

For the January 10, 2008 edition

A Perspective.....

Well, here we are, just a few days into 2008 and I wonder how well we are all doing with our New Year's Resolutions. I have noticed that there has been an increase of people at my local work-out facility. I am usually there Monday through Friday between 7:30 and 8:30 AM. Since I've been exercising at this same place for three years now, I know all the regulars. The first of January always brings an influx of newbies. They have this look of enthusiasm not shared by those of us who have been doing this for some time. My enthusiasm waned months ago, nevertheless I have persevered. So for the next few weeks, there will be many new faces hopping, skipping and jumping around the gym. By February most of the newcomers will be history, and the old-timers will have the place to ourselves again.

I truly do understand how well-intentioned these folks were at the beginning of the year. But then life intrudes and somehow there are never quite enough hours in the day to do everything one would like. It only took me five decades to make exercising regularly a priority in my life. So I'm not one to cast aspersions. The main thing is we keep trying – like giving up cigarettes. Mark Twain said it best, "Quitting is easy, I've done it a thousand times." It might take that many tries, but it's a good goal for 2008. There are any number of other things we mere mortals should work on for the New Year – my list doesn't seem to shorten with age. Fortunately, resolutions are not written in stone. I like to think of them as "serious suggestions."

The very best and most inspirational resolution that I have kept faithfully for many years, is the reading of a poem entitled "The Station." I cut this poem, whose author is unknown, from a magazine almost twenty years ago. I was so moved by it that I always share it with my congregation on the Sunday preceding the New Year. It has the Zen qualities of tranquility, simplicity and living in the moment. It's message is universal and has something to teach every one of us – regardless of our religious affiliation.

The train "station" is a metaphor for arriving at ultimate happiness and contentment. "When I'm 18..." "When I buy a new car..." "When I put the last kid through college..." "When I have paid off the mortgage..." "When I get a promotion..." "When I reach retirement...then I shall live happily ever after. Sooner or later we must realize there is no station, no one place to arrive at once and for all. The true joy of life is the trip. The station is only a dream. It constantly outdistances us."

Every year that I re-read "The Station" I am more profoundly moved by its message. "It isn't the burdens of today that drive people mad. It is the regrets over yesterday and the fear of tomorrow. Regret and fear are twin thieves who rob us of today." Today. Right now. This moment. Live it, enjoy it and be thankful for it. And if you slip up on those resolutions for 2008, so be it. Try again tomorrow. "Stop pacing the aisles and counting the miles. Instead, climb more mountains, eat more ice-cream, go barefoot more often, swim more rivers, watch more sunsets, laugh more, cry less, life must be lived as we go along. The station will come soon enough." Happy New Year!

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