

BUILDING THE FUTURE ON THE WISDOM OF THE PAST

Dick Wolgamott's presentation from 1/1/2006

Happy New Year. Yes, it really is January 1. Most of you probably realize that we get a good deal of our calendar structure from the ancient Romans. July-Julius Cesar, August-Augustus, and the last months are 7, 8, 9, and 10 in Latin. But how about January? It is named after the Roman God Janus. Janus had 2 faces, one in front and one in back. This enabled him to look backwards and forwards simultaneously. By seeing where he had been, he could better predict where he was going. Perhaps this is the basis for our custom of taking some time to reflect on our lives and make resolutions at New Years.

In addition to the calendar there are other reasons why people of faith find value in reflection at this time. We have just finished numerous celebrations of Divine Light on our planet-Xmas, Hanukkah, Kwanza, etc. as our children so beautifully demonstrated for us a few weeks ago. Surely this metaphor of Light calls us to consider the Divine Dimension both within us and without, to get in touch with this "best part of ourselves", to look at our value system and how we use such principles to shape our lives. In our own congregation, we recently celebrated a 25 year anniversary and now we are looking at how to build our future on that foundation.

Today, I would invite you to take advantage of this opportunity, to reflect on your life and where it is going. I am convinced that our choices go a long way towards creating our lives. Psychiatrist Roberto Assagioli stated that the power of choice and the exercise of will is our most uniquely human characteristic. I sure you all have wondered at times what your life might have been like if you had said yes or no to a particular someone, or job, or place to move. We can't undo the past, but we can learn from it and use that wisdom to create a more desirable future, a future that, to a great extent, is in our hands.

I'd like to share 4 ideas with you that come out of my past experiences, ideas which I use daily to enrich my life. My hope is that these concepts will be beneficial to you as you create your own 2006.

1. First, I am convinced that our planet is structured to encourage connections. We can observe this from a scientific perspective as we note how subatomic nucleus and electrons are attracted to each other, join up, and form atoms, molecules, and cellular structures. We can look at the forces of evolution that lead to increasingly complex life forms. We can look at ourselves and note that human beings need each other. We join together in personal relationships and community structures in order to experience a fuller life. It has been said that there are only 2 basic human emotions-love and fear. Love is oriented towards making connections and fear is oriented towards severing them.

I suppose another way of stating this idea is to say that love seems to be the basic law of how our planet works. Most of us remember from our childhood

religious education that we were taught "God is love". We didn't understand the use of metaphors then, but we did learn that things went better for us when we cared for those around us. I have long felt that one of the basic purpose for living on this planet is to learn how to love and be loved. To the extent we are able to do this, we are moving with the flow of the universe.

I'm sure you can look back on times in your life when you were able to love and connect, and times when you didn't. And you know which results you prefer. There is no judgment here-we are all learning how to do this. None of us is perfect and there are times when others make it very difficult to practice this primary attitude.

The question you might ask yourself is: " Am I basically a person that seeks to make connections with the people and things I meet or do I tend to sever connections?" Do I see encounters with others as an opportunity to share something of myself and receive something from others or am I more interested in protecting myself from possible harm? This is a simple concept, but I have found it to be a profound tool for creating a more fulfilling life.

2. I am convinced that all of us have unique talents and abilities. As my favorite teacher illustrated in one of his parables, we are made to grow, develop, and use our human potential. I often admire the public relations person for the Army who came up with the slogan "Be All That You Can Be". We want and need to be our best. Humans, it seems, were created to respond to challenge, and personal growth might well be the greatest of all challenges.

There are some dangers in this attitude. We can't be growing all the time-there is a need for balance in life. I like to think of it as climbing stairs. When I expand my potential or learn a new idea, I need some time to assimilate it, to test it out in the crucible of daily living, to refine it if need be, to get comfortable with it. This assimilating time is like the pause we make on the horizontal as we are climbing stairs. Only after we are somewhat established on a given level are we ready to take the next step in our growth.

I would also caution you about comparing your potential with others. Each of us is unique; each has a special contribution to make to the whole. Even those who are in the limelight and seem to be the most talented may not be able to develop without the contributions of those who helped shape their lives. We never know the impact of what we say and do. I think of us as a constellation of stars. Each star has a place in creating the whole-if any were absent the constellation would not be there. So who can say which star is the greatest?? It is best to focus on our own growth and development without competing with others. Let us rejoice in the success of others and encourage them, even as we would have them encourage us. May cooperation replace competition as we all "be the best we can be".

3. I almost feel embarrassed to speak to you about my third point, which is to be of service to others and the world around us. I say that because you have taught me much about this in the brief time we have been part of this fellowship. While the concept of service is certainly not new to me, I have never been part of a group that collectively practices it as much as UUFH.

I have read that those who practice altruistic service actually strengthen their physical hearts. I guess that shouldn't be surprising, since genuine acts of service are a natural expression of a loving heart. There is a strong connection between service and my first point about love being the basic law of the planet. We are not necessarily talking about profound acts worthy of a Nobel Prize. Service can be as simple as filling the Guest at Your Table box, volunteering for a charity, even yielding to someone in traffic. You know the sense of personal fulfillment that comes from reaching out to others; you know the sense of acceptance that comes when others reach out to you. I have read that even if we just observe an act of kindness being expressed, there is a hormonal change in our bodies that moves us towards greater health. Such feedback confirms that service is a key to a meaningful life.

To me, acts of service remind us of the fact that we are all one on this planet-one people, one environment-each of us is a unique expression of the One Life on the earth.

Albert Einstein put it this way: "A human being is part of a whole, called by us, the "universe", a part limited by time and space. He experiences himself, his thoughts and feelings, as something separate from the rest-a kind of optical delusion of his consciousness" Later he said:" Our greatest task may be to help people rid themselves of the illusion that we are all separate". Once we understand this unity, we realize that to be at odds with one another is as ridiculous as having your toes refuse to cooperate with your hand or your heart refusing to pump blood to your fingers. The human body is but a microcosm of the macrocosm of life. Hence the value of the injunction to "know thyself." I believe that the harmony and unity we experience within the cells of our bodies is intended to be a blueprint for how the body of humanity is intended to relate. If that is a stretch for you, then consider that there are more cells within our individual bodies than there are people on the planet. If we can do it within ourselves, then it is possible for us to live in harmony with others.

4. My final point is that I have found that life works best when I seek to be joyful. One of my favorite philosophers, Teilhard de Chardin, states that "Joy is the most infallible sign of the presence of God." I have found that being joyful is my best indicator that I am in tune with Life. I also know that it is difficult to be joyful at times-particularly when one reflects on the troubled times in which we live. Yet amidst all the turmoil, I never fail to find blessings in my life for which I am deeply grateful. It is this pausing to be grateful that brings me back to an inner joy, that helps me get my head on straight again when I have wandered off. Perhaps that

is why we need holidays of Thanksgiving, Christmas, a New Years and Ramadan-to take a moment and remember just how blest we are, and use that consciousness to do our part to build a better future-for ourselves, our children, and our world.

Today I invite you to do just that. Remember that we are continuously creating our lives by the choices we make. We have no choice about that!! The choice we do have is what kind of life we create. I have found that my life is more fulfilling when I seek to love and be loved, to grow and develop my potential, to be of service to others, and to be joyful. I offer these guidelines for your consideration as you go about the business of making the most of 2006. Again, Happy New Year!!!