

LIVING WITH INTENTION
Unitarian Universalist Church of Yakima
Sunday, January 16, 2022

Description for Unifire and Thursday Update:

All around us this first month of the year, we are often reminded to create goals and imagine who we *might* become. But there is, perhaps, a big difference between becoming better and becoming ourselves. Today's service, by Susan Kaphammer from the *Soul Matters* materials, asks us to consider whether we are really excited about the New Year's work of striving to create a brand new self. Or might it be better to notice an internal whisper that says, "I long to be pulled in more deeply to the self I already am"? Maybe our real New Year's work is not about pushing forward into self-improvement, but about pausing, stepping back and asking, "What hunger has my heart?"

Spiritual Snack

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 J. Palmer

Celebrant and Speaker: Susan Kaphammer

Greeter: Carole Sahlstrand

Music: Sunny Sonker

PRELUDE

Call to Community: Susan

Good morning! I invite you into community with “Be About the Work” by Andrea Hawkins-Kamper:

May we see all as it is, and may it all be as we see it.
May we be the ones to make it as it should be,
For if not us, who? If not now, when?
This is answering the cry of justice with the work of peace,
This is redeeming the pain of history with the grace of wisdom,
This is the work we are called to do, and this is the call we answer
now:
To be the barrier and the bridge,
To be the living embodiment of our Principles,
To be about the work of building the Beloved Community,
To be a people of intention and a people of conscience.

Titled, *Living With Intention*, today’s service explores the spiritual quality of intention – what it means, how to understand it, and what intention means for what we do and how we live.

Chalice Lighting

Now, in fellowship with Unitarian Universalists around the world, we mark this time together in spiritual community with the ritual of lighting our chalice with familiar words printed in the order of service:

We light this chalice in deep respect
for the mystery and holiness of life;
with honor and gratitude for all who have gone before,
with love and compassion for all who dwell among us,
and with hope and faith for the generations to come.

Welcome

Welcome to this Sunday Service of the Unitarian Universalist Church of Yakima. Whether your heart today is heavy or light, full or wanting, we hope you find joy for your spirit today, and we are glad you are here. I am

Susan Kaphammer, and I am privileged to serve as celebrant and speaker this morning.

Opening Song: *Be That Guide*, #124 in *Singing the Living Tradition*

As we are entering a new year, our opening song, ***Be That Guide***, challenges us to accept that as members of Beloved Community we are sustained by love, undaunted by doubt, trusting good, and directed by faith. We are called to find our role – guide, helper, builder or teacher – from which we are to intentionally move past fear and pioneer a new tomorrow.

Lyrics are printed in the order of service. While singing with gusto is not recommended, feel free to hum or sing to yourself as Sunny plays.

Be that guide whom love sustains.
Rise above the daily strife:
lift on high the good you find.
Help to heal the hurts of life.

Be that helper nothing daunts —
doubt of friend or taunt of foe.
Ever strive for liberty.
Show the path that life should go.

Be that builder trusting good,
bitter though the test may be:
through all ages they are right,
though they build in agony.

Be that teacher faith directs.
Move beyond the old frontier:
though the frightened fear that faith,
be tomorrow's pioneer!

Sharing Joys & Sorrows

As we journey through life, each of us reaches high and low points. By sharing the peaks and valleys of our journeys and other significant events in our lives, our sorrows are lightened and our joys enhanced. If you have not already done so, you may light a candle. If you wish to share a joy or sorrow, please stand if able and speak briefly.

....

Let us acknowledge and honor the joys and sorrows that were spoken, and those that are unspoken but kept in the confines of our hearts and minds.

Sharing our Generosity and Commitment

While Sunny shares with us her ministry of music, baskets will be passed to collect our contributions of time, energy and intentions, represented by our financial giving. We are invited to give to the church in the spirit of love and sharing. Also, we continue to “Share the Plate” of non-pledge contributions with local agencies helping to make our local community more just and fair.

....

What you freely give sustains this community and helps heal our larger community and our world; your generosity is received with gratitude.

Message: Living With Intention - Susan

A note about my comments: My message is built around and contains many quotes, excerpts and paraphrases sourced from the Soul Matters materials. In order to allow smoother flow of the ideas, sources, particularly for briefer passages, will not always be identified in context. When this message is printed or posted online, all phrases that are the words of others will be indented or enclosed in quotation marks and the authors identified.

A nearly inescapable “cultural narrative” for the beginning of the year is that we set goals; we make resolutions. As of January 1, advertising intensifies for fitness centers and products, diet plans, tool sets, craft projects – all manner of things to do and ways to improve ourselves. This focus on improving ourselves may meet a “need” some of us feel compelled to address, but it also increases our expectation that we should choose how to be a better me... then buy something to help reach our goals.

Oh, but it is now January 16... so a subsequent narrative to resolution making emerges the expectation that many of us, if not most of us, have already forgotten, failed at, or been sidetracked from our resolutions.

Instead of concentrating on making and keeping (or not keeping) resolutions, consider that perhaps we have more important and deeper work to do.

The Soul Matters small group materials for *Living With Intention* explore the meaning of intention:

There is... a big difference between becoming better -- and becoming ourselves.... So this month, maybe our most meaningful work is to make room. All around us this month, there's going to be tons of talk about creating goals and imagining who we *might* become. But living with intention seems to be more about creating a quiet space that allows us to connect with who we *already* are, a space that protects us from the pressure to accomplish and instead makes room to ask questions of integrity.

[Katie Covey, a Soul Matters Director, explains] "Here's what I discovered. Intention is different from setting goals or resolutions in that it 'pulls us into' who we truly are. Goals and resolutions 'push us out' into future possibilities. (From *Living With Intention*, Soul Matters Small Group Packet, January, 2022)

I found an article on the website, Dharma Wisdom, to be helpful in my understanding of intention:

Setting intention, at least according to Buddhist teachings, is quite different than goal making. It is not oriented toward a future outcome. Instead, it is a path or practice that is focused on how you are "being" in the present moment. Your attention is on the everpresent "now" in the constantly changing flow of life. You set your intentions based on understanding what matters most to you and make a commitment to align your worldly actions with your inner values.

As you gain insight through meditation, wise reflection, and moral living, your ability to act from your intentions blossoms. It is called a

practice because it is an ever-renewing process. You don't just set your intentions and then forget about them; you live them every day.

Goals help you make your place in the world and be an effective person. But being grounded in intention is what provides integrity and unity in your life.... only by remembering your intentions can you reconnect with yourself during...emotional storms that cause you to lose touch with yourself. This remembering is a blessing, because it provides a sense of meaning in your life that is independent of whether you achieve certain goals or not....

Intentions provide “a sense of meaning in your life that is independent of whether you achieve certain goals or not...” The article continues:

Right intention is like muscle – you develop it over time by exercising it. When you lose it, you just start over again. There's no need to judge yourself or quit when you fail to live by your intentions. You are developing the habit of right intention so that it becomes an unconscious way of living – an automatic response to all situations. Right intention is organic; it thrives when cultivated and wilts when neglected.

... There are only two things you are responsible for in this practice: Throughout each day, ask yourself if you are being true to your deepest intentions. If you're not, start doing so immediately, as best as you're able. (From “The Heart's Intention,” article by Phillip Moffitt from dharma.wisdom.org)

(Repeat): Throughout each day, ask yourself if you are being true to your deepest intentions. If you're not, start doing so immediately, as best as you're able.

What might deliberately being true to deepest intentions mean for my life? This question pointed me to several brief responses:

“Intentional living is the art of making our own choices before others' choices make us.” (Richie Norton)

“When you have the courage to shape your life from the essence of who you are, you ignite, becoming truly alive.” (Dawna Markova)

“In any given moment we have two options, to step forward in growth or to step back into safety.” (Abraham Maslow)

Intention is “the ongoing, purposeful direction that guides our choices and our decisions.” (Rev. Stephen Atkinson)

And, “Any dead fish can go with the flow – you have to be intentionally alive to swim against the current.” (Ann Voskamp)

To live intentionally means to understand your essential self – dreams, questions, hopes, beliefs, fears; all that is you. And then to be conscious of this complex you in making the many choices – large and small – of living in this complex world.

“When we do the hard work of discovering our true and authentic selves, of claiming our whole selves, we are called to live into those selves.” (Peter Friedrichs).

Victor Frankl reminds us, “Between stimulus and response there is a space. In that space is our power to choose our response. In our responses lies our growth and our freedom.” It is in that space between stimulus and response that, at our best, we act in alignment with our intentions.

Living with intention is living with integrity – the person you understand yourself to be, the person you are with family and friends, the person you are in the community, the person you are when stressed or challenged – in every arena and situation what you say and do is grounded by your intention. Actions, words, and choices are aligned with your deepest values. Life doesn’t just happen around you or to you. You live.

The wonderful writer, Annie Lamott, plainly and directly gives us her warning:

“Oh my God, what if you wake up some day and you never got your memoir or novel written; or you didn’t go swimming in warm pools and oceans all those years because your thighs were jiggy and you had a nice big comfortable tummy; or you were just so strung out on perfectionism and people-pleasing that you forgot to have a big juicy creative life, of imagination and radical silliness and staring off into space like when you were a kid? It’s going to break your heart. Don’t let this happen.”

Dawna Markova expressed this in her poem:

I will not die an unlived life
I will not live in fear
of falling or catching fire.
I choose to inhabit my days,
to allow my living to open me,
to make me less afraid,
more accessible,
to loosen my heart
until it becomes a wing,
a torch, a promise.
I choose to risk my significance;
to live so that which came to me as seed
goes to the next as blossom
and that which came to me as blossom,
goes on as fruit.

This is not to say that knowing your intentions and living them is easy. Marion Milner in *A Life of One's Own*, recognizes the ongoing challenge:

“I had at least begun to guess that my greatest need might be to let go and be free from the drive after achievement — if only I dared. I had also guessed that perhaps when I had let these go, then I might be free to become aware of some other purpose that was more fundamental, not self-imposed private ambitions but something which grew out of the essence of one's own nature. People said: ‘Oh, be yourself at all costs.’ But I had found that it was not so easy to know just what one's self was. It was far easier to want what other people seemed to want and then imagine that the choice was one's own... It was only when I was actively passive, and content to wait and watch, that I really knew what I wanted.

I relate to “the drive after achievement” that Marion Milner speaks of. Beginning in high school, through college, into my working life and adulthood, there were times that I pictured myself like a squirrel on one of those spinning wheels. I was compelled to keep running, keep the wheel

spinning, doing all that I conceived that people believed I should do... and more. More enough to call it achievement. And if I stop running, the wheel would stop spinning, I'd fall off and then where would I be? Who would I be?

I recognize now how much I needed to “let go and be free” but that was beyond me at that time, because I had no sense of living with intention, of being grounded in a sense of my deeper self that already existed; a constant and sufficient self. I am better now at understanding what is most important to me and at directing my time and efforts in this direction. Often, although not always (we are all works in process), I live in that alignment of thoughts, words, actions and feelings consistent with my core values.

Now in this message I am going to take a look at a different context for intentions, quoting from an article subtitled, “Why Your Intentions Don’t Really Matter.” Rather than contradicting what I have been sharing about intentions, this article asks for elements of humility and openness in our intentions.

Published through the website [Everyday Feminism](#), the author Jamie Utt asks, “At what point does the ‘*intent*’ conversation stop mattering so that we can step back and look at impact?” The author is addressing the experiences of marginalization and oppression for people who are perceived as “other.”

“I never meant any harm...” “It was never my intent...” “I am not a racist...” “I am not a homophobe...” “I’m not a sexist...”

[“I’m not to blame; it wasn’t my intention to be hurtful.”]

I cannot tell you how often I’ve seen people attempt to deflect criticism about their oppressive language or actions by making the conversation about their intent.

In some ways, this is a simple lesson of relationships.

If I say something that hurts my partner, it doesn’t much matter whether I intended the statement to mean something else – *because my partner is hurting.*

I need to listen to how my language hurt my partner. I need to apologize.

And then I need to reflect and empathize to the best of my ability so I don't do it again.

But when we're dealing with the ways in which our identities intersect with those around us – *and, in turn, the ways our privileges and our experiences of marginalization and oppression intersect* – this lesson becomes something much larger and more profound.

This becomes a lesson of justice.

What we need to realize is that when it comes to people's lives and identities, the impact of our actions can be profound and wide-reaching.

And that's far more important than the question of our intent.

We need to ask ourselves what might be or might have been the impact of our actions or words.

And we need to step back and listen when we are being told that the impact of our actions is out of step with our intents or our perceptions of self.

After all, 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.

When your actions are called into question, it's important to recognize that that's *all* that is being called into question – your actions, not your overall character.

When we are told that the impact of our action, inaction, or words is hurtful and furthers oppression, we can start by apologizing *without any caveats*.

From there, we can spend the time to reflect in hopes of gaining at least some understanding (*however marginal*) of the harmful impact.

And we can do our best to move forward by acting more accountably.

Listen. Reflect. Apologize. Do Better.

A UU sermon, *Intent vs Impact*, reinforced attending to our intentions by encouraging listeners to “be more open to not knowing, to listening, to

reflecting, to not having to be right, ... and to exchanging defensiveness for humility and openness to what may come.”

The quote from Marion Milner I shared earlier ended, “It was only when I was actively passive, and content to wait and watch, that I really knew what I wanted.” I had been a bit confounded by the call to be “actively passive,” until I encountered the phrase, “humility and openness to what may come.” This helps me understand how to be actively passive: pause, set aside ego, and stay open.

To set intentions, we must listen to our inner voice which tells us who we truly are.

If we are able to carve out that quieter space, then maybe we will discover that this isn’t the year of “finally becoming a better me.” Maybe we’ll decide it’s enough to simply “finally be me.” (From *Living With Intention*, Soul Matters Small Group Packet, January, 2022)

To “carve out that quieter space... to listen to our inner voice which tells us who we truly are...” I invite you into a time for thinking, feeling, listening and being in silence and in music.

Our first meditation hymn is titled, “Dark of Winter.” The words are printed in the order of service. Whether you choose to read these silently to yourself or to simply listen to the music, I invite you to turn your attention inward. Allow your quiet calm to surround you... let your thoughts go where they will... ease your mind... Allow your soul to hear a voice... to hear your voice...

Believe what Lao Tzu promises, “At the center of your being, you have the answer; you know who you are, and you know what you want.”

The music will be followed by a period of silence.

Meditation Hymn 1: *Dark of Winter*, #55 in *Singing the Living Tradition*

Dark of winter, soft and still, your quiet calm surrounds me.
Let my thoughts go where they will; ease my mind profoundly.
And then my soul will sing a song, a blessed song of love eternal.
Gentle darkness, soft and still, bring your quiet to me.

Darkness, soothe my weary eyes, that I may see more clearly.
When my heart with sorrow cries, comfort and caress me.
And then my soul may hear a voice, a still, small voice of love eternal.
Darkness, when my fears arise, let your peace flow through me.

(Moments of Silence)

“...how can you even know your truth unless you slow down, in your own quiet company?” (Dawna Markova)

Knowing yourself, knowing your truth, your deepest values, to live with intention is not one and done; it is an ongoing practice of slowing down... creating your own quiet company.

“Knowing that we do not always live up to our best expectations of ourselves, let us in quietness seek the good within...” (Maryell Clearly, “In Quietness” from *Rejoice Together*)

Our second meditation hymn counsels us to “Find a Stillness.” Again, the lyrics are in the order of service; you may read them silently to yourself or to simply listen to the music. Again, open your mind and heart to your own quiet company... to “that center of your being [where] you have the answer; you know who you are, and you know what you want.”

The music will be followed by a period of silence.

Meditation Hymn 2: *Find A Stillness, #352 in Singing the Living Tradition*

Find a stillness, hold a stillness, let the stillness carry me.
Find the silence, hold the silence, let the silence carry me.
In the spirit, by the spirit, with the spirit giving power,
I will find true harmony.

Seek the essence, hold the essence, let the essence carry me.
Let me flower, help me flower, watch me flower, carry me.
In the spirit, by the spirit, with the spirit giving power,
I will find true harmony.

(Moments of Silence)

Closing Words

Our closing words are “The Daring of Our Intentions” by Rev. Scott Taylor:

May we dare to live from the center of our being.
May we make our own choices before others’ choices make us*
May the fire that burns in our belly light our way.
May our collective intention make the world shine anew.

**From a quote by Richie Norton*

Closing Song: *We Would Be One*, #318 in *Singing the Living Tradition*

Our closing song is “We Would Be One.” The “one” of the lyrics can be considered to be both each of us as a single self, and our collective community. We would be one...pledging to greater understanding of who we are and what in us is true... reflects our commitment to individually live with intention. Also, the one joined in building for tomorrow is our UUCY community pledging ourselves to greater service with love and justice.

The lyrics are printed in the order of service that you may sing quietly to yourself if desired while Sunny plays.

We would be one as now we join in singing
our hymn of love, to pledge ourselves anew
to that high cause of greater understanding
of who we are, and what in us is true.
We would be one in living for each other
to show to all a new community.

We would be one in building for tomorrow
a nobler world than we have known today.
We would be one in searching for that meaning
which bends our hearts and points us on our way.
As one, we pledge ourselves to greater service,
with love and justice, strive to make us free.

Extinguishing the Flame

We extinguish this flame
but not the light of truth,
the warmth of community,
or the fire of commitment.
These we carry in our hearts
until we are together again.

POSTLUDE