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## Putting the New Year in perspective ... and proportion

by Donna Schaper

Eco Catholic

Proportion is important to an environmentalist, a writer, a living room and a person.

If the couch is too big and the coffee table too small, the room will look like a man wearing a belt too high or pants too short. If the air is unclean and the water iffy, if the greenhouse gases are reproducing like rabbits, then whether or not you stop smoking or lose weight may be less important than you think it is. On the other hand, if you don't stop smoking or lose weight, might you not be cooperating with the enemy, committing a kind of personal treason by way of cynicism or personal neglect?

Proportion is a moral matter as well as a practical and environmental one. Ruining your life saving someone else's is hardly a decent exchange. And there is great weight and gravitas in doing at least what you can do. No one forces you to smoke or carry around extra pounds. And if you are trying to announce that you just don't give a damn, or imagine that there is no stopping pollution -- moral, spiritual or actual -- then why not smoke and be a part of the obesity movement?

Proportion is important spiritually, too, as it tells you what is large and small in your life. Pulitzer Prize-winning writer Tracy Kidder wisely says that the whole trick to writing is figuring out what is small and what is large. He uses the word "distinguish," which is one of those great words, involving the wisdom of proportionality.

The turn from 2013 to 2014 can't be as big as the Times Square ball acted like it was. It might be as big as all those rituals involving black-eyed peas, but even there, you have to be careful not to overdo it. The turn of last year into this year does tend to keep happening. Or as the *Onion* put it so well more than a decade ago: "World death rate holding steady at 100 percent." Years do have a way of dying in order to make way for the new one. That clock does have a way of ticking.

Proportion is important if you are baking a cake. Substituting salt for sugar (as I did for one Christmas desert) can cause people who used to like you a lot to wonder about misplaced affections.

How, then, do you have a sweetly proportional New Year?

Since 2010, Amazon.com founder Jeff Bezos has devoted \$42 million toward creating a clock that will be different. It will think in 10,000-year segments. Whatever we did or didn't do on New Year's 2013 will surely be long forgotten in a trend, a pattern, a larger movement than even obesity.

While bemoaning the loss of meaningful rituals in this new century, the writer Joan Halifax says that one tribe she studied had rituals that lasted 70 years, over several generations. That is another way to think about the New Year, without overdoing it. The philosophy of the "seventh generation" among Native Americans comes to mind.

We can also remember the Chicago song, "Does anybody ever really know what time it is, does anybody really care?" Are you an old 16-year-old or a young 72-year-old? Those are the kind of questions that trend. One year doesn't answer them. Because you can change. You can get younger or older, no matter your age.

I love the consultation firm, Long Looking LLC, which focuses on spiritual and financial growth strategies. What a strange combination, right? But when the two are put together they bake better cakes, create more healthy environments, help us decorate our living rooms and manage our weight.

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It is great to have a Happy New Year and also to find a proper place for this year in the long picture.

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