



## *You hold the future . . .*

. . . in the palms of your hands. I'm not referring to palmistry here! And, certainly, there are things that are definitely out of our control. But what I am talking about is our ability to shape our futures.

This can sound pretty "well, duh!" I suppose. 'Of course," you say, "we make choices about what we'll do! That shapes the future!" Yes. But on what basis do we make those choices? What are the underlying assumptions. How many times, for example, have we "taken the path of least resistance" -- that is, made a choice based on the lowest pain level, or the least inconvenience? How many times have we let time make a choice for us? Or, how many times do we make decisions based

on past hurts or resentments -- in short letting the past dictate the future? I think we all can answer "quite often" to those questions.

But what if we started basing our decisions on the future? "What would be most life-giving for me in this situation?" or "What would be most life-giving for my loved-ones/organization/group in this decision?" The first, individual, question is easier to answer of course . . . or is it? Do we know ourselves well enough to know what gives us life? For the second question, we'd have to "poll the group" to understand what is most life-giving for the collective. Sure, it's work. And it may MEAN work for us. But the alternative is living wondering "what if . . . ?" Or being stressed when the decision doesn't match who we really are.

We love the past; I'm a historian, for goodness sake! And the old saw is that "those who do not understand the past are condemned to repeat it." I'm not dismissing any of that. But that kind of looking back doesn't give us any help as we look to a hope-filled future. Knowing the errors of the past may help us avoid them in the future, but let's have a vision for the future that brings life, and use the lessons of the past as part of our tool box to achieve that future. Holding on to past resentments doesn't help us move into a fully-living future. Answering the "life-giving" question is a justice-related issue. It is a happiness-related issue.

Our religious traditions call us into the future. Whether it's a purely linear future (as in most western traditions) or an upwardly spiraling, or cyclical future (as in several eastern traditions), the call is not to travel back in time, or even stake a tent in the present. Hope is at the foundation of most traditions -- eastern or western. Hope as "firm expectation", not "wishful thinking." The "hope" is for life in the future, however you define it.

The next time you're faced with a decision, try it! Just ask "what will be most life-giving for me?" And see if it feels right. And, if so, look what your future holds.

Blessings,

Gary