

A happy new year to you! This is obviously a blessing or wish for the person to whom it is expressed. Could it imply that this year has not been all that was hoped for with the wish that the coming year will prove to be somewhat better? Actually, 1976 is not going to be very different from 1975 unless you yourself are different. If you are not now happy, successful, healthy, things are not going to get better unless you get better in your thinking. The so-called "year" is not a fixed thing anyway; it is more a state of mind, a convenient concept for dealing with the eternal unfoldment of life.

There is a certain amount of dispute as to whether the first of January is historically, astronomically, psychologically or even logically the correct point at which to start a year. Calculating the year as we do is comparatively recent. The Romans began their year in March; hence such designations as September (seventh month) and December (tenth month.) It was not until the sixteenth century that the first of January was arbitrarily named New Year's Day. March the twenty-fifth continued for another two hundred years to be considered a civil and legal holiday. Sydney Harris, one of my favorite columnists, comments that to begin the new year in the spring makes much more sense. At that time nature is awakening to another cycle of growth and blossoming and fruition. January the first, on the other hand, is merely another grim winter day.

At the end of the year, I think it is important that we accept the concept that God requires the past. There will be no betterment if we cling to the mistakes or problems or regrets of the past year. The book of Joel is relevant...he was alarmed by the trend of events in his time. There was so much destruction, contention, bitterness and strife, that his imagination conjured up a plague of super-locusts menacing all civilization. He says, "I will restore unto you the years that the locusts have eaten." This means that years are never really wasted. Many look back and fear that they have wasted so much of their lives with years consumed by futility and despair, filled with unexpressed dreams and unfulfilled ambitions. But every experience of your past, no matter how difficult or devoid of meaning, contains something of a potential blessing.

Everything is an experience, and we grow through experiences. It has been said that there never was a sun that set but left a better man somewhere. Our word restore is akin to the Hebrew "shalem" in that it means "to be completed." It means likewise "to heal or to make whole." Little experiences appear meaningless, but there is a larger vision in which they can be restored, and we can perceive things in the context of the whole. Says Browning, "In the earth the broken arc, in the heavens the perfect round." The biblical locusts refer to destructiveness of negative thinking. It is not the challenge or tragedy or loss or failure that hurts or harms, rather the thoughts about them. In other words, our regrets, our fears, our bitterness.

It is true that years are beyond recall; you can't live them over again. To restore the years, to use Joel's phrase, does not mean that you can get them back. It means to grasp the vision to see the meaning of all that has been experienced as working for good. It is being restored in that the years are brought into the context of a meaningful whole. So, the restoring of the years is a kind of waking up, where we look beyond the immediate experience and see an unfolding pattern. The fact is very much that "all things do work together for good." In life there is a bias on the side of healing and guidance and progress. Shakespeare says, "There is a divinity that shapes our ends, rough-hew them how we will."

This would seem to imply predestination. The strange thing is that though few accept predestination, the foreordination of all things by God, yet most do accept it unconsciously as a reality. "Whatever will be will be; there's

no use struggling against fate; Que sera, sera." The Bible does speak of a form of predestination when Paul says, "For whom He did foreknow, He also did predestine to be conformed to the image of His sonship." This means that the ultimate goal of life is set and fixed. Each of us is created in God's image-likeness, and it is foreordained that we will ultimately manifest in the outer that likeness; but the human destiny, the way of attainment, the path we follow in achievement of this goal, is shaped completely by our thoughts and our actions, our ideals and our aspirations, our reactions to the experiences that confront us, and it is ever, "Choose ye this day whom ye will serve."

Our concern is not with predestination, rather with predisposition. Each individual is predisposed toward that which is good and creative. Although you may suppress this tendency, it is there nevertheless. Much of the confusion that we experience comes from this very suppression. Probably, one of the great problems of man is what we can call the frustration of potentiality. By this I mean the outright repression of good. We all have within us the potentiality that is the Christ. Not knowing of this capacity for Sonship, we frustrate it, acting out a self-image of weakness. Someone once remarked that Jesus' ideals are impossible for "weak, sinful humans to attain." My response is "Why be a weak, sinful human? Why not identify with the greater person that you innately are, and thus release your frustrated potential and permit the divine urge to guide and direct?" This, as we have said, is not predestination but predisposition. It is not a directive to follow a rigidly indicated pathway; rather it is the yearning to unfold your own uniqueness and magnify the Lord in the creative development of your very own potentiality, in the flowering process of your own unfolding consciousness. You yourself will decide and determine how it will unfold.

Ask yourself if you do not yearn to have a happy and fulfilling new year. Do you not desire better things? This is prompted by the greater potential of your life that is seeking expression. In a sense, it is proof positive that you most certainly can have that better year. You can have better things if you move with that flow. Creatively involve yourself in your relationship to life. It does not mean that there is a predestined, already laid out year seeking expression. It means rather that there is a predisposition within you to accept the flow of experiences on a high level of consciousness, thus moving along toward the fulfillment of your potentiality. This has nothing to do with what the year will historically be. But, it has everything to do with how the historical events spur you to a greater degree of your own self-mastery. The happy new year that we all wish for, and that we wish for one another, and hope will manifest for the world, may well depend upon the degree to which we can follow the guidance of Paul, "Awake thou that sleepest that Christ may shine upon you."

Upon learning of our divine Sonship, we need only to arise like the Prodigal Son and accept our own unlimited potential. One should really give serious thought to what is involved in this. To achieve what you hope for and pray for, the need is not to change anything but rather to change the way in which you have been seeing things. Examine the way in which you have been accepting yourself. Suddenly realize that you are what you want to be. You are a successful, harmonious, happy whole creature.

Move forward into the new year with confidence, with faith, and seek to live the life you have imagined. Or, release the potential within you, and you will find an entirely new experience. You will have a different consciousness, the "licence of a higher order of being," as Thoreau describes it. Thus, 1976 will be the very best year of your life, for you will make the very most of all experiences that come in terms of releasing your own potentiality.