



Soul Matters

Embracing Possibility



Small Group

September 2021

Embracing Possibility

Of all our themes this year, Embracing 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. When many were preaching that this world was fallen, we fell in love with the possibility of heaven on earth. Theologically, you might say we were the people who believed that God hadn't given up on 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?

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 faith 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?'"

We tell ourselves so many small stories about who we and others are. So many tiny tales of what the world could be. Part of it has to do with real life defeats. But often a bigger part of it is about imagined fear and protecting ourselves. There's comfort in convincing yourself that the effort 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 Embracing 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.

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?" Whose faith can you lean on when yours grows dim? 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 and sing together. It's not a solo act. For it to sink in - and better yet take flight - it needs to be at least a duet. Of course a quartet is even better. And just imagine what we might pull off if we can gather a choir, all singing the tune of "Why not?!" at the top of our lungs!

Our Spiritual Exercises

Option A

Which Quote is You...right now?

Sometimes we read a quote and it perfectly captures what's going on for us right now. It puts into words what we've felt but been struggling to articulate. Suddenly everything falls into place.

With this in mind, spend some time this month reading through the quotes in the Companion Pieces section below to ***find the one that best articulates your dance with Embracing Possibility right now.***

Then do some further reflection: Was it easy to pick out one? Hard? Consider spending some time sharing the top 2-3 quotes you are considering with a partner or friend and asking them which quote they think fits you best. And if you are really adventurous, get creative and turn that quote into a drawing or doodle. And then decide where you might hang that illustrated quote so it stays alive and in your awareness throughout the month.

Option B

What Made Surviving the Pandemic Possible?

The pandemic changed us. It also changed the way we related to the things around us. Put simply, many ordinary objects we took for granted suddenly became precious. They became essential for helping us get through it.

Artist/ethnographer Paula Zuccotti created a fascinating experiment to honor this. Via social media, she invited people to photograph 15 items that they relied on during the pandemic. Explore that project and check out some of the responses here: <https://lockdownessentials.org/About-the-project> and <https://www.itsnicethat.com/news/paula-zuccotti-future-archaeology-of-a-global-lockdown-photography-280421>

And so...your assignment: Find and take a picture of at least a handful of the ordinary objects you relied on during the pandemic.

Option C

The Word(s) that Unlocked Your Potential & Possibility

Spend the month identifying the word or sentence that made possibility emerge for you.

Maybe it was something a teacher said to you. Or a hard truth told to you with tough love by a friend. Maybe it was something you read in a book or heard in a movie. For some it will be the thing your parent said to you over and over. For a few it will be something that came to you in a dream, or out of a fortune cookie. Often it will be something that woke you up or gave you courage to defy some societal or familial expectation that was keeping you small. For many of us, it was something someone said that began with, "I see in you..."

Don't keep this exercise in your own head. Ask others what word or sentence changed their life, opened them to new possibilities. Hearing their special words will undoubtedly shake loose your own.

Option D

The Possibility of Putting it Down

In his possibility drenched poem, [Things to Think](#), Robert Bly writes,

When someone knocks on the door, think that they're about
To give you something large: tell you you're forgiven,
Or that it's not necessary to work all the time, or that it's
Been decided that if you lie down no one will die.

It's a reminder that it's possible for us to let go of many of the things that drain our spirit. It's also a reminder that putting things down opens up space for the possible.

So what's draining your spirit? Working all the time? A friendship that's gone well beyond its shelf life? Picking up after everyone else in the house? Daily workouts that could be reduced to every other day? The role of organizing all the family events? An expectation of what you are supposed to be or do?

Whatever it is, this month try putting it down or letting it go. And watch what that makes possible!

Option E

Possibility over a Cup of Coffee

One of the best ways to explore our monthly themes is to bring them into the conversations you have in your everyday life. Or to put it another way, our themes offer you the chance to deepen and enliven your conversations and relationships.

So here are some conversation starters rooted in Embracing Possibility. Choose one or all of them and take them into a conversation with family or friends.

Remember: part of this exercise is about the insights that arise from meaningful conversation, but another part is to notice the joy, meaning and even fun we tap into when our conversations go beyond the weather and normal chit chat.

Conversation Starters about Embracing Possibility:

- What's something new you've learned about yourself in the last three months? [-source](#)
- If you did not have to sleep, how would you spend the extra 8 hours? [-source](#)
- If you weren't doing your current job, what would your dream job be? [-source](#)
- How has your belief in the possibility of a better world grown or shrunk over the past couple of years?

Your Question

Don't treat these questions like "homework" or try to answer every single one. Instead, make time to meditate on the list and then pick the one question that speaks to you most. The goal is to figure out which question is "yours." Which question captures the call of your inner voice? Which one contains "your work"? What is that question trying to get you to notice or acknowledge?

Often it helps to read the list to a friend or loved one and ask them which question they think is the question you need to wrestle with!

1. How has your belief in the possibility of a better world grown or shrunk over the past couple of years?
2. Who taught you the most about defying expectations and unleashing your potential and possibility? How did their courageous living spill over into your own?
3. We all have dreams of what's possible. We live with a voice that says "One day I will..." So, what "possible life" has been with you the longest? Why has it remained a dream for so long?
4. When it comes to possibility, are you among those who carefully access the cliff and gather an abundance of gear for the descent? Or are you one of those who simply leap and trust that you'll figure it out on the way down? And...what does your partner or family think of your particular way of pursuing the possibilities that lie at the bottom of the cliffs?
5. Many say that the possibility of becoming anew requires us to come apart, to be undone. Do you buy it? Do you fear it? Have you already done it and can testify to its truth?
6. What do you know about the possibilities that live on the other side of grief?
7. What if you understood the word impossible as a dare?
8. What are others learning about living and leaning into possibility by watching you?
9. Is it possible that the thing you're sure you're right about is wrong?
10. Is "That was unfair!" or "I was wronged" keeping you from the possibility of moving on?
11. What would enable you to leave the life you've outgrown?
12. Are you sure you're too old to do it?
13. **What's your question?** Your question may not be listed above. As always, if the above questions don't include what life is asking from you, spend the month listening to your days to hear it. Or maybe the question or call you need to hear is waiting in one of the quotes listed below. Consider looking there!

Companion Pieces

Recommended Resources for Personal Exploration & Reflection

The following resources are not required reading. We will not analyze these pieces in our group. Instead they are here to companion you on your journey this month, get you thinking and open you up to new ways of imagining what it means to Embrace Possibility.

Word Roots & Definitions

From the Latin, *posse*, meaning “to have power.” A reminder that embracing possibility is not just about belief or “having faith,” but also a matter of gathering power.

Wise Words

This beginning has been quietly forming
Waiting until you were ready to emerge...
It watched you play with the seduction of safety...
Wondered would you always live like this.

[John O'Donahue](#)

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

Jelaluddin Rumi

It's the possibility of having a dream come true that makes life interesting.

Paulo Coelho

So many things are possible just as long as you don't know they're impossible.

Norton Juster, The Phantom Tollbooth

Argue for your limitations and sure enough they're yours.

Richard Bach

Impossible is just a big word thrown around by small people who find it easier to live in the world they've been given than to explore the power they have to change it. Impossible is not a fact. It's an opinion. Impossible is not a declaration. It's a dare.

Muhammad Ali

If I were to wish for anything, I should not wish for wealth and power, but for the passionate sense of the potential, for the eye which, ever young and ardent, sees the possible. Pleasure disappoints, possibility never.

Søren Kierkegaard

There is more to see in myself than just what I look for. There is more to see in my enemies than just what I look for. There is more to see in this country than just what I look for. I need this to be true. I need to stop looking for affirmation of what I already believe and instead see the world and others and myself through the eyes of a God who loves all of it madly.

[Nadia Bolz-Weber](#)

Have you considered the possibility that everything you believe is wrong, not merely off a bit, but totally wrong... How different the world seems then: everyone who was your enemy is your friend, everything you hated; you now love...

[Federico Moramarco](#)

It is never too late to be what you might have been.

George Eliot

There is no power greater than a community discovering what it cares about.

Ask: “What’s possible?” not “What’s wrong?” Keep asking.

Notice what you care about.

Assume that many others share your dreams...

[Margaret Wheatley](#)

I think it is healing behavior, to look at something so broken and see the possibility and wholeness in it.

[Adrienne Maree Brown](#)

If you treat an individual as he is, he will remain how he is. But if you treat him as if he were what he ought to be and could be, he will become what he ought to be and could be.”

Johann Wolfgang von Goethe

For a seed to achieve its greatest expression, it must come completely undone. The shell cracks, its insides come out and everything changes. To someone who doesn't understand growth, it would look like complete destruction.

[Heather Warman](#)

For years, normality has been stretched nearly to its breaking point, a rope pulled tighter and tighter, waiting for a nip of the black swan's beak to snap it in two. Now that the rope has snapped, do we tie its ends back together, or shall we undo its dangling braids still further, to see what we might weave from them?

[Charles Eisenstein](#)

We have an obligation to imagine. It is easy to pretend that nobody can change anything, that we are in a world in which society is huge and the individual is less than nothing: an atom in a wall, a grain of rice in a rice field. But the truth is, individuals change their world over and over, individuals make the future, and they do it by imagining that things can be different.

[Neil Gaiman](#)

Poems

Things to think

Robert Bly

<https://inspirare.blog/2010/03/14/things-to-think-by-robert-bly/>

Think in ways you've never thought before...
When someone knocks on the door, think that their about
To give you something large...

The Low Road

Marge Piercy

Text:

<https://www.historyisaweapon.com/defcon1/piercy/lowroad.html>

Video:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zveWE6I3M2g>

...it starts when you care
to act, it starts when you do
it again after they said no,
it starts when you say We
and know who you mean, and each
day you mean one more.

V'ahavta

Aurora Levins Morales

<http://www.auroralevinsmorales.com/main-blog/vahavta>

Say these words when you lie down and when you rise up,
when you go out and when you return...
Inscribe them on your doorposts:
Another world is possible...
Defend this world in which we win as if it were your child...

The Hill We Climb

Amanda Gorman

<https://www.cnbc.com/2021/01/20/amanda-gormans-inaugural-poem-the-hill-we-climb-full-text.html>

“...Every breath from my bronze-pounded chest,
we will raise this wounded world into a wondrous one...
We will rebuild, reconcile and recover...
our people diverse and beautiful will emerge,
battered and beautiful...”

For a New Beginning

John O'Donohue

<https://www.poetry-chaikhana.com/Poets/O/ODonohueJohn/ForaNewBegin/index.html>

“In out of the way places of the heart...
This beginning has been quietly forming
Waiting until you were ready to emerge...
Noticing how you willed yourself on
Still unable to leave what you had outgrown...”

Music

We create two different playlists for each of our monthly themes: one in Spotify and another in YouTube. We organize these lists as a journey of sorts. So consider listening from beginning to end and using the lists as musical meditations. Follow the links below to connect with this month's Embracing Possibility songs.

Click [here](#) for the Spotify playlist on [Embracing Possibility](#)

Click [here](#) for all [Spotify playlists](#).

Click [here](#) for the YouTube playlist on [Embracing Possibility](#)

Click [here](#) for all the [YouTube playlists](#).

Videos & Podcasts

How Movements Become Possible - a TED Short
https://www.ted.com/talks/derek_sivers_how_to_start_a_movement?referrer=playlist-ted_in_3_minutes#t-144248

We don't "move on" from grief. We move forward with it - TED Talk
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=khkJkR-ipfw>
On the possibilities that lie beyond grief.

Octavia's Parables,
adrienne maree brown & Toshi Reagon
<https://www.readingoctavia.com/about>

The Pattern Problem - Invisibilia
<https://www.npr.org/programs/invisibilia/597779069/the-pattern-problem>
On the possibility of change: "Are we destined to repeat our patterns, or do we generally stray in surprising directions?"

Articles

Why the Coronavirus Is Humanity's Wake-Up Call
David Korten
Full article at
<https://www.yesmagazine.org/opinion/2020/03/18/coronavirus-wake-up-call>

"This is humanity's wake-up call... As we respond to the coronavirus emergency and the immediate needs of the people and communities impacted by it, let us also keep in view the systemic needs and possibilities that crisis exposes..."

The impossible has already happened
Rebecca Solnit
Full article found [HERE](#)

"At moments of immense change, we see with new clarity the systems – political, economic, social, ecological – in which we are immersed as they change around us. We see what's strong, what's weak, what's corrupt, what matters and what doesn't.

I often think of these times as akin to a spring thaw... The ice was the arrangement of power relations that we call the status quo – it seems to be stable, and those who benefit from it often insist that it's unchangeable. Then it changes fast and dramatically, and that can be exhilarating, terrifying, or both..."

Four Narratives of America
Doug Muder
<https://weeklysift.com/2021/06/21/four-narratives-of-america/>

On the "four americas" and the possibility of a united national vision.

Reparations are required; anything less is an insult
Shay, Black Girl in Maine
<https://blackgirlinmaine.com/current-events/reparations-are-required-anything-less-is-an-insult/>

Books

Emergent Strategy: Shaping Change, Changing Worlds

adrienne maree brown

Black Futures

Kimberly Drew & Jenna Wortham

[review](#)

The Art of Possibility: Transforming Professional and Personal Life

Rosamund Stone Zander and Benjamin Zander

Related TED talk:

https://www.ted.com/talks/benjamin_zander_on_music_and_passion

Related interview with Diane Rehm:

<http://wamu.org/programs/dr/01/03/29.php>

The Tipping Point

Malcom Gladwell

On how possibilities become realities

More Monthly Inspiration from Soul Matters!

Our Facebook Inspiration Page:

<https://www.facebook.com/soulmatterssharingcircle/>

Our Instagram Page:

Find us as “soul_matters_circle”

Music Playlists:

Click [here](#) for links to the [Spotify playlists](#) for each month.

Click [here](#) to check out the [YouTube playlists](#).



© 2021-22 Soul Matters ALL RIGHTS RESERVED

Packets are for use only by member congregations of the Soul Matters Sharing Circle.

Learn how to join at

<https://www.soulmatterssharingcircle.com>