T he start of a new year can be daunting. It’s a time to take stock of our lives and reflect on the previous year. Some of us endeavor to make course corrections for the road ahead. To this end, we make resolutions.

The making of resolutions actually has religious origins. Through the millennia, various cultures—from ancient Babylonians to Romans to medieval knights—began each year with commitments to self-improvement. In the 1700s, several Protestant denominations began the tradition of holding “watch night” services on New Year’s Eve, during which they would review the past year and confess sins; then prepare for the year ahead by praying and setting resolutions.

But somewhere along the line, people have become cynical about making resolutions—probably because most people who make them don’t stick to them. Others shy away from resolutions about the future because they want to live in the present moment. We’ve been advised that worrying about the future is futile. As Jesus said, “Consider the lilies of the field, how they grow; they neither toil nor spin” (Mt. 6:28).

But we also know that one must plant seeds to enjoy a harvest.

In his classic book Discover the Power Within You, Unity minister Eric Butterworth tells a story that puts it all in perspective: “A traveler in ancient Greece had lost his way and, seeking to find it, asked directions of a man by the roadside who turned out to be Socrates. ‘How can I reach Mt. Olympus?’ asked the traveler … Socrates is said to have replied, ‘Just make every step you take is in that direction.’”

To me, that captures the idea of intentional living, achieved moment by moment. In his article, “Be a Goal Getter,” (page 16) Arturo Mora says that the key to achieving your goals is to know where you want to go. What is your Mt. Olympus? It’s not enough to resolve to, say, lose 10 pounds or quit smoking or find a new job. Instead look at the big picture. What are your life intentions? To be wealthy? To be healthy? To help others? Draw on that larger motivation to fuel your commitment.

Once you’ve set an intention, says author and spiritual coach Cindy Wigglesworth, reflect on it frequently. “At the beginning of each week, look at your calendar and priorities,” she says. “Do a reality check, not in the sense of beating yourself up, but just continually saying, ‘Am I really serious about this goal? If so, where is it in my allocation of time and resources?’”

Setting an intention is an act of optimism. When we set intentions, we affirm that we have all the resources and ability we need to live out our dreams. Creating a road map shifts our perspective to what is possible, and readies us to steer the course of our own lives.

May your step-by-step progress toward your own personal Mt. Olympus be a journey filled with courage, joy and fulfillment.

Your fellow traveler,

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