

190113 Possible or Probable?

When you were a little kid and you asked your mom or your dad a question like “Can I have ice cream?” If they answered “maybe” did you know right away from their tone if you would get ice cream? Was there a difference between “maybe” and “Maybe”. Sometimes maybes are not really possible and sometimes they are probable.

It is a new year. I know in my head that the difference between December 31 11:59 pm and January 1 12:00 am is just one minute and yet in my heart dec 31 11:59 pm is so much different than january 1 12:00 am. December 31 is filled with thoughts of all the things that I did not do, all the things that did not happen, all my hopes that never materialized. January 1 is full of possibility, it smacks of the future and not the past it is full of what I hope will be. January 1 12:00 am is a reset in my mind. I get to start over try again.

I have to say that I love a blank calendar - not because it means I have no meetings although sometimes that is nice too. I love a blank calendar planner because it is full of possibility. I spent some time in the past couple of weeks looking ahead and wondering and dreaming - maybe 2019 will hold a special trip, or maybe I'll get to go to a great conference, maybe there will be surprises, I'm looking forward to summer where I imagine that there will be the possibility of great sunsets and sunrises, of long days where after dinner I can hang outside and enjoy the peepers, and the sound of crickets. Maybe I will start some new habits or read some great books. Faith makes hope possible and I have a faith that a blank calendar is full of possibilities.

I love possibility and yet one can have a little too much of a good thing. Years ago my husband's theater was doing some collaborative work with a theater from Russia. And this involved his theater troupe sometimes traveling to Russia and sometimes the Russians would come here. When the Russians came here it was always an intense time. Hosting 10-15 people at one time; finding them housing; transporting them all; of that is pretty labor intensive Anyway inevitably during each time they were here one of the women in the Russian troupe would get her period and one of us would take her to Wegmans to get the supplies she needed. And each time each woman would look at the aisle with what seemed like hundred of choices and just get frozen and not know what choice to make.

Choice overload it is a thing. I would bet that many of us have had that experience sometime in our life. Just go down the pasta aisle in Wegmans - choice overload. In an article about choice exhaustion I came across this little story

“Amazon sells 1,161 kinds of toilet brushes. I know this because I recently spent an evening trying to choose one of them for the bathroom in my new apartment. Nearly an hour later, after having read countless contradictory reviews and pondering far too many choices, I felt grumpy and tired and simply gave up. The next day, I happily bought the only toilet brush the local dollar store offered.” <https://www.fastcompany.com/3031364/why-having-too-many-choices-is-making-you-unhappy>

Having choices is good and I am glad that we have them. Because we are not all the same and so we simply need to have a variety of choices. And it is possible to have too many choices too many possibilities. One of the things I think that helps alleviate this stuckness, that too many choices can lead to, is figuring out what is improbable and removing those from your set of choices.

But that begs the question what makes something probable -

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Well it has to seem like it is within the realm of reality - that may sound like a circular statement. But I think it really is not. I could want to be a professional basketball player but at this point in my life at my height and ability it is never going to happen. I could want to run in a 5K race - at my age with my health that could be a possibility, with work. In order for something to move from the category of possible to the category of probable it can be out of reach but not too far out of reach.

One way to make something more probable is to change your motivation or the way you think about it. Our reading this morning touched on that. Here is another story in that vein

The Zenith Drilling Company prided itself on being the best drill-bit-producing company in the world. In many ways, they had revolutionized the industry, using tungsten-tipped drill bits. The problem is, the competition caught up with them and began to erode Zenith's market share to the point where profitability was in question. The board of directors decided to get a new CEO who could perhaps help the company recover its previously held market-leader status.

The new CEO called all the leaders and managers to a three-day crisis conference, where he asked everyone to clarify what they thought the mission of the company was. After much conversation and deliberation, they decided that their mission was not only to make drill bits but also to make the best drill bits in the world. They all agreed this was an excellent purpose for the company.

At this point, the new chief executive said, "No! Your job is not to make the best drill bits in the world; rather it is to make the best holes in the world!" They went on to innovate laser drilling and become the best hole-making company in the world."

Zenith Drilling changed the way it was thinking about the problem and it led them to a different solution than they expected; but it did lead them to a solution.

Let's say you set a resolution to lose weight and your motivation behind that is a lot of self-hate or fear. You think you are ugly or you are afraid of health risks well you might lose weight. But that is a whole lot of negative stuff going on in your head and your heart and your soul. What if you change the resolution from I want to be thin to I want to be as healthy as I can be. That makes that possibility way more probable. And it isn't a word game. If the resolution is I want to be thin you have only one outcome and you succeed or fail on that standard. If the resolution is I want to be as healthy as I can be then you are able to use multiple ways to measure that weight being one but also blood pressure, blood sugar, level of activity, amount of water you drink, amount of sleep you get.

Sometimes figuring out what the impediments are helps to make something more probable. I really want to use reusable bags all the time instead of plastic bags. I have a little bag of bags that I hang from the back door so that when I leave the house I remember to take them with me. I lowered the impediment and increased the reminder.

At this first month of the year folks often think about or make resolutions hence this sermon "Possible or Probable". But this New Year is so much bigger than resolutions - the possibility of transformation this year is so probable - especially if we help.

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Earlier I said Faith makes hope possible. I found that quote in an essay written by Jim Wallace who is an American Christian writer and political activist. He is best known as the founder and editor of Sojourners magazine and is well known for his advocacy on issues of peace and social justice. He says

“ Simply put, faith makes hope possible. And hope is the single most important ingredient for changing the world. It has continued to provide the energy and sustenance I’ve needed, not just to keep going but to be continually renewed. ... faith is not something you possess but rather something you practice. You have to put it into action or it really doesn’t mean anything. Faith changes things. It’s the energy of transformation, both for individuals and for a society.”

(Loeb, Paul Rogat. *The Impossible Will Take a Little While: Perseverance and Hope in Troubled Times* (p. 254). Basic Books. Kindle Edition.

Faith makes hope possible and hope makes the possible probable. I think what is important in Wallace’s words is that faith is not a belief it is an action. It is not something you possess but something you practice. It is the energy of transformation and that is what making the possible probable is about - transformation.

Wallace goes onto say in his essay.

It took a lot of faith for those early civil rights activists to endure the hatred and violence of the system of racial discrimination. It also required a change in the moral climate and values of the nation to end that system. People had to really believe such things could be done before they were possible. Change always begins with some people making decisions based in hope, and then staking their lives on those decisions. South African Archbishop Desmond Tutu always said that people of faith are “prisoners of hope.”

Loeb, Paul Rogat. *The Impossible Will Take a Little While: Perseverance and Hope in Troubled Times* (pp. 254-255). Basic Books. Kindle Edition.

Last year around this time we held a dixieland jazz funeral for the old year because it seemed like 2017 in some ways was a dumpster fire of a year. 2018 was also hard to get through and yet I heard new voices saying No to fascism, no to racism, no to sexism and patriarchy, no to homophobia. I heard new voices saying yes to fighting climate change, yes to creating equity in our society, yes to reforming immigration. I see change coming.

Faith hope transformation powerful powerful words. Powerful because I bet you have somewhere sometime experienced Faith or hope or transformation. These turn you around set you on a new path shake up your world. Faith is choice it is a practice. These are hard times and it is hard to hold onto hope. My faith is what I turn to at times like these. Faith is a practice. My faith is I keep trying to show up and in that showing up I show myself that I have hope that it will get better that I can be part of the solution.

I cannot tell you how to be part of the solution but I do know deep deep in my heart that you are worthy, you are loved, and you have so much to give the world.

What if you practiced your faith a little more, made hope just a little more present. How might you change your world?