Reading for Reflection Before the Group Meeting

Soul Matters: What Does it Mean to be a People of Possibility?

[Catholics](http://catholicphilly.com/2014/03/catholic-spirituality/walk-into-the-starkness-of-lent-seeking-a-word-in-the-desert/) 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](https://abbeyofthearts.com/blog/2016/12/06/give-me-a-word-2017-8th-annual-giveaway/)” would offer people a word or a phrase to ponder for weeks, years, or 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 were not instructions as much as invitations to open oneself in new ways. As one [writer](https://abbeyofthearts.com/blog/2017/01/01/new-year-blessings-what-is-your-word-for-the-year-a-love-note-from-your-online-abbess/) puts it, they are about deepening and unfolding, rather than fixing and improving.

So in this New Year, let’s 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 onto your word. Some people put their word on their computer’s screen saver or cellphone’s home screen. Others have drawn their word on a [rock](https://www.myoldsmar.com/ImageRepository/Document?documentID=5285) or made/bought [jewelry](https://www.etsy.com/market/one_word_jewelry) with the word on it. Creative folks and families have done [vision boards](http://oneword365.com) 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 the words 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://abbeyofthearts.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/>

Soul Matters: What Does it Mean to be a People of Possibility?

Eno River Unitarian Universalist Fellowship, January 2019

# Logistics (10-15 minutes)

Planning for future sessions, service projects, etc.

# Opening words and lighting the chalice

“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

# Check-in (35-40 minutes)

# Topic: Possibility

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.

# Sharing thoughts on the topic (one speaker at a time, no cross-talk)

Select two or three questions from this list for sharing:

1. Share your word you selected for the year with the group and the reason(s) why you chose it.
2. 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?
3. What are others learning about living and leaning into possibility by watching you?
4. Who taught you the most about "living and leaning into possibility"? How does their memory call you to today?
5. What did your childhood and family of origin teach you about possibility? Are those lessons ones you need to remember or reject?

# Open discussion on the topic (people may speak at will, being respectful of others)

After everyone has had a chance to share individually, as time permits, the discussion will be opened for cross-talk on the topic and additional sharing.

# Likes & wishes (~10 minutes before the end of the 90-minute session)

* What did you like about the session?
* What would you like to see happen in future sessions?

# Closing words and extinguishing the chalice

“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