

Intentions in the Tradition of Yoga VS Modern Day Goal Setting

The first of the yoga sutras, which are basically the “bible” of yoga, states “Now begins the teaching of Yoga.” This might not sound like such a profound statement, but it is.

- Now= at this auspicious moment; implying a blessing of transition
- Yoga = union; to join or to integrate

Even if you’ve never heard of this ancient yoga text, I want you to think about this: right NOW, at this auspicious moment, what are you ready to integrate into your life? Not later, not tomorrow, or on Monday- RIGHT NOW, what changes do you have to make so that you can start living the life you are meant to live? Not when you lose 5 pounds, or make a million dollars, or find the love of your life. Every day you wait to live your life, is one more precious NOW you are letting go by.

Before you start this program, please ask yourself the above questions to figure out what will make you feel more joy, more abundance, and more alive on a daily basis. I promise you, getting a hot body and feeling great from eating healthy is amazing, but 99% of the time we have to go deeper to really feel alive; and:

EVERYONE deserves to feel more ALIVE

Some people are more hardcore about setting goals, and there are some who would benefit more from setting an “intention,” so I’m sharing my thoughts on both here.

Setting an intention

Through my yoga practice I’ve learned about something called “sankalpa,” which translated from Sanskrit means resolve, or good intention. By setting an intention, you make it clear to yourself and others, just what you plan to do; you redefine what it means to be serious about your goals and dreams. But not in that hardcore New Year’s way of “I’m going to lose 10 pounds and find the perfect husband.”

I’ve grown to love how setting an intention brings a feeling of excitement and promise, more so than the old-school resolutions I’ve made in the past; those left me feeling guilty and lazy when halfway through February they were old news. The resolution problem lies in thinking that we aren’t “good” enough the way we are, and that we will be better or happier when we get something else, or change who we are.

In setting an intention, you resolve on a daily basis that you’re already “enough,” so you move forward without having an attachment to the outcome- it’s more about the journey. You might still want to lose 10 pounds, but it isn’t focused on skinny jeans, it involves caring enough about yourself to eat good food and exercise, and setting an intention on a daily basis to do just that. Naturally the pounds come off, but it’s not because you need to change who you are.

The catch is that you can't just set your intentions and run off; you need to live them every day. As you gain wisdom through self-reflection and meditation, your ability to act from your intentions blossoms. We plant seeds of true intention in order to watch them blossom like flowers, and it doesn't happen overnight. It is called a practice because it is an ever-renewing process.

How to set an intention

Get clear about something you want to cultivate in your life and write it down. Make a statement that relates to your purpose and HOW you can bring about change. It can include being more patient, kind, generous, or a lifestyle change. I'm going to use the weight example only because that is what so many of us relate to.

Instead of saying "I want to lose ten pounds," be specific about where that intention comes from; how about "I will treat my body with respect because I am worth it." That's a loaded statement, and might be extremely difficult if you've abused your body with diets and exercise before; but just go with it, because failure to reach a past resolution may be due to not believing you deserve it.

"A goal without a plan is just a dream" Dave Ramsey

Once you have your statement, support it with realistic action steps you can commit to such as: "I will follow through with my exercise commitment today, then add more time to my workouts each month. I will add one healthy food to each meal, and I will ask myself if I am truly hungry before I take another bite." See the difference?

Do something today to demonstrate your commitment to your intention. Try a new yoga pose, sit for an extra minute in meditation once you've started a practice. Get rid of the "fake" food in your house and replace it with fresh, wholesome food. Only let yourself watch TV while doing seated yoga poses.

Setting Goals that Last

Some people have a better outcome when visualizing the big picture down the road, not just on a daily basis. If you're one of them, I suggest you read the following about setting goals, then fill out the questions below and re-visit them at least once a week to remain in alignment with what it is that you want to achieve.

When talking about living in the present while setting goals for the future, my clients often ask about this contradictory message. It's a great query. The problem with constantly thinking about the future is that we disconnect from the present. When we think about the future, we fear what might happen if _____ (insert greatest fear here). The difference I'd like to point out is that although we need to project what we want to see down the road when we set a goal, we aim to avoid getting attached to the outcome. Avoid obsessing about success whether you're on the right track to meet the goal; and know that it will take time for lasting change to occur- but it is completely worth it.

My program is absolutely not of the get thin quick variety. Why? Because those plans don't work in the long run, and I'm not interested in teaching you to lose ten pounds in a week only to gain back fifteen next month. You can't expect to go from zero to sixty. Progress takes time, and you need to map out where you're going and how you'll get there. That's why you need to write down your goals in order to see results. Really—it's been proven.

When you think about how you want to look and feel—whether it's related to weight, stress, flexibility, reversing inflammation or dropping your negative thought patterns—if you write your goals down, your results will be off the charts—that's the power of the pen.

If your goals start off simply, they'll be able to be reached.

Too often, we decide to create huge lofty goals all at once— like deciding you'll drop twenty-five pounds in two months, find your soul-mate by Valentine's Day and climb the corporate ladder while stepping over five superior's heads. I propose you start with just one doable action in each of three goal areas you choose.

When trying to reach a big life goal, there are two things going on—the big picture ideal you have in your head of reaching this big goal and the everyday action it takes to reach the goal. You're just beginning once you reach your goal and lose the ten pounds or successfully meditate everyday. These are life-long practices that need to be continually adjusted depending on your schedule, stress level and progress. You don't eat healthy and lose weight, and then go back to your daily "caramel crapuccino" if you want to stay healthy. It's like growing a beautiful garden. You don't plant your seeds, give them fertilizer, water them once and walk away. I used to think I could, but then I came home to a backyard of crunchy leaves and raccoon-eaten tomatoes. You need to tend to your goals like a garden, carefully monitoring them continuously.

Make your action steps non-negotiable

The best thing I did when I started my meditation practice was to make it non-negotiable. No matter what, I wake up, brush my teeth and go sit on my cushion. I do it when I'm on vacation, have a meeting and even when I'd rather stay in bed. I decided it was something I wasn't going to waste energy debating because it means that much to me. I love the following quote from Jack Canfield, as it can relate to any goal you set, or positive habit you want to cultivate:

"Successful people adhere to the 'no exceptions rule' when it comes to their daily disciplines. Once you make a 100% commitment to something, there are no exceptions. It's a done deal. Nonnegotiable. Case Closed! Over and out."
--Jack Canfield from The Success Principals

I know from personal experience, and from client feedback, that this is one of the most life-changing choices you can make when trying to create positive change.

NAME_____START DATE_____GOAL REACHED_____

Think about this past year, what was your:

Proudest accomplishment:

Greatest lesson learned:

Thing you are most thankful for:

Get clear on what you want, Focus on how you can make it happen, Prioritize, and Take Action

And right now:

What's working in your life:

What's not working:

Why don't you already have what you want?

Goals

Think about different areas of your life, and prioritize the top three you want to focus on in the future and currently; whether it's family, health, relationships, career, financial, home, etc. Then give yourself something to look forward to, a pedicure, fancy bottle of olive oil, or concert tickets.

1 YEAR GOALS	ACTION NEEDED	DO BY	CELEBRATION
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#1

#2

#3

3 MONTH GOALS	ACTION NEEDED	DO BY	CELEBRATION
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#1

#2

#3

A Day in Your Future Life- An Exercise In Visualizing Your Future

Yes, I said future life. Although we're doing so much work on focusing on being in the present, there is still a way to live in the present, but still wanting to achieve goals in the future- the trick is that you don't want to put living in the present on hold until you reach the goals you envision in the future. If we never set any goals or had dreams of what we could accomplish, we would all be living a mediocre life without purpose. So no, I'm not contradicting myself, but want you to know that there is a difference, and a place for both being present, and future planning to co-exist.

Take a 20 foot view from above at this time 1 year from now, and write down what you envision your day to be like, and how you would like to FEEL in your life. If you've never done an exercise like this, it might seem a bit odd, but trust me, getting really clear about what you want, and imagining it can happen, is the quickest way to create the life you want. Again, this isn't trying to take you out of the present moment, it's to let you feel what your life will be like once you put all your positive actions together in the now.

Be specific: how does your body feel when you wake up? How are the interactions with the other people you're surrounded by? How is your job, your relationships? How do you go to bed feeling about your day when you rest your head on your pillow? Write the story in first person, as if you are living the life you want to live right now.

For example, " I just woke up and finished meditating for 20 minutes, wow what an incredible way to start my day. I am so proud of myself for sticking with my mediation practice and consistently doing it every morning for 20 minutes no matter what. I'm excited to whip up a new green smoothie recipe, then meet my friend for a 90 minute yoga class. I never thought I would be able to get through 90 minutes of power yoga, but I've been committed.

I am excited to get back to work tomorrow, and move into my new office. I got the courage up to ask for a promotion, and incredibly enough, my boss gave me even more than I asked for. I am going to dinner with my husband to celebrate at our favorite restaurant, and couldn't be more happy about the man who has supported me through this journey....etc " See where I'm going with this?

To accomplish great things we must first dream, then visualize, then plan... believe... act!

Alfred A. Montapert

Now it's your turn to write your story; use vivid detail and make it as long and realistic as you can from the time you wake up, until the time you go to sleep. This will put everything you think you want in your life into perspective- I promise! Use as many pieces of paper that you need, or better yet, buy a beautiful journal and revisit your future story twice a year.

