



Soul Matters

What does it mean
to be a people of

Possibility?



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.

Our Spiritual Exercise

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

In his early days, Abba Euprepus went to see an old man and said to him, "Abba, give me a word so that I may be saved."

— from the "Apophthegmata Patrum, The Sayings of the Fathers"

[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. Some small groups have written their word on a piece of paper and then given it to the group facilitator who kept them in envelopes for a few months and then returned them to the group members as reminders. 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!

Here are a few links to inspire and guide you along the way:

- <https://apairandasparediy.com/2017/01/choose-word-guide-resolutions-2017/>
- <https://www.chicagotribune.com/news/columnists/schmich/ct-met-personal-word-of-the-year-mary-schmich-20180109-story.html>
- <https://gretchenrubin.com/podcast-episode/podcast-26-pick-a-one-word-theme-for-the-year-take-the-first-step-and-paper-or-digital-calendar/>
- <https://abbeyofhearts.com/blog/2016/12/06/give-me-a-word-2017-8th-annual-giveaway/> (scroll down to read words people have chosen and why)
- <https://www.artbarblog.com/one-word-resolutions/>

Your Question

As always, don't treat these questions like "homework" or a list that needs to be covered in its entirety. Instead, simply 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 which question is "yours." Which question captures the call of your inner voice? Which one contains "your work"? And where is it trying to lead you?

1. Who taught you the most about "living and leaning into possibility"? How does their memory call you to today?
2. What did your childhood and family of origin teach you about possibility? Are those lessons ones you need to remember or reject?
3. What are others learning about living and leaning into possibility by watching you?
4. We all have dreams of what's possible. We live with a voice that says "One day I will..." What "possible life" has been with you the longest? Why has it remained a dream for so long?
5. 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?
6. Is it possible that the thing you want is not the thing you need?
7. Is it possible that the thing you're sure you're right about is wrong?
8. Is "That was unfair!" or "I was wronged" keeping you from the possibility of [moving on](#)?
9. Is avoiding rejection keeping you safe but also keeping you from what's possible?
10. Are you sure you're too old to do it?
11. Are you sure it's too late to try it?
12. Is there more to see in your "enemy" than what you've been staring at?
13. Is it possible that your loved one is doing the best they can? And finally need forgiven for not living up to who you want them to be?
14. **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 your thinking started and open you to new ways of thinking about what it means to be part of a people of POSSIBILITY.

Word Roots

Possibility and possible come from the Latin *posse* to be able. It is closely linked to the Latin *potis* which carries the idea of the power of possibility, the potency of possibility.

Wise Words

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

Jelaluddin Rumi

Think in ways you've never thought before.

If the phone rings, think of it as carrying a message

Larger than anything you've ever heard...

When someone knocks on the door, think that their 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.

[Robert Bly](#)

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

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](#)

We keep looking so hard in life for the "specific message," and yet we are blinded to the fact that the message we really need is all around us, and within us all the time. We just have to stop demanding that it be on OUR terms or conditions, and instead open ourselves to the possibility that what we need may be in front of us all the time.

Rosamund Stone Zander and Benjamin Zander, from The Art of Possibility

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. Impossible is potential. Impossible is temporary. Impossible is nothing.

Muhammad Ali

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.

[Marge Piercy](#)

V'ahavta

Aurora Levins Morales

Full poem here:

<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. In times of mourning
and in times of joy. Inscribe them on your doorposts:
Another world is possible...

Imagine winning. This is your sacred task.
This is your power. Imagine
every detail of winning, the exact smell of the summer streets
in which no one has been shot, the muscles you have never
unclenched from worry, gone soft as newborn skin,...

Defend this world in which we win as if it were your child.
It is your child.
Defend it as if it were your lover.
It is your lover...

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*](#)

Somewhere, a signal has arrived. Now. Now. Now, it says. Stop waiting. Begin. Move despite the trembling. Don't wait for any of it to be perfect. Just move.

Julia Fehrenbacher

Nothing keeps us from changing more than our tendency — our willingness — to remain locked...
into personae and identities barred in by heavy leaden rods of self-righteousness.

[*Maria Popova*](#)

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*](#)

I'm becoming a fan of 'the pause. Between notes and pages and words and breaths, between thought and voice, between action and reaction. In that momentary stillness, in that space between before and after, there is possibility, a myriad of paths that can be taken, a dozen different versions of me.

Judy Clement Wall

God Says Yes To Me

Kaylin Haught

Full poem found at

<https://www.loc.gov/poetry/180/126.html>

Video:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=eh1Sq5sxdP0>

I asked God if it was okay to be melodramatic
and she said yes
I asked her if it was okay to be short
and she said it sure is...
Sweetcakes God said...
what I'm telling you is
Yes Yes Yes

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*](#)

I am looking for people who have an infinite capacity to not know what can't be done.

Henry Ford

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

Richard Bach

You are not too old, and it is not too late.

Unknown

Everybody's got a past. The past doesn't equal the future unless you live there.

Tony Robbins

Nobody can go back and start a new beginning, but anyone can start today and make a new ending.

Maria Robinson

The beauty of imperfection is the possibility for improvement.

Tom Bennett

Whoever believes in the good in people, draws forth the good in people.

Jean Paul

If it fits in a frame, it's not the big picture.

The Covert Comic

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

Viktor Frankl

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*](#)

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

"Unfortunately, the clock is ticking, the hours are going by. The past increases, the future recedes. Possibilities decreasing, regrets mounting."

Haruki Murakami, Dance Dance Dance

A Brave And Startling Truth

Maya Angelou

Full poem found at

<https://www.poemhunter.com/poem/a-brave-and-startling-truth/>

Read by Angelou:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UjEfq7wLm7M>

...When we come to it

When the curtain falls on the minstrel show of hate...

When battlefields and coliseum

No longer rake our unique and particular sons and daughters...

Then we will confess... that we are the possible
We are the miraculous, the true wonder of this world..."

Say Yes

Andrea Gibson

Full poem found at

<http://ohandregibson.tumblr.com/sayyes>

Spoken version at

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0pNQnFl7jRM>

When two violins are placed in a room if a chord on
one violin is struck
the other violin will sound the note
If this is your definition of hope
This is for you
The ones who know how powerful we are
Who know we can sound the music in the people
around us
simply by playing our own strings...

Songs and Music

Everything Is Possible Now

Clouds And Thorns

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HPwikOT70bs>

32 Flavors

Ani DiFranco

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vVg7mtgEqGY>

If You Want to Sing Out

Cat Stevens

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NDq36YD1ESM>

Cover by Rani Arbo & Daisy Mayhem:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=D3QRci5VYpU>

Black as Night

Nahko and Medicine for the People

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=lkGBLLjAXEA&list=RDm3rLLALWYyk&index=9>

"I believe in the good things comin', comin', comin'
comin'

Who have I been, who am I becomin'? 'comin',
'comin', 'comin', 'comin'..."

More "Possibility Songs" are found in our January *Soul Matters* Spotify playlist. Click [here](#) to check them out! You can also explore the playlists from other months [here](#).

Online

Breaking Free

What's Your Version of "Breaking Free"? Do You Believe It's Possible to Live Another Way?

<https://vimeo.com/14425446>

Holding on to the Possibilities After a Diagnosis - a must watch

What I've Learned from ALS

Eric Brown

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=421iX2-P-c>

Turning Rejection into Possibility

What I learned from 100 days of rejection - TED Talk

Jia Jiang

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

See Jia's blog where he posts videos of each day of rejection: <https://www.rejectiontherapy.com/100-days-of-rejection-therapy/>

The Possibilities of Just Saying Yes!

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jKQuY_X2WtY

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

The Possible Future of UUism

https://www.youtube.com/watch?time_continue=1842&v=H7sjTUk-iu0

As part of the First UU Congregation of Ann Arbor 150th anniversary year, UU leaders from around the country gathered to discuss the future of the UU movement and how UU congregations can boldly go into the dawning future.

Articles

The Possibility Report

<https://www.theatlantic.com/sponsored/vmware-2017/the-possibility-report-move/1431/>

A multi-series exploration of how new technologies will reframe our understanding of the world and unleash new possibilities.

To Pray Without Apology

Imagining the Possibility of MLK as a UU

Rosemary Bray McNatt

<https://www.uuworld.org/articles/why-martin-luther-king-jr.-wasnt-uu>

What would have happened if Martin Luther King Jr. had cast his lot with the Unitarian Universalists?

Books

The Art of Possibility: Transforming Professional and Personal Life

Rosamund Stone Zander and Benjamin Zander

https://www.amazon.com/Art-Possibility-Transforming-Professional-Personal/dp/0142001104/ref=sr_1_1?ie=UTF8&qid=1538834867&sr=8-1&keywords=the+art+of+possibility+by+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 (How possibilities become realities)

Malcom Gladwell

<https://www.amazon.com/Tipping-Point-Little-Things-Difference/dp/0316346624>

Movies

Ballast

On the possibility of moving on, together

https://www.rottentomatoes.com/m/1197307_ballast?

Black Mirror

TV series on the dark possibilities in a future dominated by technology

https://www.rottentomatoes.com/tv/black_mirror

Man on Wire

After watching, very little will seem impossible!

https://www.rottentomatoes.com/m/man_on_wire/

Billy Elliot

One of the best films of all time about the possibility of pursuing your dreams despite the odds.

https://www.rottentomatoes.com/m/billy_elliot

Big Fish

Perfect film about for convincing you to believe the unbelievable. Maybe anything IS possible!

https://www.rottentomatoes.com/m/1127787_big_fish?

Ratatouille

Not just for kids! If a rat can make his dream a reality, then so can we!

<https://www.rottentomatoes.com/m/ratatouille>

Get daily inspiration
on the monthly theme by liking our
Soul Matters Facebook inspiration page:
<https://www.facebook.com/soulmatterssharingcircle/>

Find musical inspiration
on each theme by following our monthly
Spotify lists:
<https://www.soulmatterssharingcircle.com/spotify-lists.html>



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