

yoga

JOURNAL

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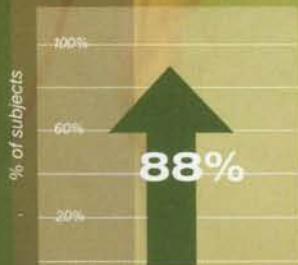
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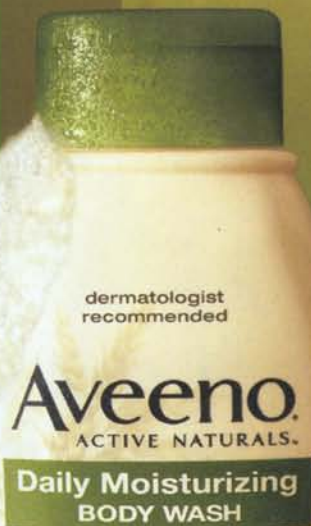
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editor's letter

Kaitlin Quistgaard

Life's Delights

Ready for something
even more satisfying than
achieving your goals?



NEW YEAR'S RESOLUTIONS have had a bad rap in my world since the time I was a teenager and momentarily believed life would be better if I went for a year without chocolate. (The eventual failure of my willpower proved far more devastating than the side effects of indulging in a little sugar and cocoa butter.) So, when we began planning this first issue of 2009, I didn't want to give any credence to resolutions, especially the typical "lose weight and get in shape" variety that focuses not on a commitment to a new behavior, but on the results of that behavior.

Yet it seemed that every writer and editor here saw this issue as the perfect place for stories about making positive changes. Our inclination to spend the depths of winter taking stock of past actions, committing to activities that promote our health and well-being, or simply renewing the connection with ourselves was just too strong to ignore.

So...we went for it! In these pages, you'll find a wealth of inspiration for examining your life and perhaps renovating aspects of it that are ready for a makeover. In "Empower Yourself" (page 69), yoga teacher Shiva Rea leads a practice to connect you with your deepest intentions. In "Growing Awareness" (page 72), senior associate editor Charity Ferreira suggests seven simple acts that can help you to live in harmony with your ideals. And in "A Path to Happiness" (page 76), writer Hillari Dowdle mines the wisdom of the Yoga Sutra to guide you toward the healthiest and happiest life possible.

A deeply moving account of self-renewal can be found here, too, in the chronicle of associate editor Lauren Ladoceur's attempt to come to terms with a diagnosis of type 1 diabetes and to bring her body into balance by following Ayurvedic principles. (See "Serene Healing," page 82.) Lauren's story beautifully highlights the power of yoga and Ayurveda to transform our lives, not just in the lofty realms of spiritual insight, but also on the practical plane of physical health.

I hope you'll enjoy these invitations to make positive changes in your life, and that you'll do so not with your eye on a desired result but with an intention, as Matthew Sanford illustrates in "The Path Less Traveled" (page 21), to experience something far more wondrous than the realization of a goal. I hope that this new year you might resolve to delight in life itself. ■



the path less traveled

To get where he wants to go, yoga teacher Matthew Sanford sets aside willpower and embraces curiosity.

We've just celebrated the new year, a time when plans are made, goals are set, and visions for the future are invited and then locked in. This is also the time of year when a sinking feeling can come on, caused by self-doubt. Maybe you doubt that you have the determination and perseverance to follow through on the goals you've made, to make your life fit the shape of your desires. But is there another way to persevere other than with willful determination? I believe there is—and that it is a lot more fun.

Think of your yoga practice as a study in perseverance. Not the gut-wrenching, willful approach that is sometimes demanded by a challenging class, but rather the kind of perseverance that can be sustained over time. A yogi shows up each day, gets on the mat, and starts doing poses. Every day is different—a different feeling or sensation appears, a different insight reveals itself. A seasoned yogi follows, explores, and tests whatever unfolds on that particular day. But what sustains the commitment to show up in the first place? For me, it's a sense of wonder, not the force of will. I am a yoga practitioner ➤

the path less traveled

➤ and teacher who is paralyzed from the chest down. I began practicing yoga when I was 25—12 years after a car accident claimed the lives of my father and sister and rendered me a paraplegic.

Over the past 17 years, my yoga practice has been anything but ordinary. Imagine me trying to do something as simple as Dandasana (Staff Pose). How does someone like me learn the subtle interplay between pushing my femur bones down, extending through my spine, and lifting my chest? I cannot do all the required physical actions. I can never “finish” the pose, and no amount of willful determination can change that. So what keeps me going?

I am nourished by the sensation of wonder. Each day that I get on my mat, I open to the vastness of yoga rather than narrow myself to a goal for that particular day. I feel wonder as I realize that every pose is infinite and that ultimate mastery is not possible. I feel wonder as my practice teaches me to trust that time, dedication, and curiosity are what bring me progress, not the intensity of my will. Most of all, I feel wonder about the little things—how my breathing is such a sensual experience, how my lifted chest directs awareness through my extremities. Finally, I am filled with a sense of wonder as I realize that my yoga practice allows me to refine the quality of my existence.

This is what I wish for you. As you think about your goals, take a page from your yoga practice: Relish the ride, not just the accomplishments.

MATTHEW SANFORD

*Matthew Sanford is an Iyengar-style yoga teacher and the author of *Waking: A Memoir of Trauma and Transcendence*. He is the founder of the nonprofit *Mind Body Solutions* (mindbodysolutions.org).*



natural wonder

Use this simple practice to connect with your innate innocence.

Wonder can be experienced and practiced as a mind-body sensation. But it requires a sense of openness and vulnerability. Wonder is essentially innocence turned outward.

Sit comfortably in a chair and call to mind a childhood memory that you associate with innocence. Remember what that feels like. Breathe. Now bring that feeling forward into the present. Breathe. When you went “looking” for this memory, you paid less attention to your physical surroundings—the sounds, the lights, the smells. Your mind stopped pushing outward through your body to perceive the world around you. Rather, your mind went inward through your body, to find your innocence.

Holding that feeling, connect to your base—your feet on the floor, your sitting bones on the chair seat—and allow a graceful sensation to move from the base of your spine upward through your lifted chest. Breathe. Use the discipline of the asana to spread the sensation of innocence throughout your body. Breathe. M.S.