

**The Power of Tomorrow**  
**The Importance of Considering the Legacy We'll Leave Behind**  
**By**  
**Rev. Dr. Todd F. Eklof**  
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I first began planning this morning's sermon in November, when members of our Endowment Team suggested we have a Legacy Sunday emphasizing the endowment fund's importance to our church. I gladly agreed, because one of our priorities is having a sustainable budget, and a healthy endowment fund can help make that happen. An endowment is an investment fund, the profits from which an organization can use if it wants. Its principle is always left alone, except in the most extreme circumstances, though a percentage of its appreciation can be used for special projects or general operating expenses. About three years ago we decided to let the fund grow to 500-thousand, which is a few thousand more than our current annual budget. This way we'll have about a year's operating expenses set aside, and the annual returns on half a million, 15-thousand or more, will make a significant and sustainable contribution toward our annual expenses.

Half-a-million-bucks might see like a lofty goal, especially considering the fund was under 190-thousand just six-and-a-half years ago when I came to Spokane. But thanks to continuing contributions and gifts from our members, and to the wise investment strategies of our Endowment Team, when I was approached about Legacy Sunday just two months ago, it had already grown to over 400-thousand dollars. So, we felt pretty confident that by generating a little more awareness about it, we could reach our goal within the next year or so. This morning, I'm eager to let you know that between November and now, thanks to some very generous gifts, our Endowment Fund is over 535-thousand-dollars. This means we'll begin benefiting from this continuing source of income starting in July.

I also want to acknowledge the generosity of Dolores Beebe, who was a perfect stranger to our congregation. Dolores was a Unitarian Universalist who quietly admired our church from afar, from her home in Ridgewood, New Jersey. When she passed away on February 9<sup>th</sup>, 2014, at age 92, she left us a significant portion of her estate, about 80-thousand dollars. Her enormous bequest is what brought our Endowment close to the 400-thousand-dollar milestone, and the interest and returns that amount generates has been a significant part of getting us to where we are today. Dolores left no family behind for us to thank, so we can only offer the feelings of gratitude we hold for the kindness of this stranger, who believed enough in what we're doing that one of her final acts was to help make sure our church continues to thrive well into the future. And that's what her gift and those given by many others over the years, are about, for, as Non-Profits expert, Scott C. Stevenson says, "*an endowment fund... should act as an insurance policy for the future.*"<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.thebalance.com/how-to-start-an-endowment-for-your-nonprofit-2502103>

And this is really what I want to talk about today, the future, or, more specifically, the role the future has today. This may seem an odd juxtaposition, but I promise not to get so convoluted that I end up proving I'm my own grandma. I've thought seriously about the role of the future in our lives ever since I read Eckhart Tolle's book, *The Power of Now* in 1999, the same year I entered the Unitarian Universalist ministry. I'm not sure the book is the "Guide to Spiritual Enlightenment," its subtitle promises it to be, but the simple, yet profound, truth of the book seems almost indisputable, that *nothing exists outside the Now*. "Nothing ever happened in the past; it happened in the Now," Tolle says, "Nothing will ever happen in the future; it will happen in the Now."<sup>2</sup>

For the most part, practically speaking, I think this is so, and it's a principle that helps me appreciate where I'm at and what I have, instead of fretting over what I want, or on the things I regret. There doesn't seem to be a rewind or forward button on the remote control of life. If now is the only moment there is, I don't want to miss it or waste it because I'm stuck in the past or anxious about the future. Even so, upon reading *The Power of Now*, as a philosopher I had to consider the truth value of its basic assertion, which Tolle calls, "obvious," that it's not "possible for anything to happen or *be* outside the Now."<sup>3</sup> If this is so, then Tolle's assertion would mean the discovery, at long last, of an absolute Truth.

Yet, as Bertrand Russell once said, "In philosophy, what is important is not so much the answers that are given, but rather the questions that are asked."<sup>4</sup> Or, as my own philosophy professor, Wallace Roark taught his students, we must always consider what's on the other hand. This is especially true of claims considered certain or self-evident, since, as Russell continued, "no definite answers can, as a rule, be known to be true."<sup>5</sup> Thus, as "obvious" as what Tolle says about Now may seem, I had to ask if Now really is the only moment that exists, if nothing exists beyond this moment, if the past is gone and the future is yet come, if neither has ever existed as anything more than Now, and if it's possible that right now someone or something exists in a different time, in the past, or in the future?

In 2001, just a couple of years after *The Power of Now*, I read Richard Gott's newly published book, *Time Travel in Einstein's Universe*, which I purchased right after hearing the Princeton physicist give a lecture about it at a bookstore in Louisville, Kentucky. Unfortunately, his physics are mostly over my head, but I understand them enough to make a reasonable argument that Now may not be the only moment that exists, that different timelines may overlap and influence each other, the way film editors overlay two filmstrips to make their images slowly dissolve from one to the other, both appearing to momentarily exist at once.

Someone once told me if we could see our entire lives all at once, that we'd look like snakes, starting off small at our tails, gradually getting thicker, leveling off for some length, then slowly shrinking again before our noses become blunt at the end of life. But, our limited senses perceive only a narrow spectrum of reality, one frame of our existence—a frame

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<sup>2</sup> Tolle, Eckhart, *The Power of Now*, New World Library, Navato, CA, 1999, p. 41.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid.

<sup>4</sup> Russell, Bertrand, *Wisdom of the West*, Crescent Books Inc., Rathbone Books Limited, London, 1960, p. 19.

<sup>5</sup> Russell, Bertrand, *The Problem of Philosophy*, (Oxford University Press, New York, NY, 1912, 1959) p. 161.

called *Now*—even though there is a lot more to it. This is why Einstein included the dimension of time in his theory of Special Relativity, because, as Gott summarizes, “time is measured differently by stationary or moving observers.”<sup>6</sup> In other words, time, including this moment in time, *Now*, is not an absolute, but, like everything else, is relative.

Gott gives another example of this, similar to the image of our time-bodies resembling snakes. In physics, seeing the entire path of our bodies this way is called our “world line.” Everything that exists has a worldline, including our own world, the Earth. In general, to get somewhere on our planet, we only need to think two-dimensionally, meaning we only need two coordinates, longitude and latitude. But if we’re going to an appointment at a downtown high-rise, we also need a third dimension, height. We need to know which floor it’s on. These three dimensions, longitude, latitude, and height, are spatial dimensions. Since it’s an appointment, however, we also need to consider a non-spatial fourth dimension. We need to know the time of the appointment.

To better explain four-dimensional word lines, Gott asks us to imagine “a movie of our solar system, showing how Earth orbits the Sun.”<sup>7</sup> Looking at it on a screen, one frame at a time, the Sun remains stationary, as a small blue dot slowly moves around it. But cut the film into individual frames, stack them atop each other, and, as Gott says, “Earth becomes a blue helix winding around the yellow rod at the center... This helix is the Earth’s *word line*, its path through space-time. If we were to think four-dimensionally, we would see that Earth is not just a sphere—it is really a helix, a long piece of spaghetti spiraling around the Sun’s world line through time.”<sup>8</sup> In this way, our perception of Time suggests a limitation of our senses.

This is just one of many examples physicists consider when thinking about the relative nature of time, but it’s enough to suggest the assertion that *Now* is all there is, may not be as obvious as it seems. It may be that even now, in this moment, the past, present, and future coexist and comingle. But we don’t really need to study physics to understand this. Tolle begins *The Power of Now* by saying that early in life he experienced overwhelming anxiety and depression. He was freed from this once he learned to be more present, to concentrate on the here and now, not lamenting the past, or worrying about the future. Considering the ongoing impact severe trauma can have in our lives, causing us to respond to the present as if it were the past, and to treat every new person and situation as if they were part of our past; or to feel, as with PTSD, that we are in constant danger because of the past, in addition to anxiety issues and disorders that cause many to worry too much about the future and all of its uncertainties, then learning to focus on the present moment, on the *Now*, seems like a pretty good strategy most of the time.

This is the reason many religions emphasize the importance of being present and of being aware of what’s happening now, rather than, as Jesus said, “worrying about tomorrow.” The beloved Vietnamese Buddhist monk, Thich Nhat Hanh says, “Life exists only in the present

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<sup>6</sup> Gott, Richard J., *Time Travel in Einstein’s Universe*, Houghton Mifflin Company, New York, NY, 2001, p. 8.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 10.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*

moment. To lose the present is to lose life.”<sup>9</sup> Being haunted by the past or paralyzed by the uncertainty of the future is no way to live. Being attentive to the moment, to what’s really going on, not to what’s already happened, or to what may never happen, seems a more meaningful way to live.

But on the other hand, as an old Taoist saying goes, “If one dwells on the past then one robs the present, but if one ignores the past one may rob the future. The seeds of our destiny are nurtured by the roots of the past.” This simple saying is packed with insight. Firstly, it partly agrees with *The Power of Now*, that if we are stuck in the past, a mindset psychology calls *fixated*, then we diminish the present, the Now, by missing what’s really happening around us; by relating to others as surrogates for those from our pasts, rather than as who they really are; and by remaining immature individuals who may never achieve our full potential.

Even so, being stuck in the past is one thing, but ignoring it is another. For the past and future are intricately connected, Taoism tells us, because the future is rooted in the past, built upon what has come before, the evolution and advance of life, the wisdom of our ancestors, learning from our mistakes, and pursuing our dreams. And Now, the present, is the time we must honestly consider the past if we don’t want to repeat our errors and injustices of the real past—not the chimera we call the past, the delusion of good old days that never were. Isn’t this a problem in our own nation, the delusion of the good old days, the lies about discovering a new country, of taming the uninhabited wilderness, of making a loving, upper middle-class home for little Beaver Clever and his big brother Wally, of a “Father Knows Best Society,” of Happy Days and Mayberry, and sacrificing the heroic lives of our brave sons and daughters who fought for our freedom so that our Great-God-Blessed-America can continue fulfilling its manifest destiny by spreading Democracy to the world?

By denying our past, that it is built on genocide, and slavery, and inequality, greed, violence, war, and occupation, we can never get past these nightmares to build the just and peaceful future we dream of. Likewise, if it weren’t for those who came before us, the primordial chemical stews, the single-celled ones, the blobs of algae, the water beings, the crossovers, the creepy crawlies, the four-leggeds, the knuckle draggers, and the stone people, none of us would be here today, and, were it not for us, there could be no tomorrow—or, at the very least, tomorrow will be what we make of it, for better or for worse.

Just as today is the result of too many who, but a year ago, didn’t fully consider the consequences of making an authoritarian racist and misogynist, leader of the free world, not considering the impact today’s decisions will have on future generations, upon our children, and grandchildren, and greatgrandchildren, on our neighbors around the world, and upon the planet itself, may have dire consequences sooner than any of us can imagine. Of course we must think about the future. The future is a part of the present moment because, like an expectant mother, this moment, the Now, is pregnant with possibilities. Thus, some of the most potent and motivating words in human language are future oriented words, like *mission*, *vision*, *hope*, and *dreams*.

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<sup>9</sup> Thich Nhat Hanh, *Our Appointment with Life*, Parallax Press, Berkeley, CA, 1990, p. 30.

Though he wasn't here to see him, Barack Obama was Martin Luther King's dream. And had not King struggled to make his dream come true, had he not dwelt on the future, this generation would not have seen our nation's first black President. As the JAY-Z song, "My President is Black," puts it, "Rosa Parks sat so Martin Luther could walk. Martin Luther walked so Barack Obama could run. Barack Obama ran so all the children could fly." Unfortunately, we still have some dreaming to do before all the children can fly, the black ones, the brown ones, the poor ones, the gay ones, the girl ones, and more. And that's why Now, this moment, our moment, must be impregnated with this possibility, with this hope, this vision of a better tomorrow for our children and all the children of the future, because these are the things that move us right now to start building that better future.

And that's what a legacy is, not something we leave behind, but something we leave forward. Our legacy is all we do to make our hopes and dreams for our children and our world come true, even after we're gone, even if, as King said, we only see the Promised Land from a distance, but never enter it ourselves. In our church, there are many ancestors no longer with us who contributed to our endowment fund, that is, to its future, but there are many others still with us who are part of our Legacy Society, those who have also contributed to the fund and helped us reach a milestone that will now help sustain our community long into the future, making sure it exists for people nobody here today will ever know—that's our dream, our vision, our mission, the legacy we give to the future.

And that's the best theory I have in response to my question about how tomorrow impacts today. Like one groping in the darkness, tapping what's before of us with a cane, we can't see all that lies ahead, and so the future doesn't always seem real, and sometimes it's scary to move forward in the dark. Yet, even in our limitations, unable to observe the fourth-dimension of time in its wholeness, we can imagine what's there, what might be there, what we hope is there, and our legacy, what we leave forward, amounts to all we do and give right now to make our dreams come true for the children of tomorrow.