

Imagine a New World in the New Year

Joyce Ramay - Sermon – 2022 1-2

It's a new day. It's a new year. Let's make a new World

It's that time again – a time for reflection on our past lives, contemplation on where we are now, and hopefully, some conscientious thoughts about our future.

We all know familiar New Year's Resolutions – lose some weight, eat better food, get more exercise, read some good books – most of which are all about ourselves and some illusions about becoming more perfect.

I have never wanted to be perfect – because when you are perfect, you are finished, complete – nothing left to do.

The future is about continuing to grow, to develop, to evolve, and to discover a meaningful purpose for living – a purpose beyond our own selves.

Our Prelude today, *Over the Rainbow*, was from the *Wizard of Oz* – a movie that came out in the year that I was born, 1939.

In that story, Dorothy's three friends seek what they need:

The straw man asks for a brain, the tin man asks for a heart, and the cowardly lion asks for courage.

The message is that we need all three – we need to think, to feel, and to have courage to act ... in order to achieve a meaningful life.

I have often gone back to reading Viktor Frankl's book, *Man's Search for Meaning*.

He spent years in Nazi concentration camps, and realized that, even under the very worst circumstances, we can find meaning through being responsible, and that we always have the freedom to choose our attitude.

Oprah Winfrey once said, *The greatest discovery of all time is that a person can change his future by merely changing his attitude.*

Viktor Frankl repeatedly emphasized that keeping a sense of **Responsibility** is the most important attitude to have.

Other psychologists thought that human motivation comes from **pursuit of pleasure**, or **pursuit of power**, or **pursuit of self-actualization** – all stressing the needs of the individual.

But Frankl believed that beyond those is a more basic source of motivation – **the pursuit of purpose**, which can sustain you even when you are deprived of any possibility for pleasure, power or self-actualization. We need to stop blaming others and our circumstances for our moral failures.

Here in America, we have a long tradition of emphasizing the individual's **rights**, but far too often we fail to inculcate a real sense of responsibility to ourselves, to our families and friends, to our community, and to nature itself.

If we are to create a new world, we need to find a balance, through **a restoration of responsibility**, alongside our rights.

While we choose to live for something beyond ourselves, **individuality still matters**.

Each person has a unique personality, with specific talents and potentialities.

By looking into ourselves, and then looking out at our surroundings, we can **choose** what **our particular role** will be in bringing about valuable changes in our world.

I appreciate the words of Judy Garland who said, **“Be a first rate version of yourself, not a second rate version of someone else.”**

Only by being the best **you** that you can be will you attain the essential authenticity that characterizes all those who make positive contributions to our lives.

At our congregation, we have many people who live out their **faith through action** for the benefit of others. We are blessed to have employees who not only do their jobs, but also demonstrate the true essence of loving service to others.

We have a lot of members helping at All Faiths and leading social justice activities. There are many options available for you to join.

We became a UUA Green Sanctuary by implementing many steps to make our activities, and our facilities more sustainable.

Our Building and Grounds team would welcome some additional helpers to keep our All Faiths home beautiful.

All through the pandemic, our Climate Action team remains busy with education and projects to save life on our planet.

We collect food and supplies for Pet Shelters.

Our Heart for Homeless team acts to help those who have no homes.

Our Racial Equity people participated in seeking justice with Black Lives Matter.

We have become a UUA Welcoming congregation, working to enhance rights for the LGBTQ community. We were the first church to perform gay marriages when they became legal in Florida.

For many years we were supportive of the McGregor Clinic, serving those suffering from AIDS.

We are honored to support the work of Mano a Mano for uplift of poor people in the highlands of Bolivia.

We were on the streets promoting peace, not war, at the time of the start-up of the war in Iraq.

Our people are involved with Lee Interfaith for Empowerment along with 15 other congregations, addressing many local social justice issues - prevention of bullying in schools, restoration of ex-felons voting rights, affordable housing, civil citations for non-violent offenses, and improving services for mental health.

These are some of the ways in which our people continue to demonstrate that we are leading meaningful lives, even during these most difficult two years of Covid 19.

While engaging in justice work, and in all of our daily interactions, we need to establish genuine **relationships** with others.

Today you heard the reading about seeing with new eyes.

One of my favorite authors, John Steinbeck, said, ***I wonder how many people I've looked at all my life and never seen.***

How true is that!

If we want a new world, we have to actually look people in the eye, and see them as a person.

Martin Buber wrote the famous book, ***I and Thou.***

When Haneef Ramay and I were dating, he asked me to read Buber's book.

I later said that perhaps I had to pass the Buber test before we could get married.

I frequently find other authors referring to Buber's two types of relationships – **I-It and I-Thou.**

Too often, we interact with others on an **I-It** basis – the other is merely an **object** for our use or service.

When you have an **I-Thou** relationship, both of you are **subjects** in a mutually meaningful relationship.

Both persons have inherent worth and dignity and are deserving of respect and even reverence.

This applies not only to people, but also to trees, to birds, to the sun and stars.

At the end of service today, you will hear the song ***Feeling Good*** – in which the singer is connected with all the things in the universe to such an extent that **they** know how **she** is feeling.

Imagine living like that and feeling that way!

Then you will truly be alive in a new world of connections, of beneficial relationships.

In our songs today, you will also hear about **dreams** and being a dreamer.

I am particularly fond of Albert Einstein, who is one of the greatest scientists who ever lived.

At the top of your order of service you will see his words –

Imagination is more important than knowledge. .. Imagination is everything. It is the preview of life's coming attractions.

Imagine that – Einstein is talking about the right brain's imagination, intuition, invention, and creativity.

He said that he wanted to understand “the mind of God” in order to do his scientific work.

That attitude required going beyond the left brain's logic, literal language, and mathematics.

His understanding of a New World came from Imagination!!!

Great scientists start with a deep sense of wonder and awe, and a powerful motivation to connect with the underlying reality of their **subjects**.

In our songs today, you will also hear about **birds flying high** or over the rainbow.

I have had a strong connection with birds all of my life – I wanted to fly, and often do so in my dreams.

I did get my pilot's license and flew to many parts of America in a small plane.

What I realized is that birds possess something beyond what land-based creatures have – and that is a **profound sense of trust!**

Imagine how much trust it takes for a young bird to stand at the edge of that nest, high up in a tree, and to leap into the thin air, trusting that it will somehow hold her up!

In my world, that is the kind of trust that we have in our universe – that it is designed to foster life and growth and evolution.

For those of you who are overly concerned with security, try to remember - we are not meant to live in a static world.

We can welcome and embrace the adventure that change continuously brings to us, and then move ahead in ever more creative ways.

Helen Keller, who was born blind and deaf, said, ***The only thing worse than being born blind, is to have sight but no vision.***

So, if we want to have a New Day, a New Year, a New World, we need to see in a New Way. We need a vision.

With a broadening vision, we can discover the many possibilities for our own personal mission.

We cannot change everything, but we can improve something.

We can find a way to bring more peace, compassion and justice into the lives of others.

We can go beyond our own small egos, and self-centered needs, and focus our attention and efforts on the greater sphere of existence beyond ourselves.

My late husband, Haneef Ramay, was a politician, artist, writer, and philosopher.

But more than that, he was a kind of Sufi.

He looked at things in a very inclusive way.

He recognized that, particularly in the western world, we have placed too much emphasis on **Analysis** – which divides things up, and studies them in isolation and separation from other things.

But that is a limited and incomplete way of viewing life and the world.

We need to utilize **Synthesis** – putting things back together again, because nothing exists in and by itself.

All things are interconnected and interdependent for their existence on everything in their environment, on this Earth, and in the Universe itself.

All life is truly about **Relationships** – **Synthesis** – **Union of the many into the One**.

And the unifying force throughout the Universe is **Love**.

It's like that sign on McGregor, **God is Love**.

When you see with new eyes, you begin to have that kind of vision.

You not only include all of creation in your identity, but you feel that the Universe itself includes and energizes you.

It lifts you up and supports you, like the air supports the birds flying high over the rainbow.

You don't have to wait any longer to have that vision of Synthesis, Unity and Love. Start today!

New Year's Day has special meaning for me. My husband, Haneef, died on January 1, 2006.

That day, when I returned from the hospital to our home, I went up to my room and sat down, reflecting upon the wonderful life that we shared together.

That is when I wrote the words at the end of my emails:

To live is to love, to love is to live. Live and Love completely.

I was so grateful that we had done so.

And today is the birthday of my Auntie Muggs, who was my most favorite person in the world.

She is the only person I ever knew who loved everyone in a special I-Thou manner.

She was the living personification of what Buber described.

So today, I invite you to **open your minds, open your hearts and find your courage, to** let the new identity with the universe flow into you. And that will change everything.

Your life will become more meaningful.

You will see things in a new way, with a new worldview.

You will feel a sense of the sacred in your relationships.

You will have a confidence that, no matter what happens, you have the courage and freedom to choose what your attitude will be.

You will know and express a deep sense of responsibility towards all living creatures.

You will be a strong advocate for peace, compassion, justice and love.

You will lead your life as a Brave Co-creator of a New World in the New Year.

May it be so!

Happy New Year. Happy Life. Love to All!