

# Resolve to Evolve

*Give your New Year's resolutions a yogic twist—set intention and infuse the new year with positive change. ~Catherine Guthrie*

A new year's resolution is a noteworthy concept—start off the year with a change for the better. So how did it devolve into a subconscious exercise in self-loathing? Lose 10 pounds! (Message to self: You're fat.) Stop drinking caffeine! (You're unhealthy.) Call Mom and Dad once a week! (You're ungrateful.) Why not celebrate this new year by trading in your tired (and probably familiar) resolutions for a sankalpa instead?



**POSITIVE POWER** A Sanskrit word, sankalpa means “will, purpose, or determination.” To make a sankalpa is to set an intention—it's like a New Year's resolution with a yogic twist. While a resolution often zeros in on a perceived negative aspect of ourselves (as in, “I want to lose weight, so no more chocolate chip cookies or ice cream or cheese”), a sankalpa explores what's behind the thought or feeling (“I crave chocolate chip cookies or ice cream or cheese when I'm feeling stressed or sad. I will set an intention to become conscious of this craving and allow my feelings to arise and pass, rather than fill up on fats”).

**EFFORT COUNTS** A sankalpa also praises the nobility of the effort rather than focusing on what you are doing wrong. “New Year's resolutions leave me feeling guilty and mad at myself for not keeping them,” says Wendy McClellan, a yoga teacher in Louisville, Kentucky. So, last year, in a conscious effort to reject the resolution rut, she taught a special New Year's Eve yoga class and encouraged students to look back and let go. Her intention, or sankalpa? To open her heart to new possibilities. “An intention has much more of a global sense than a resolution,” she says. “It helps me be softer with myself.” With a sankalpa, the self-loathing that comes from dwelling on past transgressions can begin to dissolve. In its place is an exercise in effort and surrender—create an intention and open yourself to the universe.

## Sankalpa Setting

**LOOK INWARD** For several days, set aside time to write in a journal and meditate. Mull over your typical resolutions. How do they make you feel? Anxious? Unsettled? Incomplete? Now contemplate how you would like to feel during the coming year. Is there any way you can reframe your results-oriented resolutions into something that will make this year's journey more joyful and worthwhile?

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**REPHRASE IT** Create a short sentence or phrase for your sankalpa. Be careful not to set limitations based on fear. For example, instead of “May life bring me only happiness and joy this year” consider “May I be happy and open to what life brings me.”

**BE FIRM BUT FAIR** Change doesn’t happen overnight. When you stray from the essence of your sankalpa, don’t berate yourself. Instead, gently remind yourself of your intention. But be firm in your resolve—it’s a good idea to incorporate your sankalpa into your daily routine. Use it as a mantra during pranayama or meditation practice; post it on your computer, phone, or mirror; or simply say it to yourself quietly before going to sleep. —C.G

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