

## Sankalpa: The Beauty of devotion to the Highest Truth

### How to SanKalpa

Almost every New Year's resolution starts with two words: I will. We summon our willpower and promise to change not just what we do but who we are. We set goals and imagine how happy we will be when we get what we want.

Most New Year's resolutions come from the misguided desires of the ego, senses, and conditioning. They almost always fail because they start from the assumption that who you are is not good enough, and reinforce the belief that your happiness depends on acquiring what you want.

Yoga offers a refreshing alternative to the New Year's resolution: the practice of Sankalpa.

A Sankalpa practice starts from the assumption that you already are who you need to be to fulfill your life's dharma (purpose of life). All you need to do is focus your mind, connect to your most heartfelt desires, and channel the divine energy within.

**Kalpa** means vow, or the rule to be followed above all other rules.

**San** refers to a connection with the highest truth.

Sankalpa is a vow and commitment we make to support our highest truth. A Sankalpa honors the deeper meaning of our life.

While a typical New Year's resolution is abandoned within weeks, as enthusiasm and willpower run out, a Sankalpa requires none of the ego-driven willpower we typically summon to make changes. A Sankalpa arrives with everything needed to fully realize it.

A Sankalpa comes from the heartfelt desire, a statement that reflects your true nature. A Sankalpa is far more all-encompassing than a New Year's resolution, and requires no change or action. It is literally and simply a

statement of who you are, such as I am already whole, and already healed, or I am peace itself. It doesn't come from the intellectual mind. The resolve comes from deep within us. It then informs our mind of a particular direction that we need to take.

## How to discover your Sankalpa

Discovering your Sankalpa is a process of listening. Your heartfelt desire is already present, waiting to be seen, heard, and felt. It's not something you need to make up, and the mind doesn't have to go searching for it.

The first step in discovering your Sankalpa is to listen. The willingness to hear the message of the heartfelt desire. It can take courage to listen to the heart, and a quiet, settled mind (one cultivated through meditation, yoga and pranayama) will best be able to hear this innermost call.

The second step, is to sit with it, feel it and reflect upon the message that arises.

The final step, is the willingness to do what the heartfelt desire requires of you. It will call you into action, into the world.

Now what if you sit down to listen, and don't hear anything in response? Or what if the answers you hear (new car, new job, better relationship) sound more like the desires of your ego, than like the wisdom of your heart?

Simply start where you are. Any goal can be an entry point, including a typical New Year's resolution. Even a desire that might be interpreted as simple or shallow can lead you to the heart's desire. It might arise out of conditioning, but if you trust the practice and keep following the heart's desire, it will take you to the essence of your being.

To get to that deeper meaning, work with whatever goal arises, but also ask yourself what's underneath it. For example, I want to get fit or I want to lose

weight. Imagine how life will be, and how you think you will feel, as a result of losing weight and getting in shape. Is it a sense of self-love, physical well-being, or freedom? What is the feeling you are striving for? What is the longing in the heart that is pointing you in this direction?

Another common intention is to quit something, such as smoking, shopping, or eating meat. To investigate the heartfelt desire behind this kind of intention, ask yourself what desire that behaviour is currently trying to satisfy.

Are you seeking peace of mind, freedom from pain, or the feeling of being accepted? See if you can find a deeper hunger, a longing that's asking to be nourished. That hunger may point you toward what the heart really longs for.

If someone starts with, I want to quit smoking, as they work with it, they'll start to feel a deeper desire, such as, 'I want to take care of my body'. Even further down the road, the Sankalpa might become, I love my body, or even I am love itself. It's an evolution, but it still has that feeling of the initial intention to quit smoking.

## How to state your Sankalpa

It's natural to identify a desire as I want and an intention as I will or I won't. But these phrases lack the truth of the commitment that comes from heartfelt desire and connection to one's dharma. A Sankalpa isn't a prayer, It is a statement of deeply held fact, and a vow that is true in the present moment."

For this reason, your Sankalpa should be stated in the present tense. For example, rather than saying, I want to be more compassionate, your Sankalpa might be, Compassion is my true nature or I am compassion itself.

Rather than setting the intention, I will not eat meat, your Sankalpa might be, With compassion for my body and for other beings, I eat a vegetarian diet. Stating your Sankalpa in present tense acknowledges the tremendous will, energy, and truth that arrive with the discovery of your heartfelt desire. It also reminds you that whatever is required of you is already within you.