

# David's Desk #188 Audio Companion

## January 2023

**James:** Hi, David.

**David:** Hi, James!

**James:** Welcome to another David's Desk Audio Companion, this one for January 2023. A New Year!

**David:** How about that!

**James:** Today we'll be talking about newness, making all things new.

**David:** Yes. So thinking about this David's Desk and what to write about, I focused in on the idea of the new year itself, and our human ability to envision beginnings and endings. I've thought this before—I look out at the natural world around me and it's the same from one day to the next, more or less. My clothes are not celebrating New Year's. And my maple tree doesn't celebrate New Year's. Certainly there is an awareness of the passing of seasons and environmental changes, but the idea of having this particular time when we say a new year is beginning is a very human thing.

And it's different in different cultures. We celebrate it in the west on January 1, but the Chinese have their new year later in the year and other folks have their new years at different times. It's not a fixed calendar date, although for all practical purposes, January 1 is the global New Year for commerce and everything else. Wherever it's celebrated, and whenever it's celebrated, it's always this sense of a new beginning and something in us that says, I can start afresh and I can start anew and that I feel is very powerful ability.

**James:** I like that . It feels like this is...if we're going to have a superpower, that would be an excellent superpower to say, this is a beginning, that was an end, I can look forward with some hope and

some other kind of things will be different. Just things will be different this year. How will they be different?

**David:** Yeah, exactly. It's a function of imagination, isn't it? We have this ability to imagine change and to imagine thresholds and to imagine the creation of something new. In the David's Desk, I said that this was the same human ability that seemed so important to me in the New Age movement; that when folks talked about the coming of a New Age, on the one hand, there was an interest in what were the practical elements of that—What would institutions look like? What would the world look like? What would culture look like and so on. But behind all that is the sense that something new is possible, that out of human imagination and creativity and our capacity to change—the past does not have to dictate the future. And as you say, that is very much a human superpower and it's a superpower that we need to be exercising even more at this time, as we face various challenges that are out there in our world.

**James:** And there's challenges that we face within ourselves as well. When we have hope for something, when we're imagining a newness arising, we also have these elements of ourselves—our habits, our patterns, our conditioning, our, as you say, inertia—having an awareness of that is really important when we're looking at bringing newness into the world through ourselves, our actions, our thoughts, our behaviors, our relationships. Because we're part of that newness—it has to come out of us, right? It comes out of us and it comes through our personalities, which have all these other requirements that you have to get through to get out into the world that shape us in some way.

**David:** I agree. And it's also true that we are part of the inertia. It's this interesting paradox that we are that which maintains the continuity through our habits, the inertia that comes out of our past; and we are that which can change that. People make New Year's resolutions, and they're always made when they're not just a joke—in this expectation that decisions can be made and a will can be invoked that will overcome habit and will bring about meaningful

change. And for many people, it does; the resolutions are in fact fulfilled. That's something to celebrate.

**James:** Yes, it is something to celebrate. And it's also something I'm seeing with people I hang out with—they're making commitments that are not just a New Year's resolution, but their commitment to things like taking planes less less often, for example, because they have a concern about the amount of fuel that's being burnt and what's happening to the atmosphere with all this—they're making changes that reflect their concern about where the planet is going, or where our politics are going, or where whatever it is...our lives are going. There seems to be more support inside the person, by their environment, to bring out the newness that's being asked for at this time.

**David:** Yes, I think this is an important point to make, that we think of New Year's as an event on the calendar—it's a particular day of the year, whenever we celebrate it. But every day can be a new day; every day, we have that capacity to start anew and to make things new. It's not like we have to say, I'm going to change all these major elements of my life all at once because it's New Year's. We can say, each day I will look at what I can change, I will look at what is the new person I wish to be this day, and build up a momentum of transformation.

A number of years ago, when our children were small and Lorian and was back in the Midwest—we were all living in Madison—we were having a New Year's celebration, and one of the one of the children didn't quite get what we were saying when we said “Happy New Year!” So she started saying “Happy New You!” and that caught on. So at New Year's we would wish each other a “Happy New You!” I think that's very much in the spirit of that idea that we we do in fact have the ability to change every day. It's not a one time a year thing.

**James:** I like that. I really do resonate with that, because I come up with a question that's very similar—who am I being or who do I want to be today? Because it's in the awareness of myself—the more aware

I am of being in the world, the more I can see the impact and the ripples I have with my thoughts or my feelings or my actions. Coming out with a “Happy New You” in the morning, that’s a nice way to take a small person-sized step about maybe I just want to smile a little bit more, or I want to say thank you a little bit more, or I want to do something at my person-scale that makes a difference, that’s like a blessing, right? A blessing for me and a blessing for the person. That this comes out in this way because of how I am in the world at this time. Because it's a choice to be that way. When we really slow everything down, I can choose a response if I'm aware of how I'm triggered. So a “Happy New You” is a nice way to bring that to mind.

**David:** Yes it is and I love your phrase—“ a “person-sized step”—I think that’s exactly right. There is another wrinkle to this, and that is that something new does not necessarily have to be something novel in the sense of never having seen it before. There are habits that we have, there are things we do as part of our routine that may be purposeful and effective and quite appropriate. To make them “new” in the sense of doing them with that kind of attention and consciousness as if we're doing them for the first time.

One of our friends years ago was the dean of the Cathedral at St. John the Divine in New York City. There were times when he would invite me to give a talk at the Cathedral (or other people we knew) and we would go and...usually in such events, there would be a service as well; that is, he would conduct a Mass, and then as part of the whole process, I would get up and give a talk. Every time that Jim conducted the Mass, it was, for me, a very powerful event because he just made it come alive. He knew how to invoke spirit. It was like he was doing it for the first time right then, even though I know he had conducted the Mass hundreds and hundreds of times> It wasn't a rote thing for him, it was a living experience. He was making it new, and he made it new for all of us who were attending.

The idea of making all things new isn't quite the same as saying I'll just create novelty all the time. It's that whatever I do—whether it's something different and there’s a change or whether it's the same, I

do with that awareness and attention and consciousness that treats it as if I were doing it for the first time and gives it that aliveness.

**James:** That aliveness is what I'm really getting a sense of, that freshness, the aliveness. Why do people like fresh-baked bread? Because there's that sense of aliveness. It's not novel, it's that it's fresh, it's there, and it feels alive, like there's an aliveness with that. That's another thing I feel that we long for in our in our time, is that sense of connectedness, of aliveness, of being present to what's happening around us. Because that's the place where we can take that person-sized step—in that moment when the aliveness is flowing, and we're really there. That is a blessing. For me that's a blessing.

Like when I'm with my grandchildren—I know you have the same experience with your grandchildren—there is an aliveness in being present to this new human being who is experiencing for the first time, and we're experiencing with them as if it was the first time—the first talk or their first smile any of the firsts they go through. I'm saying that because I'm a new grandfather as well and I'm just noticing how that aliveness comes with not just the newness, but it's seeing things as if it was the first time. Experiencing as if it was the first time. Yeah, and living that way now.

**David:** Yes, I think that's so important. You were speaking earlier of getting up in the morning and being a new you and greeting the day with this new awareness. That is in itself an amazing practice and a very powerful one; to say, I'm not coming out into this house that I've seen 100 times, I'm not meeting the same people I've met 100 times; I'm engaging with my home and with the people in it and recognizing that I've never met them before. That there is a freshness of presence that is always renewing itself. All of that I feel gets subsumed into this idea of our capacity to make things new which we've celebrate at this time of year.

**James:** I think that's a wonderful place to end our conversation—that we do have the power to make things new, and it really is our presence to what's happening around us and the people we meet

and the things we're doing, the workplace that we go to every day for the last X number of years, and our household. It really is a shift of perspective, and I feel that's what's being called for now within our world and within our lives.

**David:** I totally agree, James.

**James:** Thank you, David. This was another wonderful time together with your audio companion for your David's desk

**David:** I know. Isn't it wonderful?

**James:** It is. It's a delight. Thank you again

**David:** Thank you my friend

**James:** Okay. Bye for now