

WHAT YOU CONTAIN, EXPANDS!

"We are what we repeatedly do. Excellence, then, is not an act, but a habit."

Aristotle

"A man is the sum of his actions, of what he has done, or what he can do, nothing else."

Mahatma Gandhi

"You learn to speak by speaking, to study by studying, to run by running, to work by working; in just the same way, you learn to love by loving."

St. Francis De Sales

I'm sure most, if not all of you, are familiar with the universal principle that what you focus on, expands. Paradoxically, what we contain expands. How can this be so?

A good analogy is that of a gas in a container - when heated up, it expands. Rituals provide a way of holding or containing intention and in essence, heating up the energy.

As a child and even in early adulthood, I used to get uncomfortable with the thought of rituals, for they usually connoted something religious, which in my experience often was solemn, required discipline, and was boring.

I have since come to realize that rituals simply serve as containers for focusing intention on a particular energy, ability or goal and through that focus or "heat", transforming it, expanding it, and bringing it into reality.

One definition of ritual is "any detailed method or procedure faithfully or regularly followed." So rituals provide a specific structure or process that holds and focuses energy toward particular outcomes.

As with a contained gas, the act of focusing energy within a ritual generates a way - a path - for transformation. Successful rituals create an attracting pull toward our desired results, so that the behavior or change we are seeking becomes our new default.

While rituals can be one-time events, like weddings, I want to focus on specific structured activities, actions, or relationships that create containers which allow you to create a new reality over time.

Yes, even relationships serve as containers for holding different kinds of energy and intention for people, be it companionship, personal growth, intimacy, or partnership. We can be and are transformed through our relationships.

Any habit - whether positive or negative - is a ritual. We often associate positive habits with will and discipline. Yet the idea of discipline causes many people to shudder, invoking images of rigidity or fear of loss of freedom.

What distinguishes ritual from mere discipline is that it adds our intention and what we deeply value to structured activity. Ritual thus expands and softens the perceived harshness of discipline by itself.

With the power of values and intention added to the familiarity and comfort of routine, we practice making choices that support our deepest values and aspiration. In this way we attain the freedom to choose who we are and how we show up in the world.

Let's look more concretely at the relationship between what we focus on and the results we get.

For example, if we focus on contracting thoughts that invoke fear or lack of confidence, we typically feel more fearful or more anxious - e.g. more contracted. If we focus on thoughts that are positive or supportive, we feel more optimistic. It's then easier to take risks and actions that move us towards our vision and goals.

What is it that you want to expand?

Your financial freedom, your health, your physical energy,
your happiness, your patience, your empathy, flexibility,
connectedness to others, your ability to focus, your positive
self-talk, your self-care....?

Then put your attention there in an intentional way.

Create a ritual - some structured activity at a specific time – for what it is you want to expand. Schedule it into your daily or weekly calendar - whether it's a small block of time on a regular basis or a larger block of time less frequently.

Remember that something done once or twice or even three times does not a ritual make! Only when we do the action "faithfully or regularly" does it become a ritual. Thus, rituals become a way of practicing keeping agreements with ourselves.

Start small - it's much better to be realistic and create a small win that you can build on than to be over-ambitious and set yourself up to fail. Momentum comes from building on small wins.

The beauty and power of creating ritual containers to focus and expand energy is that as one area of your life expands, another necessarily is impacted. Think of it as taking one piece of the puzzle and expanding it - other pieces simply have to expand to match it.

Self-awareness, self-confidence and self-management are three critical abilities of emotional intelligence. Focusing intention through use of ritual allows us to exercise all of these.

The result? We build our sense of trustworthiness and self-confidence when we keep agreements with ourselves, and we strengthen our sense of personal power to effect change.