



Introduction

What does it mean to be a people of possibility?

Of all our topics this year, possibility is arguably most central to our faith. It has distinguished Unitarian Universalists from the start. Historically, when others saw depravity and sin at the core of human identity, we saw potential--sometimes with hardly any boundaries. When many were preaching that this world was fallen, and we should look instead to the hope of an afterlife, we found ourselves falling in love with the possibility of heaven on earth. Theologically, you might say that we were the people that believed that God hadn't given up on any of us and so we shouldn't give up on each other or this world. Psychologically, it's led to us being a people of "why not?" Why not give people another chance? Why not fight what seems a losing battle? Why not risk a little failure? After all, to us the possible has always seemed more likely than not!

So that's our religion. But what about us personally? How open have you been recently to "Why not?" How's your faith in possibility doing? As we honor our religion's trust in what's possible, we need to allow space for the reality that trusting possibility isn't so easy for many of us. Here's how one Soul Matters member puts the challenge:

"When I think of possibility, I think of all the people and opportunities we close the door on. Such as: 'I will never see eye to eye with my sister.' 'I couldn't possibly leave this job to start my own business.' 'I will never have close friends like I had where I used to live.' 'I will never really make a difference, so why bother?' 'UU's will always be a small faith.'"

We tell ourselves so many small things about who we and others are. And we know that's not really because we're pessimistic. More often than not, it's about protecting ourselves. There's comfort in convincing yourself that the work is hopeless; that way you don't have to try and risk failure, hurt or disappointment yet again.

All of which is to say that maybe being a people of possibility has more to do with being a people of vulnerability and courage than we've thought. The work isn't just about *believing* in possibility. It's about being willing to endure a few wounds along the way. It can hurt to be hopeful. Especially with all that is going on in our world and society right now, we need to make room for that.

So maybe the question this month isn't "Are you ready to lean into possibility?" but "Who's beside you and who are you bringing along?" "Who have you gathered to patch and pick you up when the path gets bumpy?" After all, no one makes it down the road of possibility alone.

And perhaps that's the real secret: remembering that "Why not?" is something we all have to say together.

Spiritual Exercise

The Possibilities in a Word: An Alternative New Year's Practice

Catholics talk of a time in the third and fourth centuries when people would go to the desert and seek out monk-like hermits for guidance and wisdom. This tradition is referred to as "seeking a word." These wise "desert mothers and fathers" would offer people a word or a phrase to ponder for weeks, years and even a lifetime.

The idea behind this practice was that a simple word - when reflected upon with discipline - has the power to create possibilities in us and in the world. These words weren't instructions as much as

invitations to open oneself in new ways. As one writer puts it, they are about deepening and unfolding, rather than fixing and improving.

So this New Year's lets lean into that work of unfolding, rather than fixing. Forget about making a list of resolutions to improve yourself. Instead try out this ancient practice of picking a word that will help keep you open to new possibilities throughout the year.

There are tons of words to choose from. Online you can find many examples of potent words that people have selected: embrace, listen, home, wholeheartedness, patience, presence, blossom, soar, overcome, treasure, nourish, expect, release, finish, delight, follow, lead. It's not hard to imagine how holding any one of these in front of you on a daily basis can open possibilities and expand the way you walk in the world.

But how do you find yours? Well, it's more of a matter of it finding you. For many, it will be easy. It may simply come up immediately. If not, take some time to make a list and then read it over until one pops out to you in neon lights. It often helps to ask yourself questions like: What do I need? What do I want? What do I need to focus on? What is in the way?

You will also want to find a way to hold on to your word. Some people put their word on their computer's screen saver or cellphone's home screen. Others have drawn their word on rock or made/bought jewelry with the word on it. Creative folks and families have done vision boards or paintings that hung on a wall in their house all year. ... Whatever your method of choice, this holding on part is key to making the exercise work.

So come to your group ready to share not only the word you chose (or that chose you) and why, but also the method you've selected to hold on to it. And maybe even give some thought to how you as a group can help each other hold on to it. Enjoy the possibilities that this alternative new year's practice unfolds for you!

Chalice Lighting

There are hundreds of ways to kneel and kiss the ground. *Jelaluddin Rumi*

Check-in: *Share briefly what's been on your mind lately or your highs and lows since we last met. We give each other the gift of listening without asking questions or offering advice to allow people the safety to share what's in their hearts.*

Quotes and Readings for Inspiration

To be hopeful in bad times is not just foolishly romantic. It is based on the fact that human history is a history not only of cruelty, but also of compassion, sacrifice, courage, kindness. What we choose to emphasize in this complex history will determine our lives. If we see only the worst, it destroys our capacity to do something. If we remember those times and places—and there are so many—where people have behaved magnificently, this gives us the energy to act, and at least the possibility of sending this spinning top of a world in a different direction. And if we do act, in however small a way, we don't have to wait for some grand utopian future. The future is an infinite succession of presents, and to live now as we think human beings should live, in defiance of all that is bad around us, is itself a marvelous victory. *Howard Zinn*

When we are no longer able to change a situation, we are challenged to change ourselves. *Viktor Frankl*

Questions

Pick the one question that speaks to you most and let it lead you where you need to go. The goal is to figure out what possibility means for you and your daily living.

1. What are others learning about living and leaning into possibility by watching you?
2. What “possible new you” did you pledge yourself to last new year’s? Is it time to pledge yourself to it again? Or is time to finally let it go?
3. Is it possible that the thing you want is not the thing you need?
4. Are you sure you’re too old to do it? Are you sure it’s too late to try it?

Sitting in Silence *Take a few moments to sit quietly and reflect upon your thoughts.*

Sharing/Deep Listening *Respond with your thoughts and experiences with the topic. We create a safe space by listening deeply and not responding. When sharing, connect with what is true for you. When listening, give the speaker your full attention rather than thinking about what you will share.*

Reflection *This is a time to respond briefly to something another person said or to relate additional thoughts that may have occurred as others shared.*

Singing - High Hopes (excerpts)

Next time you're found, with your chin on the ground
 There a lot to be learned, so look around
 Just what makes that little old ant
 Think he'll move that rubber tree plant
 Anyone knows an ant, can't
 Move a rubber tree plant

But he's got high hopes, he's got high hopes
 He's got high apple pie, in the sky hopes
 So any time you're gettin' low
 'Stead of lettin' go
 Just remember that ant
 Oops, there goes another rubber tree plant
 Oops, there goes another problem kerplop
 Oops, there goes another problem kerplop
 Oops, there goes another problem kerplop, kerlpop

<https://www.google.com/search?q=ant+rubber+tree+plant&oq=ant+rubber+&aqs=chrome.0.0j69i57j0l4.2671j1j7&sourceid=chrome&ie=UTF-8>

Extinguishing the Chalice

Listen to the MUSTN'TS, child,
 Listen to the DON'TS...
 The IMPOSSIBLES, the WONT'S...
 Then listen close to me-
 Anything can happen, child,
 ANYTHING can be
Shel Silverstein



Packets are for use only by member congregations of the Soul Matters Sharing Circle.
 Learn how to join at <http://www.soulmatterssharingcircle.com>