



## Newsletter from the Open Grove

*forward thinking; interactive radio*

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**Happy New Year from the Open Grove!** We spent much of the last weeks touring the groves in Northern California. We visited all kinds of groves from Redwoods to Olive Groves. I was most impressed by the rainforests in the Lost Wilderness National Forest. If you haven't seen American rainforest, you owe it to yourself to check it out!

The New Year is an excellent time to begin to focus on the aspects of our life that we would like to change. Many people make "New Years Resolutions" which are often pushed aside by Valentine's Day. In our first issue of the year, we decided to turn our attention to making changes without having to make "resolutions".

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### Unusual "resolutions" for the New Year

I personally am not a big fan of New Year's resolutions. In my experience, they often end up being commitments people make to themselves that they are unable to honor. The nature of "resolutions" requires people to focus on the end goal (ex. losing 20 pounds) with no thought given to the process of achieving that goal. People get discouraged as often they do not have the means – financially, emotionally, or energetically – to meet their end goal because goal require definitive strategies.

For the last several years, I have been creating a "focal point" at the beginning of the year. This helps me concentrate on one thing that I would like to change or create in my life each year. My yearly focal point becomes the cornerstone of all of my decisions. For example, last year my focal point was to learn about and practice self-kindness. This lead to the ideas, thoughts and practice outlined on the self-kindness web-site ([www.selfkindness.com](http://www.selfkindness.com)). Each decision I made last year was based in my focal point. It changed my life.

Here are some New Years focal points that might interest you. Pick one or two and you might change your life.

1. Create a healthier lifestyle. This focal point is a bit of a trick as most people immediately focus on how much weight they would like to lose. Focusing on creating a healthier lifestyle accentuates a lifestyle that might include being at a different weight. Many people approach this focal point in a step-wise manner developing small achievable goals along the way. For example, for the month of January, your goal may be to take your vitamins. February, your goal may be to get 30 minutes of exercise a week. Each month add another healthy goal to your life.
2. Look at a "bad" habit. Whether it's smoking or eating too much chocolate, we all have habits that we don't like. Rather than focusing on "quitting smoking" (another end point instead of a process), focus on the process of changing a habit by looking at the habit itself. Make a focal point this year to get to know your bad habit. When do you eat more chocolate? What time of the day, month, week? What is going on for you emotionally when you smoke or bite your nails? Getting to know your habit is the first step toward changing it for the better.
3. Let go of judgement. This is a really tough focal point. Judging others and ourselves keeps us disconnected from the present, other people and your self. Judgement only creates pain. At the same time, judging people is a habit designed to protect you from the world. Spend some time with your judgement this year. When do you judge people? Is it mostly women or men? Carl Jung believed that

we tend to judge others because they reflect a disowned or “shadow” part of ourselves. (My current favorite book on this topic is The Dark Side of Light Chasers by Debbie Ford.) Letting go of judgement will allow you to better experience the miracle of life.

4. Step passed your perceived limitations. We all have edges that we are unwilling to step over due to our fear, shame or self-loathing. One focal point for this year would be to practice stepping over your edge once a month. Maybe that means that you go out to eat by your self or hike a harder trail than you are used to. You might go to a play or ballet even if you are convinced that you might “hate” it. Look for your perceived limitations and then look beyond them to see what you might experience just on the other side; you might just find life waiting for you there.
5. Listen to a different thought. Learning about what other people think can help you to feel compassionate to other people’s points of view. If you usually read the *Utne Reader*, check out the *New Republic*. Try listening to the views of your very liberal friend. Liberal? Take some time to really listen to a conservative friend or politician. Mad at the Taliban? Spend some time reading the Koran. Even if it makes you angry, and convinced that you are “right”, it affords you the unique opportunity of hearing another point of view. Each new view affords you the opportunity to grow in wisdom.
6. Meet a few new people. Often we meet people in spurts – a few people in college or at that fun job. What if you made the focal point to meet one new person a month? Maybe you could join a book club. You might get involved in your neighborhood association. You might try taking an art class or a class at the gym. Meeting someone new can brighten up your day with new thoughts, new jokes and new adventures.
7. Practice forgiveness. Holding onto your resentments only creates pain. Many times we don’t want to forgive people because we feel like they will be “off the hook”. However, we spend a tremendous amount of time and energy holding onto that hook! Jack Kornfield has a lovely meditation for the three facets of forgiveness – asking others for forgiveness, forgiving ourselves and forgiving people who hurt us. This meditation focuses on each person’s human tendency to hurt other people, intentionally or unintentionally, out of our own fear, anger, pain and confusion. (You can find the meditation at [www.selfkindness.com](http://www.selfkindness.com), click on “Self-kindness” or in *Buddha’s Little Instruction Book* by Jack Kornfield.) Try it. You might find that you over the course of the year, you will feel more peaceful and at ease.
8. Give of yourself. You would be surprised at how much you get from giving to people in need. What do you feel strongly about? Feeding the American hungry? Abused children? Reading? AIDS? Each of these issues has excellent groups who could use your help. You would be surprised at what a difference you make by simply caring about another human being. I encourage you to give of yourself in an active, physical way rather than simply in a financial way. Watching the impact you have on someone in need can change the way you see your self and the world.
9. Begin to address your issues with money. Issues with money? Moi? Every American has some issue with money. We either spend too much or hold onto too much. In our society, we exchange our energy for money. In this way, money becomes our energy. How we deal with our money reflects how we deal with our life energy. There are wonderful books to help you save money, get out of debt or simply keep track of your money. . Spending a year focusing on your money issues can change your entire life.
10. Get involved. Many Americans are discouraged about our government. Many people feel as if their votes don’t count and that they can not make an impact on what happens in America. With high paid lobbyists and corporate influences in government, it’s easy to get discouraged. However, as a lobbyist friend of mine said, nothing is more frightening to “special interest” groups than Americans taking back their right to vote and their right to having a voice in America. If you feel discouraged about “the system”, get involved. Most government officials have web sites. Send them an email. Write them a letter. Call them when they do something you like or when they do something you don’t. Become your own special interest group fighting for something you feel passionately about. The system was designed for our interaction – most of us just don’t interact. Make your voice known to your elected officials. You’d be surprised; they often send Thank you notes when you do.

