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Reformation – Resolution – Restoration – Redemption

How to be successful in 2008

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Your Life Your Health

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Life is cyclical and in most of our minds, time is circular rather than linear. While we think about being older each year, which is a linear concept – you go from “here to there” without ever being “here” again -- the cadence of our life is regulated by seasonal activities and schedules which go around and around. Many of these cycles are physically the result of the revolution of the earth around the sun and the simultaneous revolution of the earth upon its axis and we perceived them as changes in light patterns and temperatures, as well as in work, educational and social calendars. Because life is cyclical, after great effort and after the passing of time, we often find ourselves right back where we started.

Thus, we soon will arrive at New Year’s Day, to which, while it is just another day, which follows the day before and precedes the day after like any other day, special significance is added by the cycles of taxation, deductibles, age and our often annual pretension at self-reformation. Words like “new,” “beginnings,” “starting,” “change,” “improvement,” find their way into our consciousness, as we search for a hook upon which to hang our desire for change in the hope that will give us the discipline and perseverance to be successful where we have previously failed.

In regard to health, this reformation most often relates to exercise, weight loss, stopping smoking, getting “healthy,” or some other form of physical self-improvement. An overwhelming number of such efforts fail because they are based on the principle of resolution which is not a powerful enough force in our lives. We continue to resolve, sometimes even to the point of writing down a list of New Year’s resolutions, which we are confident through experience that we cannot, or will not sustain. We continue to fail without understanding why our resolutions are so difficult to maintain? Why do we so often fail? Principally, it is, I think, because we do not add to resolution the steps which will allow us to move our determination to reform through the steps required for success.

Reformation is founded upon Redemption

While redemption is a profoundly theological concept there are principles associated with it which can be employed without reference to sectarian dogma. The only reformation which has ever been successful and sustainable is that which is founded upon redemption. And, the fundamental nature of redemption is that it requires that a price be paid for reformation and restoration to take place. Unfortunately, and this is the reason why most efforts at reformation fail, it is not possible to redeem yourselves. In human relationships, or in human experience, redemption requires another act in order to purchase your success. In other words, we cannot

redeem ourselves. And, without an act of redemption, we cannot and will not be successful in our efforts for reform and resolution.

The steps of reformation which leads to restoration through resolution while being sustained by redemption are:

- Determination
- Declaration
- Discipline
- Denial
- Duty
- Devotion

Determination is exactly what it sounds like; it is a decision which you make within yourself. No one can make it for you. It must be your own. Without this step, all else is ineffective. The change which is expected cannot be someone else's idea, or someone else's desire; it must be your own. The change which is expected cannot be imposed upon you by someone else. And, the more passionately you hold that determination, the more likely you are to succeed. This determination is a matter between you and yourself. It is internal and it is unobserved by others.

Declaration is the step at which you begin to externalize your decision, your determination. You tell others about it. You talk about it, sometimes to the point of being tedious, but you continue to affirm to others the intent of your determination. As with a religious confession, determination without declaration will not be effective. When you declare your intent, you begin gaining strength from your declaration and from others who will share your enthusiasm and at times will sustain your enthusiasm. It is here that one of the elements of redemption begins to act.

In the very act of sharing your determination through your declaration, you invite others to add their strength and commitment to yours. You admit that you cannot do it alone and that you need the help of others. It is at this point that the individual begins to gain strength from the group.

This is the virtue of the group meetings where individuals share their determination to stop drinking alcohol, or using drugs, or overeating, or whatever the decision is. That which one cannot do alone; one can do with the support of others. That which an individual cannot do, as a member of a group he/she can.

Discipline is the result of your determination and your declaration, as the discipline is the making of an act automatic, routine and preferential. A discipline is almost like a habit, except it differs in that a discipline becomes non-optional and is more cognitive than a habit. A discipline is the act of renewing your determination at every opportunity to neglect or to abandon your decision. You do not practice a discipline because you feel like it, or to do it because you want to do it; you do it because you have determined and declared your intent.

Denial takes place when you actively choose to maintain your discipline in the face of an

opportunity, or temptation to abandon your determination. A discipline is founded and sustained on the basis of denial. Denial affirms that to practice your discipline, you must give up that which would cause you to fail at the practice of your discipline. Without the will to deny yourself something, you cannot succeed. A discipline has a self-perpetuating character as it draws strength internally from your determination and externally from your declaration and consequently from the energy of the group, which has entered into the relationship to help make you successful. This is how a resolution differs from a discipline. In order to sustain a resolution, you have to add a great deal of energy; once established, a discipline generates its own energy requiring less and less effort for it to be sustained.

Duty is that which you owe to others. For reformation to flow from redemption, you must in your declaration of your determination become accountable to others, borrowing from their energy and vitality that which you need in order to be successful. You allow others the right to hold you to the course you have determined to take and as a result you assume an obligation not to squander or waste the investment they made in you. In reality, successful reformation and resolution requires a community effort in order to achieve success. That community effort is the price of redemption which others pay for our success and which not only obligates us to succeed but also energizes our success. Without this element of redemption – the price paid by others for our successful reformation and restoration – we cannot and we will not be successful.

Devotion is the end result of this entire process. Devotion is born of the gratitude which we have for the gift others have given us in participating in our effort. Gratitude is one of the most powerful motives in human experience. Out of gratitude will flow diligence and discipline. Out of gratitude will flow great and persistent effort even in self-improvement. Self-centered and selfish acts of indulgence which undermine our discipline are less frequent and more easily overcome when we are motivated by gratitude.

Starting Over Quickly: The Key to Success

And yet, the key to successful change is to recognize that we do not succeed simply by maintaining our commitment; we most often succeed by quickly starting over when we fail. Many people will start, fail and then not start over until the next seasonal change such as the next New Year's Day. Others start, proceed, fail and start over almost immediately. These are those who will succeed. Success is achieved through sewing a tapestry of life together from the patches of many starts and stops, with a very short interval between the last failure and the new beginning. Failure, when properly processed, presents the opportunity to begin again, which beginning is in itself an act of success. Axiom for success: I have not finished many things I started, but I have NEVER finished anything that I did not first start. The key to success in anything is starting and re-starting and re-starting.

Determine

As you celebrate the New Year, consider those areas in which you wish to change. Determine to do so in your own mind and heart. Publicly affirm your intention. Develop a discipline which draws on the energy and support of others. Let them support and energize you. Let

your gratitude for their effort sustain you.

If your determination is to lose weight, exercise and/or stop smoking, SETMA's LESS **Initiative** (Lose Weight, Exercise, Stop Smoking) would be a good place to start. You can get information about The Less Initiative from www.jameslhollymd.com under the heading Your Life Your Health, or from your SETMA healthcare provider.

Remember the words of Theodore Roosevelt who said:

“It is not the critic who counts; not the man who points out how the strong man stumbles, or where the doer of deeds could have done them better. The credit belongs to the man who is actually in the arena, whose face is marred by dust and sweat and blood; who strives valiantly; who errs, and comes short again and again, because there is no effort without error and shortcoming; but who does actually try to do the deeds; who knows the great enthusiasms, the great devotions, who spends himself in a worthy cause; who at the best knows in the end the triumph of high achievement, and who at the worst, if he fails, at least fails while daring greatly, so that his place shall never be with those cold and timid souls who know neither victory nor defeat.”

Whatever you determine to do for your health, or for yourself, be successful. How? Start now and start often, as often as you fail. Remember, it is your life and it is your health.