things that I cannot adjust to is how each year passes more quickly than the next.

When I was a psychiatric nurse, a sign of dementia or “not being oriented to X 3” was not being able to know what day, month and year it was. This was asked particularly of older adults who were retired, who were admitted to the in-pt setting for depression. I am still working full time and if you ask me these questions, I would often fail. I make no bones about it; I am calendar challenged. As part of neurological testing, they ask you to multiply or subtract backwards. I would fail that in spades. I no longer drink any alcohol, but if I was stopped and given a sobriety check, I am certain I would fail that also. If you look at the angle I sometimes park my car, you would wonder if had been imbibing a little too much.

In the past, I use to worry about such things; having everything precise (in other words, I was a control freak). But that was because my internal self was in shambles. I was a Hare; rushing around like the white rabbit in Alice in Wonderland (did you know that his name was W. Rabbit?) I used to joke around and say that I would be late for my funeral. It was quite some time after I stopped abusing substances that I realized rushing and being late gave me a little

buzz in the form of anxiety. Now I do not like that feeling. I have changed into a turtle.

Certainly age has something to do with it; although I know some pretty spry older adults who continue to be Hares and haven't slowed down a bit. AND I certainly do not mean to attribute the same characteristics that I had to anyone else. I often think I would like to come back as a hypo manic, with their energy and creativity. I also think I would like to come back as a tall person with a fast metabolism, but that is another story.

What characteristics have changed in your life over time?

Many of us are probably making New Year's resolutions. A New Year's resolution is a commitment that an individual makes to a project or the reforming of a habit, often a lifestyle change that is generally interpreted as advantageous. The name comes from the fact that these commitments normally go into effect on New Year's Day. Some examples include resolutions to donate to the poor more often, to become more assertive, or to become more environmentally responsible.

There are religious parallels to this secular tradition. People may act similarly during the Christian fasting period of Lent, though the motive behind this holiday is more of sacrifice than of responsibility. During Judaism's New Year, Rosh Hashanah, through the High Holidays and culminating in Yom Kippur (the Day of Atonement), one is to reflect upon one's wrongdoings over the year and both seek and offer forgiveness. The concept, regardless of creed, is to annually reflect upon self-improvement.

Recent research shows that while 52% of participants in a resolution study were confident of success with their goals, only 12% actually achieved their goals. Men achieved their goal 22% more often when they engaged in goal setting, (a system where small measurable goals are being set, such as, a pound a week, instead of saying "lose weight"), while women succeeded 10% more when they made their goals public and got support from their friends.

Have you made yours? How successful have you been in keeping them in the past? In my thirties and early forties, I could not resolve to do much of anything. I kind of lived in the now, not in the positive way, but without planning, ignoring the connection between cause and effect, actions and consequences. I used to brag that I lived my life like the metal ball in a pinball game, never knowing where I would end, because I was not the one in charge of making decisions.

I have dealt with a lot of change in my life as I am sure you have. Some of it good; some of it tragic. Change is a constant. Maybe I have become a turtle so I can see my life; when I was traveling in the fast lane, it was all a blur. Someone told me to have high acceptance and low expectations. In my younger days, I would have looked at that person with disdain, judging that s/he had low self esteem. Now of course, I look upon it as words of wisdom.

So, if I say I am going to do something, I have to think about it first to see if it is doable before I make that commitment. One of the hardest things I have to practice is not immediately responding verbally (usually to something I disagree with). I often say internally, "I can't believe I said that" or "Who said that?" I

often talk about wanting “spiritual duct tape” meaning the wisdom to be silent, listen and not respond emotionally.

Some of the traditions I have grown up with I now question. Why do I have to send Christmas cards? Why do I have to buy presents? No, I am not a scrooge; I just don’t have to go crazy because of a date on a calendar or the pressure of the advertising world, or because it is a time-honored “tradition” that I was raised with. Am I copping out? I don’t think so, at least, I hope not. Some of the traditions I have kept, like the importance of being a parent, grandparent and now a great grandparent. The simplicity of the important things in life, they are not tangible. A beautiful sky, flowers, a child’s laughter and silence are some of the simple, yet exquisite, parts of my life that are important.

Our church community is undergoing change. Some of the traditions are evolving. For instance, the candle is lit on the altar. The way the candle flickers is beautiful. We no longer call the thing we hit a gong but a bell. We are getting a new roof. We have a settled minister. We have had some leadership workshops.

So, make all the resolutions you like. But please consider making a resolution that you will keep. Help our community to mature. Listen with a more open mind, communicate directly and be a bit of a turtle when it comes to having and voicing your opinion and a Hare when it comes to happily volunteering of your time, your talent and your financial support.

Happy New Year and Peace be with you.