Five New Year's Resolutions to Reclaim the Sacred
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This week, much of the world turned a calendar page.

The secular New Year arrived with its familiar rituals: countdowns, fireworks, champagne, and resolutions. We promise ourselves we will eat better, exercise more, manage our time, our money, our stress. None of that is bad. Much of it is wise. But by the second week of January, most resolutions quietly fade, not because we lack willpower, but because they aim too low.

Tonight I want to talk about a different kind of New Year's resolution. Not one about productivity or self-optimization, but about reclaiming the sacred in our lives.

One of the great challenges of modern life is that in an age of technological and scientific brilliance, we have misplaced, and sometimes intentionally replaced, the sacred. In the rush to liberate ourselves from superstition and coercion, we have also stripped our lives of depth, reverence, and meaning. We have dethroned the sacred at precisely the moment when our world, our families, and our inner lives need it most.

Judaism was never primarily about convincing people to believe in a God above. Judaism is about shaping people who live with godliness here on earth. Godliness is not about what you say you believe. It is about how you show up in the world. It is about how you treat others, how you care for your own soul, how you choose to live.

So tonight, as a new civil year begins, I want to offer five spiritual resolutions. They are not rigid promises that collapse with a single failure. Rabbi David Wolpe once taught that the best resolutions are elastic. If you resolve never to eat sugar again, one cookie ruins everything. If you resolve to eat more thoughtfully, every day offers another chance to begin again.

These are resolutions of direction, not perfection. Five ways to reclaim the sacred in the year ahead.

1. Choose people over pixels.

Most of us have experienced this moment. You reach for your phone before you reach for the person next to you. A child runs into the room, eager to tell you something, and you finish scrolling first. A couple sits across from one another at dinner, both gazing into separate screens.

I speak from experience. I have done this too.

Jewish tradition has a language for this tension. The word *kedushah*, holiness, does not mean purity or withdrawal from life. Rabbi Moshe Chaim Luzzatto taught that *kedushah* is presence without distraction. It is the experience of being fully with another person. King David described it as, "My soul clings to You." Martin Buber called it *I–Thou*.

The opposite of *kedushah* is *tumah*, which the rabbis understood as separation and disconnection. Rashi described it as gossip that distances us from God. Ibn Ezra saw it as behavior that breaks down social bonds. The Vilna Gaon called it the force that destroys intimacy.

Those descriptions feel uncomfortably modern.

This year, resolve to offer presence as a sacred gift. Look into someone's eyes when they speak. Replace long text exchanges with coffee. Put the phone down when someone you love is trying to connect. If you hold hands, it becomes harder to hold your phone.

Make a promise of presence.

2. Take your soul seriously.

Many of us begin and end our days consuming news, commentary, outrage, and fear. We tell ourselves it is responsible to stay informed, but constant exposure to cruelty, mockery, and dehumanization shapes us whether we admit it or not.

Part of who we are is the sum of what we take in. What we watch. How we speak about others. The tone we allow to surround us.

Jewish tradition understands life as an ongoing process of soul-shaping. Every choice leaves a mark. You only get one soul. Do not squander it on things unworthy of its dignity.

We take care of our bodies with effort and intention. We exercise. We stretch. We try to protect ourselves from physical decline. How are we protecting our souls from erosion?

Each morning we say, *Elohai n'shamah shenatata bi tehorah hi.* The soul You placed within me is pure. You formed it, You breathed it into me, You guard it within me.

But the prayer is incomplete unless we accept our role in that guardianship.

This year, take your soul seriously. Choose what nourishes it. Step away from what corrodes it.

3. Increase your kindness.

When people reflect on what truly matters in life, they rarely speak about achievements or possessions. They speak about relationships. About being seen. About belonging.

One of my favorite passages in the siddur is *Elu D'varim*, "These are the things," a list of mitzvot rooted in kindness:

Honoring parents. Acts of compassion. Welcoming guests. Visiting the sick. Accompanying the dead to burial. Making peace among people.

What unites these acts is their sensitivity to vulnerability. They are about showing up when someone feels exposed, uncertain, or alone.

Judaism teaches that few acts are more powerful than comforting the uncomfortable.

This year, increase your kindness in concrete ways. Greet people when you come into this building. Notice the unfamiliar face. Offer help without being asked. Show up at a shiva even when the mourner is not a close friend.

Abraham Joshua Heschel believed that presence itself is an act of holiness. He would attend shiva houses, sit quietly, and leave without speaking. He understood that sometimes the most sacred thing we can offer is our willingness to be there.

If you want to feel more generous, act generously. Moral growth often begins from the outside. Our behavior shapes our hearts.

4. Choose someone to forgive.

Forgiveness is hard. When someone hurts us, resentment can feel protective. Yet holding onto anger drains us far more than it affects the person who hurt us.

Refusing to forgive is like swallowing poison and hoping someone else will get sick.

You do not need to begin with the hardest wound. Start small. Forgive the person who cut you off in traffic. Forgive the careless remark. Forgiveness grows with practice.

The more we forgive, the less power the world has to wound us. Forgiveness becomes a soft shield for the soul.

5. Include yourself in that forgiveness.

Often the hardest person to forgive is ourselves. We replay mistakes. We cling to regret. We punish ourselves long after growth has already occurred.

Jewish tradition offers a practice for this as well. Before sleep, we are invited to forgive ourselves for the ways we fell short, for the harm we caused our bodies, our dignity, our own hearts.

Ending the day this way restores perspective. It allows us to begin again.

Forgiving yourself does not excuse failure. It releases you from being defined by it. The reward is wholeness, health, and peace.

Choose people over pixels. Take your soul seriously. Increase your kindness. Forgive someone. Forgive yourself.

These are not resolutions that can be completed or checked off. They are directions of travel.

Rabbi Yisrael Salanter taught that changing one character trait is harder than learning the entire Talmud. Growth requires patience and awareness. All change begins with noticing what needs repair and daring to try.

A New Year’s resolution, at its core, is a promise to ourselves that we want to live differently.

The year ahead is still untouched. We have not wasted a single day of it yet.

So let us begin here, not striving for perfection, but for presence. Not for mastery, but for meaning. In this New Year, may we resolve to reclaim the sacred, again and again, one choice at a time.