

Going to Work on Doing What I Should

Happy new year and happy new decade. I know, it doesn't really mean anything to say it's a "new year" or a "new decade" since it's arbitrary, but it feels significant — partly because it's treated as though it is. I like excuses to celebrate so I'm fine with it.

The winter solstice is a natural time for a year to begin, as would be the other solar divisions of the year: the summer solstice or one of the equinoxes.

The winter solstice was originally celebrated as the new year's dawn because this is when the sun stops moving farther south and the daylight hours stop getting shorter. This makes it the time of renewal and hope — as it was to our ancestors who recognized their dependence on the natural world more than we modern humans seem to.

This is why there is a cluster of happy holidays around this time of year. The winter solstice is the logical choice for a new beginning, even if we celebrate a little late. Better late than never.

The new year is simply the winter solstice wrap-up party.

Regardless of why, when, or how we celebrate a new year, this event gives just about everyone an excuse to reflect on the year past and plan for a better year to come.

This year I'm thinking about one important point I learned since the last new year: that it's better to listen than to speak.

Over the past year, I came to realize how hungry people are to tell their stories. All you have to do is be willing to listen to them. With the rush of modern life, and with everyone's nose seemingly stuck to their phone screen, listening to someone is one of the simplest acts of compassion you can perform.

The flip side of this observation is that it's pointless to speak if someone doesn't really want to listen. You can lead a horse to water, but you can't make him drink. I can explain what I mean, as completely and thoroughly as humanly possible, but I can't make others understand if they don't really want to, nor can I make them accept what I'm saying — even if they understand — if it's not what they want to hear.

I don't always do what I know I should, but I'll keep working on it. Next year at this time I'll look back and see how I'm doing and see what new things I've learned.

Onward into 2020.