

Happy New Year

Carl Fooks · Tips of the Day · 2 min read

I remember the first time I was allowed to go to my parents' perennial New Year's Eve party. I don't remember how young I was, but I remember feeling excited to be present for the grand crossing over of one year to the next. I don't know what I was expecting but it was something noticeable and significant. Something like the machinery of the universe whirling and clunking over into The New Year. As the time drew near - "how long mum?", "is it near yet?" - my excitement and anticipation grew. "It won't be long now," my mum would assure me. And then ... it was here. The music went off, the radio went on, the countdown began with the chiming of Big Ben's bells: "ten, nine, eight, seven," my excited expectation reaching fever pitch. "Three, two, one." And then ... nothing! Well, except for cheering adults and a drunken rendition of Auld Lang Syne. I can't begin to tell you how disappointed I was. I had spent the preceding couple of years pretending to be asleep in bed while the adults celebrated, but would creep out to try to witness The Big Event, always to fall asleep near the time, waking up only with the cheer after it had happened. Charged up with excited anticipation about finally witnessing my first New Year, I was left wondering what on earth was wrong with my parents and their friends! Thus New Year struck me as rather pointless. Particularly when I became old enough to be pressured into making New Year's Resolutions. I couldn't work out what was wrong with my behaviour that I had to change it by resolving to do something different, especially given nobody continued with theirs beyond the first few weeks anyway. It seemed to me to be a time of collective delusion. First of all with The Big Event that wasn't, and then with resolutions that, well, aren't. None of which is intended to say that making resolutions is pointless. On the contrary, resolving to do something can be really helpful. A common mistake with resolutions, at any time of the year, is the way we relate to them, engage with them. If we're not paying lip-service to the tradition, we typically choose something we really want to change and we put in a Herculean effort for the first few weeks that is unsustainable. Eventually, we burn out and give up. This, of course, is a simile of our relationship to the Dhamma. Burning brightly with interest and good-will, we throw ourselves in only to find ourselves unable to sustain the pace. We are sprinting for the marathon. The Buddha, of course, knew this about us and came up with a factor of the Noble Eightfold Path for exactly this: Right Resolve (*sammā-saṅkappa*), also variously translated as Right Thought, Right Intention, Right Aspiration; "a right way of thinking/aspiring, which has a balancing warmth." This is taught as the intention to move away from greed, ill-will, and cruelty, towards peaceful renunciation, lovingkindness, and compassion. I don't know about you, but when I first heard this, it sounded so far away from what was possible, it seemed unachievable. What was missing, for me, was this "balancing warmth", and it is that which makes it sustainable. So rather than choosing resolutions that will effectively punish us, we need to find ways of orientating towards them gently, with warmth, compassion, and kindness. This helps make them

Happy New Year

sustainable and easier to integrate into our lives.

Transcriptions produced locally using Swiss low-carbon electricity. Corrections and rewriting by cloud-hosted AI.