



By the time this column appears in Lowcountry Weekly, the ball will have dropped in Times Square, New Year's Eve champagne glasses will have been clinked and washed, hoppin' john will have been gobbled down for good luck, and we'll be already rockin' into 2021. The Presidential election is history, a Covid vaccination awaits in the not-too-distant, Beaufort has a new mayor, Lowcountry nature still spreads its gorgeous wings daily, and life itsownself rolls onward. No doubt this will be the most-anticipated beginning of a year in recent memory.

Breathe a big sigh of relief about all!

So are you thinking it's time to make your squeaky-clean, brand-new 2021 self into a new and better model than your 2020 self by making New Year's resolutions? Granted, I've heard a few inspiring success stories about those makeovers. And a big shout-out to you if you've been one of them. But unfortunately, many more tales exist of starting out with great intentions, at the gym, for instance, and maybe making that new workout last long enough into the winter months to begin to see a few results.

Then one day that exercise equipment begins to play second fiddle to another priority that's crept in or an old habit that your self-critic says is far more important than the appointment with that slave-driving personal trainer. *Just this one time*, you think. But sluffing off that resolution gets easier every time, and pretty soon, you abandon yet another good idea. Sound familiar? The numbers don't come to me right now, but several years back, I remember reading that something like 60 to 70 percent of those old Nordic Trak machines ended up as clothes hangers

in owners' bedrooms. Just sayin'!

If holiday distractions caused you to miss Chris (Sutty) Suddeth's "Wholly Holistics" column in the December 1 through 13 issue of *Lowcountry Weekly*, go online and give it a read. It's as good a treatise on the fallacy of making New Year's resolutions as I've seen in a month of Sundays. The following quote is, I believe, Sutty's premise in his own words: "A question to ask is why not start right away when you realize a change needs to occur? Where is your resolve? Perhaps there's a good reason for not starting right away, perhaps not. The point is, there's no hope for a better yesterday, no matter how much we dwell on it and long for it."

And why *not* start right away...right now? Eckhart Tolle focused on that assertion in his late 1990's bestselling book, *The Power of Now: A Guide to Spiritual Enlightenment*. Though not a new concept by any means, his message about living life in the present moment and dropping our obsession with the past and future is presented in a fresh perspective. The present, Tolle offers in his quiet, sure voice, is all we have. And if you think about it, he has a point. Dwelling on the past leads to regrets and if-only's, while concentrating on the future brings up fears and what-if's.

A question he proffers has certainly given me plenty of food for thought through the years after a friend gave me a copy of this life-changing read. "Get present," the widely-acclaimed spiritual teacher says. "Now tell me, 'What is wrong right this minute?'"

And yes, you can probably reel off a list of issues that make your life seem harder or stuck in a tough place. That's the human condition. When a stress-filled situation throws you off kilter, your mind tends to transport you into either the past, memories of its assumed failures, and habitual reactions to thoughts of them, or the future, its worry about possible gloom and doom ahead, and becoming paralyzed from panic. But if you can allow yourself to get present, i.e. come into the moment, look around in it, and see it for its truth, then instead of *reacting* from how it looks when you're lost in it, you can *respond* from a place of higher intuition.

Sounds simple, yes? Actually, the concept *is* simple but it's not necessarily easy. The longer I live the more I understand that the big, important questions in life are just that. Simple, but with required going inside yourself to find answers. Which can be a tough journey but oh, so worthwhile.

Just FYI, Katy Perry said that listening to the audio version of *The Power of Now* inspired her to write the song “This Moment” from her album

Prism

. Since acquiring my first copy of that powerful read, I’ve poured through the book; a shortened version of its highlights, titled

Practicing the Power of Now

; and listened to the audio version untold numbers of times. Yet I can still return to it and be motivated.

Lest you think I’m writing an Amazon review for the book, my point here hearkens back to the title of this column, with a big thanks and a tip of the hat to American yogi and spiritual teacher Ram Dass, from whom I unabashedly plagiarized the phrase. These words describe so well what being present means. Living in the present as much as possible allows you to get to know yourself and your capacities – physically, mentally, emotionally and spiritually – better. And in so doing, you can begin to respond to what the days offer, whether those offerings be joys, changes, and/or challenges, and you can recognize the opportunities they present, even if those are only growth-related. I use the word “only” because growth-filled moments, once you recognize them, can be real eye-rollers. *Oh, you may think, not that issue. Again?* And that reply smells like growth to me because at least you’ve recognized it for what it is and perhaps for what it represents to you. And that in itself is cause to celebrate!

So what’s the how-to of becoming more present? What’s worked for me and for many others is a daily meditation practice. Add to that a slew of additional options. Practice yoga or chi gong. Explore online resources such as the Chopra Center, Commune, or the Gaia Network. Read Eckhart Tolle, Ram Dass, the Dalai Lama, Marianne Williamson, Thomas Merton, or any spiritual leaders who inspire you. Read poets Wendell Berry, Mary Oliver, and numerous others of their ilk.

Spend quiet time in nature and simply observe. Tune in to your heart. When a decision must be made, close your eyes, take a deep breath and ask yourself how you *really* feel. Go deep. Practice. Keep trying. Above all, know that you’re not alone in your journey within and that it’s worth the effort.

In the following, beloved Buddhist monk Thich Nhat Hanh summarizes simply and truly how vital living in the present is. “The past is gone, the future is not yet here, and if we do not go back to ourselves in the present moment, we cannot be in touch with life.”

Being here now is what living and loving life are all about. Revel in the journey.

Katherine Tandy Brown has traveled the world as a freelance writer for 25 years. She teaches memoir, travel writing and writing practice in USCB's OLLI Continuing Ed program and in her downtown cottage. A certified writing coach, she is penning her first novel, One to Go: An Equine Thriller. ktandybrown@gmail.com or (859) 312-6706