

Thoughts prompted by a new year

by Poep Sa Frank Jude Boccio | January 2, 2010

Quite often during the last few weeks, perhaps in response to the turning of the year, quite a few students have asked about the difference between 'motivation' and 'intention' as regards one's practice, and this got me to thinking a bit about these and two other related concepts: 'aspiration' and 'purpose.'

My trusty Webster's defines motivation as it relates to 'motive,' and under 'motive' it says, "something within a person (as need, idea, organic state or emotion) that incites him to action" or "a prompting force or incitement working on a person to influence volition or action." A motive can apply to any emotion, desire or appetite operating in the will of a person and moving her to act. Interestingly, emotion and motive both relate to action: they both contain the idea of motion.

'Intention' is the act of intending, and 'intent' comes from the Latin meaning "the act of stretching out." The primary meaning is often used as a synonym for 'purpose' or 'design' as well as the state of mind or mental attitude with which something is done. In this sense it is a synonym for 'volition.' It is in this sense that the Buddha defined karma as volition. Up until the time of the Buddha, karma was understood in a mechanistic, deterministic way, but by defining karma as volition, the Buddha ethicized the concept of karma. The secondary meaning is to have the mind concentrated on some act or end and thus would also mean 'determined' or 'resolved.' Intention simply indicates what one proposes to do.

We see this distinction between 'motive' and 'intent' in legal philosophy. Someone may want their rich aunt's money, and decide to kill her for it. The motive is getting one's hands on the money. The intention is to kill. Many students intend to come to class, but fail to articulate their motive for practicing yoga.

'Purpose' is "something that one sets before himself as an object to be attained: an end or aim to be kept in view in any plan, measure, exertion of operation. It is an object, effect or result aimed at, intended or attained." And finally, 'aspiration' has as its first definition, "breathing; an aspirated sound" and then "a strong desire for realization (as of ambitions, ideals, or accomplishment." It is an end or goal aspired to or a condition strongly desired. To "aspire" is "to be ambitious, to yearn, long or seek." It is also to "rise, ascend, tower and soar."

At the beginning of the new year, many people make 'resolutions,' and from previous experience, I can expect the attendance in Yoga class to increase during the first few weeks of the new year. Based upon this observation, I feel confident in assuming that taking more Yoga classes, or practicing more Yoga is a major resolution for many people. The problem is, I've also seen time and time again, that by the end of February or March, the attendance is bound to drop. In looking for possible reasons for the short commitment to practice and the "failure" to live up to and maintain their resolutions, based upon our little etymological survey above, I might suggest it is lack of clarity about motivation. The "intention" to make it to class x times a week, without a clear understanding of why you would want to, is bound to fade over time. Generally, this is

because intention is so tied with "purpose" or goal, and while there are many purposes for practicing Yoga, all of them generally take some time to develop.

Yes, one may feel "relaxed" after one class, and if to "be more relaxed" is your intention or purpose, this may be fine and wonderful. Except that the state of relaxation felt after class is, like all "states," impermanent. Sometimes all it takes is to find your car has been ticketed, or your car has a flat tire, and the relaxed feeling is history!

Personally, I love the fact that "aspiration" is related to breathing, because conscious breathing, anapanasati is the basis of my practice. I aspire to know each breath as I sit or practice asana. One of my first meditation teachers said that it was perfectly normal and fine to have goals (purposes) for our practice. That we can practice with the intention to become more relaxed, more alert, more peaceful and happy, or even enlightened. But that we had then better place those goals on "the shelf" and attend to what is happening right now. Motivation is what moves us. And my guess is that most of the new students coming to class (and those who have been away for the last few months) have not made their motivation conscious.

So I ask you, "What moves one to practice? What moves you?"
Please comment on Tucson Yoga's Facebook Page.

Looking forward to exploring the response to this question with all of you in the new year!

Metta,
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Frank Jude Boccio

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