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GROWTH Wisdom

Intention ... the worthy seed

"Intentionality fuels the master's journey."

– George Leonard

The first month of the new year, the time when ideally we should be feeling all charged up with resolutions or new goals. However, for many of us resolutions do not sustain long. We quickly lose focus, steam or even worse motivation. Goals, in contrast, with their results-focus and time-orientation do tend to stick longer. This year though doesn't seem to support even goal-setting. In times like these – when the new year feels like the continuation of the last couple of years' chaos and trauma, when life continues to choke under the weight of multiple constraints and newer challenges every day, when even stability for most people has become a luxury, what to say of growth and progress – how does one set and pursue new growth goals. Difficult in more ways than we can contemplate or tackle.

Couple of things though are possible and doable. One is to stay rooted in our higher purpose even as this continued turbulence seems to be casting very long shadows, and the other is to continue taking purposeful action on day-to-day basis. A conscious connection with our higher purpose helps us stay grounded, and sustains the overall sense of direction with which we need to lead our lives, in good and bad times alike. And purposeful action sets the path towards eventual success and fulfilment, even if that feels difficult or doubtful in times like these.

Conscious intention-setting is an important key in the journey of maintaining clarity about and connection with our life-purpose, and taking purposeful committed action in that direction. It is that vital micro life-task on an everyday basis, that eventually loops in to our macro goals and long term purpose, and keeps even our routine actions focussed and well-directed. Steve Maraboli wisely says –

*"Intent is the seed of manifestation,
action is the water that nourishes the seed."*

As is clear from this short, simple but deeply meaningful quote, intention paves the way for deliberate action and together they co-create an eco-system of growth that may not be visible in the immediacy but is happening for sure at a deeper level. At a deeper level, being intentional about what we are doing or not doing ultimately means being mindful and fully present in the moment. Such an intentional choice-making about our decisions and actions reinforces our deeper belief-system, mindsets and overall life-view. It is common for us to say or hear others say – "Be positive". By itself, 'positive attitude or thinking' is only a catch-phrase. It has meaning only when guided by higher purpose, a meaningful intention and take forward with an aligned action in that direction.

Legendary psychologist Albert Bandura talked of intention being the first of the four essential pillars of human agency (capability to influence our functioning through our actions). He suggested that intention is the foundation-block for imagining a reality that is better, new or positively different from our current circumstances. Without consciously choosing what we intend to be, do or have in times to come, our actions may lack the sense of purpose, direction and motivation. Add to that Steve Maraboli's insistence that clarity of vision comes only from the clarity of intention – we come to understand that our agency about our life is strongly linked to clarity of intention about what we want of our life, on every-day and long-term basis. And take it further to how intentions fill our actions with meaning and purpose by helping us become more aware and mindful in-the-moment, thereby enhancing our emotional, mental and physical energy. Intentions are not just expansive in spirit, they also have huge affirmative impact on our overall way of conducting our life. On top they also offer an action map we can relate to. In fact, in my experience, the best thing about intention-setting is that it helps you get out of your head and heart,



your thoughts and feelings, and puts you in action-mode.

Your intention need not be about you or your family or other immediate persons in your life alone. Intentions can be larger and higher than our limited personal realms. Human universe would have been very different if a Gandhi or a Mother Teresa or a Martin Luther King or a Mandela wouldn't have held self-transcendent intentions for a free, harmonious, compassionate world, and strived all their lives to make them come true. That said, we need not look for such larger than life inspirations. In recent times, many of us have transcended our personal worries, and risen to help others even if that meant compromising on our own safety or comfort. Farmers' movement has taught us that noble intentions do not just inspire committed action, they also empower us with a higher strength and courage to withstand all adversities.

Time to put what we have been talking about into practice. Let us learn the way of intention-setting. Try setting a new intention for the year ahead by reflecting on following prompts. Fine-tune them suitably if you have a month, a week or even a day. Please feel free to create your own prompts. Just be sure that they help you become better aware of what inspires and drives you in life towards purposeful action. Here are a few to help you get started –

- *What mattered the most in the last year and continues to feel important?*
- *What capabilities, qualities or resources serve you the best, through thick and thin? Do you think about nurturing/strengthening them further? What do you wish to do about it?*
- *What recurring positive dream(s) keep infusing a sense of positivity or inspiration, however hard the circumstances be?*
- *What are your current or lingering anxieties or worries about? What can you do to address and resolve them?*
- *What do you really long for in life? What inspires you to go on with hope and meaning?*

Once you feel complete in your reflections, you may craft intentions on the lines of following suggestions –

- Today/This week/This month/This year I intend to ____.
- This is important for me because ____.
- I intend to complete it by ____.
- I intend to undertake ____ (specific action).
- I intend to seek necessary help from or by way of ____.
- I intend to take it forward to the next level of ____.

You may ask if it is possible to always be able to set intentions that align with our higher purpose. Your wonderment is valid. Important very much, however it may not always be easy to align intentions to

our higher purpose. Nonetheless intention-setting retains its positive influence in helping us maintain purposiveness of our actions. As Alan Cohen puts it simply, *"when your intention is clear, so is the way"*. If in doubt, set intentional-reminders nonetheless to keep your everyday actions filled with some meaning. Positive psychologist and internationally acclaimed best-selling author, Dr Brené Brown talks about a simple vowel-check method that she learnt from a friend. I share below a version of it that I designed for myself during initial periods of lock-down so as to help myself cope with anxiety and maintain a sense of wellbeing. These have since become part of my life, even as new intentions keep getting added –

A – I intend to Actively self-regulate the amount of TV watching.

E – I intend to Engage - both with my work and the world, on everyday basis.

I – I intend to Include creative pursuits in my routine, so as to deal with anxiety.

O – I intend to maintain a mindset of Optimism, resilience, faith, compassion, gratitude. I created tiny affirmation cards and pinned them where I get to see them several times a day.

U – I intend to say everyday Universal wellbeing prayer, and do at least one concrete action every week to support those in need.

Intention is the seed that we consciously sow on the soil of our life. Something that eventually starts manifesting as meaningful action in the service of a higher purpose. Being able to set intentions is the start of the story. We should also know how to make intentions work. Dr Deepak Chopra in his famous book, *The Seven Spiritual Laws of Success*, offers various ways to harness the power of intentions. I share below an essence of the same –

- Plant the seed of intention when you are in what Dr Chopra calls "the gap" state – the state of pure awareness where we are not overwhelmed by the internal noise of thoughts or feelings. He advocates meditation as one powerful way to "the gap" state.

- This state is a field of possibilities. Dr Chopra advises that it is best to release our intention into the universe during the restful state after meditation.

- When it comes to intentions, faith matters. When contemplating or seeding an intention, come from a mindset of faith, rather than doubt or deficit.

- Allow your deeper wisdom to flow with the uncertainty. Stay detached from the outcome. Instead set an intention for the right opportunities to show up.

- Finally do your best, and leave to universe the rest. As depth psychology scholar and practitioner David Richo wisely says – *"we achieve by effort, but we receive by grace"*. By all means take ownership for your endeavour, but do not deceive yourself thinking that you have to be in command.

Our life environment is full of forces that we cannot contemplate or influence. Gardener does not fight with the wind or the rains. He does his job by planting the seed in the right season, on the right soil, waters and feeds it right. The blooms happen when their time comes. Plant your intentions today. Undertake all the purposeful action that they need to manifest desired fruit. Trust the higher forces to support you in your endeavour. Take the ownership of your effort, and wait for the season of bloom. It will happen just in time. Until then, stay purposeful, intentional and committed.

I would close today's discourse by underlining that everything in universe starts with an intention made conscious. Vedic wisdom insists that our intentions determine our will, our will determines our actions, and our actions ultimately shape our destiny. Hope you take the first step towards consciously designing your life by becoming intentional about your life. So what are you waiting for, pick up the pen and paper, write down your intention for today and for life in its overall gamut.

Happy Intention-ing.

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