

# JOURNEYS

Theme Packet for October 2014

The Unitarian Fellowship of Peterborough

# Possibility



**Peoples Climate March, September 21, 2014, New York City**

Photos by Peter Bowden: Unitarian Universalist contingent (1500+ strong)  
<https://www.flickr.com/photos/116378748@N03/sets/72157647856044396/>

## Can you believe in the possibility?

My boat struck something deep.  
Nothing happened.  
Sound, silence, waves.  
Nothing happened?  
Or perhaps, everything happened  
And I'm sitting in the middle of my new life.

~ Juan Ramon Jimenez



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## WONDERINGS *on the theme of* POSSIBILITY

Go to just about any UU conference or workshop and there'll be a flipchart to record all the ideas...all the brainstorming...all the possibilities.

Possibility is central to UUism, rooted in our theological insistence on the potential of humanity, and embedded in our commitment to 'open minds.' Religious freedom, a value which resides in the very DNA of our faith, cannot exist without a variety of possible beliefs or philosophies from which to choose. We acknowledge that we live in mystery, that there is always more to know. We trust that we thrive best in an environment of multiplicity; we crave a diversity of voices; we are passionate about creating new manifestations...at least that's our 'talk'.

There are unlimited possibilities in our process of growing and becoming. But, on a daily basis, it is not always easy to 'dwell in possibility' or to 'walk our talk.' Possibility takes us into unfamiliar territory, requiring us to be open to change and to difference. It requires us to let go of something comfortable to make space for something new. It calls us to believe in ourselves and to trust that we can actually be more.

But, deep down, don't we long to hear the possibilities singing to us? Don't we want to stretch our eyes and imagine all that might be? Mary Oliver, in her poem *Such Singing in the Wild Branches* suggests that we take notice of the spring, and the trees, and the longing in our own soul, and then "open the door and fly out on our heavy feet" before the song drifts away.

When we can see that any situation comes with choices, and that it is always within our power to make a choice, possibilities arise. To seize them requires openness and courage...as well as some manner of discernment in order to choose what appears best...to pay attention to those longings that lure us to the places we need to go. It might not be an easy way forward, it might be a strange way forward, but once possibilities appear, so too does hope.

I encourage you to listen to your longing, and to lean into the possibilities.

With gratitude for the many ways we help each to open the doors, ~ Rev. Julie

### Theological Ponderings *about* POSSIBILITY

In an article about creativity, Rev. Barbara McKusick Liscord speaks of process theology, and refers to how two of our most famous UU theologians, Charles Hartshorne and Henry Nelson Weiman, wove possibility into the notion of god, with Hartshorne speaking of God "not as a supernatural being but as the creative becoming and possibility in every moment," and with Weiman defining God as "creative interchange - that part of the creative exchange between people that is not you or them but the third mysterious thing." God as possibility. Huh.

Similarly, in an April 2014 article for *Quest*, Rev. Elizabeth Stevens writes, "God works like the scent of pancakes in the morning, to waken longings deep in the heart, luring not just people but all of creation forward in a continually unfolding process of growing and becoming."



### Next month's theme: **COURAGE**

Do you have ideas for resources? A favourite novel, blog, poem, or movie? Maybe you've taken a photo or done some artwork for the front page? Email your suggestions to [unitarianchurch@cogeco.net](mailto:unitarianchurch@cogeco.net)

## STORIES *about* POSSIBILITY

A popular business anecdote tells about a shoe factory looking to expand its prospects abroad. The company sent two marketing scouts to a remote region of Africa to study the opportunities for expanding their business.

One sent back a telegram saying: Situation hopeless. No one wears shoes.

The other writes back triumphantly: Glorious business opportunity. They have no shoes.

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From **The Art of Possibility** (story written by Rev. Shawn Newton)

This book by Benjamin Zander, the conductor of the Boston Philharmonic, and his wife Rosamund, a psychologist, *The Art of Possibility* explores ways to open the self to possibility. Zander is also a professor of music. Rather than accepting the traditional way of marking and ranking students, he choose, in one class, to give all of his students at the conservatory an “A” at the outset of each semester.

All that is required of them is that they write a letter in the first week of classes, post-dated to the end of the semester, describing why he or she got the grade. And, then, they are invited to live into that A.

Here’s part of a letter of one student, describing his experience in the class: “In Taiwan, I was Number 68 out of 70 students. I come to Boston and Mr. Zander says I am an A. Very confusing. I walk about, [for] three weeks, very confused. I am number 68, but Mr. Zander says I am an A student.... One day I discover I [am] much happier as an A than Number 68. So I decide I am an A.”

“An A,” Zander says, “can be given to anyone – to a waitress, to your employer, to your mother-in-law, to the members of the opposite team, and to the other drivers in traffic. When you give an A, you find yourself speaking to people not from a place of measuring how they stack up against your standards, but from a place of respect that gives them room to realize themselves. Your eye is on the statue within the roughness of the uncut stone.

“This A is not an expectation to live up to, but a possibility to live into.”

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### QUESTIONS *for reflection on* POSSIBILITY

- Where do you need more possibility in your life?
- Is there a dead end that needs a shaft of sunlight?
- What new possibilities can you imagine?
- Are you willing to consider the possibility that you might be more, that life could be more, that this day could be more?



## INSPIRATIONS *on* POSSIBILITY

"Man often becomes what he believes himself to be. If I keep on saying to myself that I cannot do a certain thing, it is possible that I may end by really becoming incapable of doing it. On the contrary, if I have the belief that I can do it, I shall surely acquire the capacity to do it even if I may not have it at the beginning." — *Mahatma Gandhi*

"You do not need to know precisely what is happening, or exactly where it is all going. What you need is to recognize the possibilities and challenges offered by the present moment, and to embrace them with courage, faith and hope." — *Thomas Merton*

"Without leaps of imagination or dreaming, we lose the excitement of possibilities. Dreaming, after all is a form of planning." — *Gloria Steinem*

"We must be willing to get rid of the life we planned, so as to have the life that is waiting for us. The old skin has to be shed before the new one can come." — *Joseph Campbell*

"It's the possibility that keeps me going, not the guarantee." — *Nicholas Sparks, The Notebook*

"A thought, even a possibility, can shatter and transform us." — *Friedrich Nietzsche*

i dwell in  
possibility...  
emily dickinson

"All life is rife with possibilities. Seeds have possibilities, but all their tomorrows are caught by the patterning of their life cycle. Animals have possibilities that are greater than that of a fir tree or a blade of grass. Still, though, for most animals, the pattern of instinct, the patterns of their lives, are very strong. Humanity has a far greater range of possibilities, especially the very young. Who will children grow up to be? Who will they marry, what will they believe, what will they create? Creation is a very powerful seed of possibility." — *Patricia Briggs, River Marked*

ponder  
the beauty  
of possibility

"We tend to consider imagination too lightly, forgetting that the life we make, for ourselves individually and for the world as a whole, is shaped and limited only by the perimeters of our imagination. Things are as we imagine them to be, as we imagine them into existence. Imagination is creativity, and the way we make our world depends on the vitality of our imagination." — *Thomas Merton*

"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, young and ardent, sees the possible. And what wine is so sparkling, what is so fragrant, what is so intoxicating, as possibility!" — *Søren Kierkegaard*

"All the possibilities of your human destiny are asleep in your soul. You are here to realize and honor these possibilities. When love comes in to your life, unrecognized dimensions of your destiny awaken and blossom and grow. Possibility is the secret heart of time." — *John O'Donohue, Anam Cara: A Book of Celtic Wisdom*

"All things are possible until they are proven impossible." — *Pearl S. Buck*

"It may have happened, it may not have happened but it could have happened." — *Mark Twain*

"But this was that view of human destiny which she had most passionately hated and rejected: the view that man was ever to be drawn by some vision of the unattainable shining ahead, doomed ever to aspire, but not to achieve. Her life and her values could not bring her to that, she thought; she had never found beauty in longing for the impossible and had never found the possible to be beyond her reach." — *Ayn Rand, Atlas Shrugged*

## PRACTICING POSSIBILITY

### Spiritual Exercise #1: Look at the World through the Eyes of Possibility

- Choose one of the poems below....whichever most speaks to you.
- Cut it out; put it someplace where you'll encounter it every day.
- For two weeks, start the day off by reading it at least once. The idea is to get it stuck in your head.
- Reflect on, and share with others, how this practice has helped you to see things in a new way.

#### *Things to Think* ~ Robert Bly

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,  
Vaster than a hundred lines of Yeats.  
Think that someone may bring a bear to your door,  
Maybe wounded and deranged; or think that a  
moose  
Has risen out of the lake, and he's carrying on his  
antlers  
A child of your own whom you've never seen.  
When someone knocks on the door,  
Think that he's 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.

#### *Everything is Waiting for You* ~ David Whyte

Your great mistake is to act the drama  
as if you were alone. As if life  
were a progressive and cunning crime  
with no witness to the tiny hidden  
transgressions. To feel abandoned is to deny  
the intimacy of your surroundings. Surely,  
even you, at times, have felt the grand array;  
the swelling presence, and the chorus, crowding  
out your solo voice. You must note  
the way the soap dish enables you,  
or the window latch grants you freedom.  
Alertness is the hidden discipline of familiarity.  
The stairs are your mentor of things  
to come, the doors have always been there  
to frighten you and invite you,  
and the tiny speaker in the phone  
is your dream-ladder to divinity.  
Put down the weight of your aloneness and ease  
into the conversation. The kettle is singing  
even as it pours you a drink, the cooking pots  
have left their arrogant aloofness and  
seen the good in you at last. All the birds  
and creatures of the world are unutterably  
themselves. Everything is waiting for you.

### Spiritual Exercise #2:

#### *Pick a "Can't" and Commit to Proving it Wrong!*

There are so many ways in which we close the door  
on possibility...automatically...without even thinking.  
We tell ourselves stories...things about who we are  
(or aren't) and what we're capable of (or aren't), and  
our words drown out the possibility of anything else.

- Think of the things in your life that you've  
place a big fat **CAN'T** beside. Pick one that  
where you can hear your inner voice, no matter  
how faint, saying "Why not?" or "Are you sure?"
- Commit to taking this *can't* on. Make a promise  
to yourself that you'll do what it takes, for as  
long as it takes, to prove it wrong!

Or, come at it from this angle:

Pick a supposed impossibility. Think of  
something you've told yourself you could  
NEVER do, even though you believe it would  
help you to experience life differently. Be  
imaginative, or even a little bit nuts!  
Anything is possible!

### Children's Books on POSSIBILITY

*Playing Right Field* by Willy Welch  
*What do you do with an Idea?* by Kobi Yamada  
*Oh, the Things You Can Think* by Dr. Seuss  
*That's a Possibility!: A Book About What Might  
Happen*  
by Bruce Goldstone  
*Ruby Lee the Bumble Bee: A Bee of Possibility* by  
Dawn Matheson  
*The Realm of Possibility* by David Levithan (age  
12+)

## Resources on POSSIBILITY

### On the Web

*Possibility* - Lykke Li (music video)

[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RvMeOllo\\_Vo](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RvMeOllo_Vo)

*Leadership, An Art of Possibility* – Benjamin Zaner

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nTav0D3YIN4>

*Possibility Days* - Counting Crows (music, audio)

[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dityp2WT\\_yE](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dityp2WT_yE)

*Navigating Our Global Future*, Ian Golden

[http://www.ted.com/talks/ian\\_goldin\\_navigating\\_our\\_global\\_future](http://www.ted.com/talks/ian_goldin_navigating_our_global_future)

*Can Technology Solve our Big Problems?* Jason Pontin

[http://www.ted.com/talks/jason\\_pontin\\_can\\_technology\\_solve\\_our\\_big\\_problems](http://www.ted.com/talks/jason_pontin_can_technology_solve_our_big_problems)

### Movies

*Fitzcarraldo*, 1982 (PG) The story of an extremely determined man who intends to build an opera house in the middle of a jungle.

*Burden of Dreams*, 1982 (NR) Documentary about the making of *Fitzcarraldo* (above.)

*What Dreams May Come*, 1998 (PG13) A man dies to find himself in a heaven more amazing than he could ever have dreamed of. After life there is more. The end is just the beginning.

*Finding Joe*, 2011 (NR) Focusing on the teachings of mythologist, Joseph Campbell, this documentary looks at the Hero's journey which is "to go beyond what we perceive as the limits of our possibility."

*The Realm of Possibility*, 2009 (NR) ...a digital animation based at the intersection of absurdity and logic.

### Table Grace on POSSIBILITY

Looking at our empty plates, may we know the possibility of being fed.

Looking at our full plates, may we acknowledge all that made this food possible.

Contemplating our food, may we remember that many are still hungry.

Beginning to eat, may we recognize all that is possible when we are nourished...the possibility for joy, for service, for justice.

Finishing our meal, we offer our gratitude.

Washing the dishes, we remember that it is possible to find the sacred in all we do.

Amen. (After a prayer by Thich Nhat Hanh)

### Chalice Lighting on RENEWAL

Welcome to this place of possibility!  
This is love's hearth, the home of hope,  
a refuge for minds in search of truth  
unfolding, ever beautiful, ever strange.

Here, compassion is our shelter  
freedom our protection  
from the storms of bigotry and hate.

In this abode, may we find  
comfort and courage.

Here may our sight become vision  
to see the unseen,  
to glimpse the good that is yet to be.

- Marianne Hachten Cotter

### Books

*Conversations for Power and Possibility: Four Simple Conversations to Transform Your Life and Change the World* by Darlene Chrissley

*The Art of Possibility* by Rosamund and Benjamin Zander

*Man's Search for Meaning* by Victor Frankl

*Conquest of the Useless: Reflections from the Making of Fitzcarraldo* by Werner Herzog

*What Color Is Your Parachute? 2015: A Practical Manual for Job-Hunters and Career-Changers* by Richard N. Bolles

*Infinite Possibilities: The Art of Living Your Dreams* by Mike Dooley

*10: What's on Your Top Ten List?* by Dan Zadra

*Possibility: Essays Against Despair* by Patricia Vigderman

Thanks to all who helped create this packet by writing text, suggesting resources, offering artwork and providing feedback! We subscribe to "Soul Matters" a curriculum from Rev. Scott Taylor. Service Leaders and Covenant Group Facilitators work with Rev. Julie Stoneberg to incorporate the theme into our programming & Sunday Services. Would you like to share your talents?

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