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BLOGPOST: Monthly motivation: Happy serenity



For the past couple of months philosopher Jörg Bernardy has taken a closer look at contemporary and philosophical issues in our ' [Monthly Motivation](#) ' blog. The final December issue explores the hopes, challenges and opportunities of the coming year and calls for inner serenity.

The magic of new beginnings

It's been an abnormal year, and even Christmas and the new year will be different. The world is going through unprecedented change, and we'd better be prepared rather than mourn a bygone past. That's why we should reinterpret the traditional Christmas story and bring it in line with our personal new beginnings.

Collective awakening in a sheltered world

In the Western world, we have long been under the impression that we are safe. We believed that our world was stable, that despite the normal irregularities our states, economies, health care systems and cultures were all secure. But since the outbreak of COVID-19, we've come to the abrupt realization that it's not just us shaping the disruption of the world, but disruption shaping us and our environment in turn. All in all, there is more change in the world than we can influence or control.

Of course, there are countless positive developments as well. In many areas, the shock of the first lockdown released a great deal of creative energy. Economically, we've seen digitization experiencing a tremendous boost. Politically, right-wing groups have been successfully tackled, and the women's quota for corporate boards has finally been enforced. And last but not least, another positive aspect of 2020 is that the topics of mental health and social proximity have gained more attention.

Even 2000 years ago, Christmas didn't go as planned

At Christmas, the Christian world celebrates a special birth that signals a decisive new beginning in the history of mankind. The Christmas story is filled with confidence and hope for a better future, but we're also humbled by it when we realize in what circumstances people lived back then. You probably know the story: after Emperor Augustus has called for a census, Joseph and the heavily pregnant Mary set out for their home town in order to comply with the state regulation. But things don't go as planned: Mary suddenly goes into labour, and because there's nowhere they can turn to, Jesus is born in a Bethlehem stable.

Personal meaning and lifestyle

In the Christmas story, Christ is the Saviour of the world. In daily life, it's advisable to give our-selves a little help instead of putting our salvation entirely in the hands of divine powers. That is, corona does not stop short at our personal life choices, and recently many of us have been rethink-ing what we find meaningful in our own lives. Old habits have gone, new ones have taken their place. Happiness and meaning turn out to be more closely related than we'd thought. This is also what Christmas is about: the meaning of life is not limited to our personal existence and its cur-rent hardships alone.

At this point we could tentatively conclude that the conditions for change have never been as favourable as they are at present. We're virtually being forced to adapt to the changing circumstances, so why not actively use the power of change to improve our

lives? In the coming year, our priorities will continue to shift and many of us will wonder: how do I want to live and work in the future? How do we want to work together as a society? How can we best manage the crises of the future? Will we be able to uphold and realize the ideal of a united Europe in the coming decades?

Facing change with composure

If there's anything we can learn from our history of the last 2500 years, it's that we should remain calm in the face of change. The Stoics already knew it: change requires composure, and compo-sure can be learned. In other words: as one of the most powerful philosophical schools in ancient Rome, Stoicism was a sort of training camp for these two skills: flexibility and composure. It's precisely these skills that we will need most in 2021. Because every change involves risks and re-quires the courage to apply yourself. As Seneca noted: there is no easy way from the earth to the stars.

While 2020 has been all about resilience, the most important personal qualities for 2021 are composure and flexibility. Unfortunately, there is no simple magic formula for change. Be sceptical of overly shiny promises of happiness and distrust the fast track to change. The corona crisis is part of a complex web of factors, and this goes for our lives and our habits just as well. Take some time for yourself and your change process. That's the best Christmas present you could give yourself and your future.

Wishing you a merry and contemplative Christmas - or to speak with the Stoics: cheerful compo-sure!

Jörg Bernardy

'The universe is change; our life is what our thoughts make it.' (Marcus Aurelius)

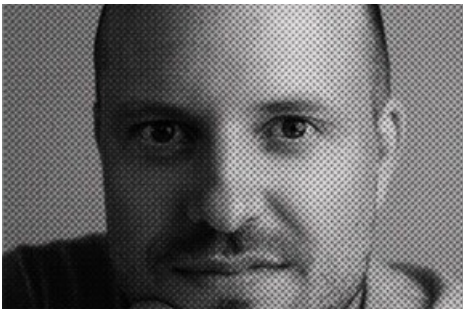
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Medieninhalte



Monthly Motivation: Happy serenity



Dr. Jörg Bernardy, author, philosopher and lecturer. Picture by Max Baier

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