



Living a Life of Intention

Small Groups: March 2015

On the first Sunday of January, during our meditative welcoming the New Year service, I shared the story of *The Touchstone*. While the author of the story is unknown, the tale is very much about intention and mindfulness, two things that go hand in hand. The story tells of a man who finds tucked inside an ordinary book, a thin piece of parchment which details the secret of the Touchstone. The parchment explains that the touchstone is a pebble that turns any ordinary metal it comes in contact with into pure gold. It goes on to say the touchstone is hidden among thousands of other pebbles and looks just like them. The difference is that when you pick up an ordinary pebble it will feel cold in the hand, but when you pick up the touchstone it will feel warm. The man sells his few possessions and sets out to find the touchstone. He sets up camp at a beach covered with pebbles. He realizes that if he picks up a stone and it feels cold and he drops it back down, he could end up picking up the same pebble hundreds of times. So, he decides that if he picks up a stone and it is cold, he will throw it into the sea. All day long he spends his day picking up pebbles, and each one feels cold in his hand, so he throws it into the sea. The days turn into months and every day is the same. He picks up a stone. It feels cold in his palm. He throws it into the sea. Several months pass, and then one day, he picks up a stone and it feels warm in his palm, but before he can stop himself, he tosses it into the sea. So bound by habit, he tosses away the thing he has been looking for all along. His intention, so clear when he began, became lost in the routine of his daily rhythm, so much so that he lost the treasure he sought.

Three months into this still relatively new year, do we remember the intentions we brought with us into the new year? Intention is one thing. Staying true to our intentions is something else. What do we do when we lose sight of an intention or promise we have made to ourselves? How do we recover and continue on the road we have chosen? Intention is about being specific about our hopes, our values, and the choices we make and knowing why we make them. But intention also requires mindfulness and forgiveness because we all lose our way at times.

At our New Year's service, we passed out stones to be our touchstones for the new year. In them, we placed our intentions, our dreams and hopes for the new year. The stone acts as a reminder, when we feel ourselves forgetting what's important, or getting lost in habit, or plain losing our way, a reminder to call us back to our intention. Yogi Berra once said, "if you don't know where you are going, you'll end up someplace else." This year, at UUCP, we are undertaking discernment conversations to explore our intentions for the future, our dream for UUCP. The Vision Task Force is leading this process. The reason for the conversation is to help us be mindful of where we are going and intentional in using our resources and our ministry to move us - as a community, as people - forward in living our values fully, mindfully and with an eye to creating impact in our own lives and beyond our walls. Throughout January and February the Vision Task Force has been listening in group conversations, in leadership meetings and in one to one conversations. In March and April we will continue listening as the team seeks to discern our touchstone, the essence of who we are and what we seek to embody as a liberal, inclusive religious community and the future we aspire to live into. It is our hope that a clear and compelling vision, like our mission, will help us as a community be mindful of our intention, mindful of who we hope to become, just as the stones we passed out on New Year's are there to help each of us stay mindful of the values and dreams that we wish to remain true to in our lives.

Yours in love,
Rev. Susan



Living the Theme: Intention

Choose one of the exercises below to engage the theme. Come to the meeting prepared to share how you tried to experience intention and what you learned from the practice.

1. Try a Mantra

This is a kind of "mantra" for making positive change, for setting and following through on intentions: *If you can perceive it and believe it, you can achieve it.*

Let's unpack that statement a bit:

If you can perceive it - This means regularly using your imagination and all of your senses to experience as fully as possible what you will feel like when your goal or intention is achieved **AS IF YOU'VE ALREADY ACHIEVED IT**. During this imaginative experience, consider how you will look, what you will be saying/telling yourself, what other people will say/tell you, how your body/mind will feel - all in as much detail as you can imagine. What are the sights, sounds and smells accompanying your achievement?

Believe it - This means to affirm your intention regularly, counteract fears and negative messages, find ways to build your confidence and create a "cheering section" in your own mind and, if you wish, amongst family and friends who support your intention.

Achieve it - You'll know when you get there! Then, to maintain your goal, you may have to continue to practice the steps. Especially if your intention is a behavioral goal, it takes lots of practice for it to become a habit.

2. Set an Intention of Gratitude (adapted from www.gratefulness.org)

Here are some daily gratefulness practices for you to try. If there is one practice on this list that you would like to try every day, do so. Or try a new one each day. Or switch it up. What matters is that you do something every day to build the habit of intentionally directing your attention to notice and appreciate the gifts of your life.

- Close your eyes. Take a few, very deep breaths – all the way out and all the way in. Notice how your breathing so often takes care of itself...just breath moving itself through you – keeping you alive – just keeping you alive. Commit to not taking this gift for granted.
- Every night before you go to sleep, take an inventory of the things for which for which you are grateful. Let them percolate through your mind and calm your body. Write down at least five things that matter to you.
- At any point during the day, reflect upon one important thing that you have learned in this day. Write down what you have learned.
- Make the decision to see your most challenging moments today as opportunities. What might be making itself known or available to you in hard times? How can you cultivate even small sentiments of gratefulness for the gifts that come from struggle? Reflect on this at the beginning and end of the day.
- Start your day with an intention to show up absolutely whole-heartedly to everything you do today. Notice at the end of the day if anything changed because of this intention.
- Sit quietly and allow a sense of peace to enter your heart. From this place, consider lighting a candle. Create a grateful intention, settling into the peace of residing in gratefulness for a few, precious moments.
- While racing somewhere, take 30 seconds to stop, take a breath, and look at the sky, or at the environment around you. What was begging for your attention?
- Enter the meditative space of a labyrinth, or walk a short path meditatively somewhere near you. If you move as a mindfulness practice, you can go back and forth on the same path and it will always generate new horizons. Notice how amazing it is to move – no matter how you do it.



Some Questions to Live With

As always, don't treat these questions as "homework." You do not need to engage every single one. Instead, simply look them over and find one that "hooks" you most. Live with it for a while. Allow it to regularly break into – and break open – your ordinary thoughts. Then come to your small group prepared to share that journey with the group.

1. Do you have lots of hopes, wishes, dreams, plans that don't seem to be getting fulfilled? Is it because the capital I Intention isn't there? **How do you find or create Intention?**
2. Many of us hold multiple intentions; sometimes they conflict with each other. **How do you decide which intentions are most important?**
3. How do you want to **be remembered?**
4. How do you want **others to describe you?**
5. Who do you **want to be?**
6. **What matters** most to you?
7. What **values** are most important to you?
8. What would you consider to be the **successes** in your life?
9. What has made your life **worthwhile?**
10. What does intention look like in a **person?**
11. What does intention look like in a **society?**
12. Is there a time when you felt you made **a choice, a life decision, with real intention?** What was that like?
13. Is there a time in your life or **decision(s) you made without mindful intention?** What was the result?
14. Was there a time in which your **good intentions led you down a wrong path** or created problems?



Recommended Resources

These are **not** required reading. We will not dissect these pieces in our group. They are simply meant to get your thinking started and offer different ways to see and explore the theme.

First Thoughts and Wise Words

Intention: having the determination or resolve to act upon an action or goal.

What one does is what counts. Not what one had the intention of doing.

Pablo Picasso

Live with intention. Walk to the edge. Listen hard. Practice wellness. Play with Abandon. Laugh. Choose with no regret. Continue to learn. Appreciate your friends. Do what you love. Live as if this is all there is.

Mary Anne Radmacher

The life of every man is a diary in which he means to write one story, and writes another.

J.M. Barrie

The most fundamental aggression to ourselves, the most fundamental harm we can do to ourselves, is to remain ignorant by not having the courage and the respect to look at ourselves honestly and gently.

Pema Chödrön

Walk as if you are kissing the Earth with your feet.

Thích Nhất Hạnh

Powerful words come with powerful intent. Where you have passion, strength, courage, and determination you can accomplish anything!

K.L. Toth

Write it on your heart that every day is the best day in the year.

Ralph Waldo Emerson, Unitarian

All doubt, despair and fear become insignificant once the intention of life becomes love.

Rumi

In the end, just three things matter:

*How well we have lived
How well we have loved
How well we have learned to let go*

Jack Kornfield

"Vision," according to English writer Jonathan Swift, "is the art of seeing things invisible." This gift belongs to those who can see the good hidden away in the kernels of setbacks, suffering, and pain. It resides in those who never give up hope when less stalwart souls are ready to pack up their bags and go home. It stirs in the love of those who refuse to capitulate to cynicism on either a private or a public level.

Frederic and Mary Ann Brussat

Our vision has to do with our values, and with our personal blueprint for what is most important in life.

Jon Kabat-Zinn

Give us clear vision that we may know where to stand and what to stand for, because unless we stand for something, we shall fall for anything.

Peter Marshall

*living eulogy.
she danced.
she sang. she took.
she gave.
she loved.
she created.
she dissented. she enlivened.
she saw. she grew. she sweated.
she changed.
she learned. she laughed.
she shed her skin.
she bled on the pages of her days,
she walked through walls,
she lived with intention.*

Mary Anne Radmacher



*Between stimulus and response,
there is a space. In that space is our
power to choose our response. In
our response lies our growth and
our freedom.*

Viktor Frankl, Man's Search for Meaning

*Everyday, think as you wake up, today I am
fortunate to be alive, I have precious human life,
I am not going to waste it. I am going to use all
my energies to develop myself, to expand my
heart out to others; to achieve enlightenment for
the benefit of all beings. I am going to have kind
thought towards others, I am not going to get
angry or think badly about others. I am going to
benefit others as much as I can.*

Dalai Lama

*I want a singleness of eye, a purity of intention,
a central core to my life that will enable me to
carry out these obligations and activities as well
as I can. I want, in fact — to borrow from the
languages of the saints — to live "in grace" as
much of the time as possible.*

Anne Morrow Lindbergh, Gift from the Sea

*If to do were as easy as to know what were good
to do, chapels had been churches, and poor
men's cottages princes' palaces. It is a good
divine that follows his own instructions: I can
easier teach twenty what were good to be done,
than be one of the twenty to follow mine own
teaching.*

William Shakespeare, The Merchant of Venice

*To me, the key word is the adjective: intentional.
Sometimes we can make a plan and work to see it
through. Sometimes we just have to react to what
life gives us. But even then we can choose to act
in accordance with our deepest values.*

Worship Associate

*What I have learned is to set my intention, but to
carve it in water, not stone. If I try to force it
and MAKE it happen, I'm often met with
resistance. (This is especially true if my
intention involves other people!) If I keep it fluid
and flexible, hold it lightly, and just mindfully
watch for the right timing, things often unfold
naturally and beautifully.*

Small Group Facilitator

*The woods are lovely, dark and deep,
But I have promises to keep,
And miles to go before I sleep,
And miles to go before I sleep.*

Robert Frost, from "Stopping by Woods on a
Snowy Evening"

*May the light around us guide our footsteps,
And hold us fast to the best and most righteous
that we seek.*

*May the darkness around us nurture our
dreams,
And give us rest so that we may give ourselves to
the work of the world.*

*Let us seek to remember the wholeness of our
lives,*

*the weaving of light and shadow in this great
and astonishing dance in which we move.*

Kathleen McTigue, UU minister

*The journey of a thousand miles begins with a
single step.*

Lao-tzu

Skill to do comes of doing.

Ralph Waldo Emerson, Unitarian

*Some say if you want success surround yourself
with successful people. I say if you want true
and lasting success surround yourself with
people of integrity.*

Charles F. Glassman

*Life is what happens to us when we are making
other plans.*

Thomas La Mance

The secret of success is constancy to purpose.

Benjamin Disraeli

*Your vision will become clear only when you
can look into your own heart. Who looks
outside, dreams; who looks inside, awakes.*

Carl Gustav Jung

*Attention is love, what we must give
children, mothers, fathers, pets,
our friends, the news, the woes of others.
What we want to change we curse and then
pick up a tool. Bless whatever you can
with eyes and hands and tongue. If you
can't bless it, get ready to make it new.*

Marge Piercy



In the end what really counts is not how much we have, but what we have done with it, how many we have helped, how much we have shared.

Denny Davidoff, former UUA moderator

Do all the good you can. By all the means you can. In all the ways you can. In all the places you can. As long as ever you can.

John Wesley

I myself am made entirely of flaws, stitched together with good intentions.

Augusten Burroughs

Intention is an awareness of purpose that guides our words and actions. When we are intentional, we use our time and other resources thoughtfully. Since we have limited energy, money and power, we treat these as precious gifts, not to be squandered carelessly but to be spent in ways that bring healing and happiness into the world. We direct our energy toward the things that mean the most to us and those we serve.

Intention is living day to day, even moment to moment, with a sense of choice and purpose. It means being continuously conscious of how the present moment relates to our values and goals--and where there are the greatest opportunities to cultivate love, beauty and delight.

WisdomCommons.org

The way you wake up can set the tone for your entire day. To start your day out right, set an intention for the day, and help move your intention into action with an affirmation: Today is going to be the best day of my life. Write down five things for which you are grateful. By focusing on gratitude, you will be better able to see the blessings in your life throughout the day. Take time every day to practice stress relief: go for a walk in nature, meditate for 10 minutes, devote time to a hobby that helps you feel happy and relaxed.

Small Group Facilitator

It is true that we are called to create a better world. But we are first of all called to a more immediate and exalted task: that of creating our own lives.

Thomas Merton

Watch your thoughts; they become your words. Watch your words; they become your actions. Watch your actions; they become your habits. Watch your habits, they become your character. Watch your character for it will become your destiny.

Frank Outlaw

Life is Always Unfinished Business

In the midst of the whirling day, in the hectic rush to be doing, in the frantic pace of life, pause here for a moment.

Catch your breath; relax your body; loosen your grip on life.

Consider that our lives are always unfinished business; imagine that the picture of our being is never complete; allow your life to be a work in progress.

Do not hurry to mold the masterpiece; do not rush to finish the picture; do not be impatient to complete the drawing. From beckoning birth to dawning death we are in process, and always there is more to be done.

Do not let the incompleteness weigh on your spirit; do not despair that imperfection marks your every day; do not fear that we are still in the making.

Let us instead be grateful that the world is still to be created; let us give thanks that we can be more than we are; let us celebrate the power of the incomplete; for life is always unfinished business.

Richard S. Gilbert, UU Minister

Before you tell your life what you intend to do with it, listen for what it intends to do with you. Before you tell your life what truths and values you have decided to live up to, let your life tell you what truths you embody, what values you represent.

Parker Palmer



The voyage of the best ship is a zigzag line of a hundred tacks. See the line from a sufficient distance, and it straightens itself to the average tendency. Your genuine action will explain itself, and will explain your other genuine actions.

Ralph Waldo Emerson, Unitarian

*Covenants are intentional.
Covenants are audacious.
Covenants are a promise that can change our lives together in this faith.
Together, we will be stronger.
Together, we will be wiser.
Together, we will be gentler.
We promise
to recognize our uniqueness
to treasure our faith
to honor our neighbors with holiness.
We covenant to be committed to each other
to consider each as significant
to consider each as valuable.
We covenant
to be invitational
to be accepting
to speak grace-filled truth
to forgive each other
over and over again.
And yes,
to love.
Our Covenant stands firm.
It is our embodiment of faith in each other.
It is our blessing of each other.
It is our commitment to each other.
May we hold this community as a precious gift.
May we hold our relationships as gifts that transcend borders.
May we carry forth
the intention of our Covenant
the audacity of our Covenant
the promise of our Covenant
now and in years to come.
May it be so.
From Bless the Imperfect, ed. Kay Montgomery*

Remember this always: The living of your own life writes the book of your most sacred truth, and offers evidence of it.

Neale Donald Walsch

Clarify your purpose. What is the why behind everything you do? When we know this in life or design it is very empowering and the path is clear.

Jack Canfield

The day you decide that you are more interested in being aware of your thoughts than you are in the thoughts themselves - that is the day you will find your way out.

Michael Singer

Perhaps the most important thing we ever give each other is our attention.

Rachel Naomi Remen

So human beings come to this world to do particular work. That work is the purpose, and each is specific to the person. If you don't do it, it's as though a priceless Indian sword were used to slice rotten meat. It's a golden bowl being used to cook turnips, when one filing from the bowl could buy a hundred suitable pots. It's a knife of the finest tempering nailed into a wall to hang things on.

Rumi

Planning is bringing the future into the present so you can do something about it now.

Alan Lakein

The future is not someplace we are going; but one we are creating. The paths are not to be found, but made. And the activity of making them changes both the maker and their destination.

John Schaar

Additional Resources

Articles:

“...as a person of privilege, I can never fully understand the ways in which oppressive acts or language impact those around me. What I surely *can* do is listen with every intent to understand, and I can work to change my behavior.”

<http://everydayfeminism.com/2013/07/intentions-dont-really-matter/>



“You can pause for a moment, even before you open your eyes [in the morning] and ask: What service can I offer today? Somewhere during your lunch break take one minute

and ask: How am I doing? These simple activities are already a part of living the day's rhythm. Living with intention comes quite naturally. It isn't exotic.”
http://www.gratefulness.org/readings/dsr_sacred_Journey.htm

Church of the Larger Fellowship, Quest Themes:

Vision –

<http://www.questformeaning.org/quest-monthly/vision-2013/>

Living with Purpose -

<http://www.questformeaning.org/spiritual-reflections/spiritual-themes/living-purpose/>

“To live an intentional life, we must begin by laying a proper foundation and then add practical steps on top of it.”

<http://www.becomingminimalist.com/the-helpful-guide-to-living-an-intentional-life/>

“An Intentional Life: everything you do is done with consciousness, fulfilling one of your core values (compassion, for example). Everything is done with a conscious intent.”

<http://zenhabits.net/intentional/>

If meditation can possibly lead to numbing detachment, what would a meditation that valued self-discovery look like?

<http://www.truth-out.org/opinion/item/28278-the-mcmindfulness-craze-the-shadow-side-of-the-mindfulness-revolution>

“...performing a ritual focuses your attention on some moment and deems it worthy of respect.”

<http://www.nytimes.com/2014/12/25/opinion/religion-without-god.html?ref=opinion>

Videos and Films:

The Holstee Manifesto is a call to action to live a life full of intention, creativity, passion, and community.

https://www.youtube.com/watch?feature=player_embedded&v=QDmt_t6umoY

Oprah Winfrey speaks to author Gary Zukav about the power of intention:

<http://www.oprah.com/own-super-soul-sunday/The-Power-of-Intention-Video>

Books:

Let Your Life Speak by Parker Palmer

<http://www.brainpickings.org/2014/12/02/parker-palmer-let-your-life-speak/>