

The Path

Introduction from Soul Matters

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

- Katie Covey, on what she learned from Soul Matters colleagues during their brainstorming session on intention

So here we are again, in the month of January with its talk of daring resolutions and its demanding call to "become better." It's hard not to buy into it. We are tempted to go along and declare, "This is the year I'm going to finally be a better me!"

But are we sure this is what we really want? When you read that quote above about being "pulled in" rather than "pushed out," what happens in your heart? Do you find yourself still excited about the New Year's work of striving to become a brand new self? Or do you suddenly notice an internal whisper that says, "I long to be pulled in more deeply to the self I already am"? In other words, maybe our real New Year's work is not about leaping into self-improvement, but about pausing, stepping back and asking, "What hunger really has my heart?"

There is, after all, a big difference between becoming better and becoming ourselves. Self-improvement is not the same as self-alignment. Wanting to get from point A to point B is something quite different from longing to find your inner anchor. Goals and intentions may indeed be more distinct than we have thought.

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What Does It Mean to Be a People of Intention?



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So this month, maybe our most important work is to make room. All around us, there's going to be plenty of busy talk about being "a people of goals and resolutions." We are going to get more than enough advice about how to stay focused on a new future for ourselves. But in the midst of it all, may we, as a people of intention, also carve out a quieter place that keeps our attention closer to the present and who we *already are at our center*. May we make space for listening before we leap into the striving. And as we do that, 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."

2017/2018 Themes

September – Welcome
October – Courage
November – Abundance
December – Hope
January – Intention
February – Perseverance
March – Balance
April – Emergence
May – Creativity
June – Blessing

Self-Care for the Spiritual Journey

When we go deeper into spiritual exploration together and individually, there's always a chance we will encounter some tender spots in our own spirits and stories. Therefore, it is important, when doing deep spiritual work, to have trusted companions and adequate support on the journey, and to know you are welcome to care for yourself and your spirit along the way, engaging in the theme to the level that's comfortable for you.



Likewise, please know that we are here to offer support if you find yourself struggling with something surfaced by the monthly theme. Rev. Mara is our first point of contact for pastoral care. She may be able to set up a time to meet you, or refer you to Andre Mol, our ministerial intern, caring lay leaders through our Care Network, or outside resources. She can be reached at revmara@uusociety.org or (802) 862-5630 ext. 24.

Option A: Filling in the Blanks with Intention

It's not easy to stay true to your deepest intentions. But often it's even harder to figure out what they are. This exercise assumes that our deepest self already knows our core intentions and our work is to decipher what it wants us to hear. To help, you are invited to fill in the uncompleted sentences **below** and then step back to see what they are trying to tell you. When filling in the blanks, don't spend a lot of time pondering what to put in the blank. Instead just write down the first or second thing that pops in your head.

After you complete the sentences, use these questions to help you reflect on the work you've done:

- What would you change after giving the completed sentences a second look?
- What surprises you?
- Would your closest friend agree with how you filled in the blanks?
- What two or three sentences seem to merit your greatest attention right now?
- What single intention are you ready to make based on listening deeply to what the list of completed sentences is trying to tell you?

If you are in a Theme Circle, come to your group ready to share a question or two that you engaged the most and why that was so. And if you are comfortable, consider telling the group what single intention you set based on the exercise.

Intentional Fill-In the Blanks

1. My most important promise to myself is _____.
2. I will help others by _____.
3. Because of me, those I care about will understand that _____.
4. I have always wanted to _____.
5. I am on this earth to _____.
6. I will learn more about _____.
7. I am avoiding _____.
8. If I could change one thing about myself it would be _____.
9. At my funeral, the two adjectives I hope people use to describe me are _____ & _____.
10. I have always intended to _____ once I have finished _____.
11. When I stop procrastinating, I will _____.
12. I am most happy when I am _____.
13. I want to spend the rest of my life becoming a _____.
14. I want to spend the rest of my life doing _____.
15. In five years, people will be surprised that I am _____.

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Spiritual Exercises

Option B: Start Your Day with Intention

“At the beginning of the day, the mind is most open to receive new impressions. One of the most important things we can do is to take full responsibility for the power of the morning.” -*Marianne Williamson*

“Your day is pretty much determined by how you spend your first hour.” -*Anon*

This exercise invites you to explore the power of intentional mornings. Too often our days take hold of us rather than us taking ahold of them. For at least one week, pick one of the below practices to begin your day with a greater sense of intentionality and purpose.

Pick a Word

Carve out some time each morning to complete the sentence: “Today I want to be/feel _____.” You can do this while you are meditating, brushing your teeth, eating breakfast or walking the dog. Just make enough room to pick one descriptive word that you want to walk with throughout your day. Pull that word into your awareness throughout the day. It helps to literally place it in front of yourself. Write it on a 3x5 card and place it on your desk or put it in your wallet or purse. Maybe even write it on your hand!

Get Grateful

Begin your day with gratitude. So many ways to do this. You can keep it simple by just sitting in silence and pulling into your mind the things you’re looking forward to or the things with which you are blessed. One focused way is to start each day by thinking of a person you are grateful for in your life, letting the good energy from that relationship flow into you.

Nourish

This route gives you permission to indulge yourself and give yourself the gift of generosity. It invites you to begin your day with the feeling of being gifted by life, rather than armoring up for the battle of another day. You can keep it very simple. For instance, shower with aromatherapy, treat yourself to a special cup of coffee or tea, give yourself an extra 30 minutes to get ready at a slower pace or wake up early enough to see the sunrise. Whatever it is, add something to your morning routine that nourishes you.

Sing

Get up. Pick a song you love. And do nothing but sing it or sing along with it. Songs have more power than we give them credit for. Don’t underestimate the power of singing as opposed to just listening. When the words come out of your mouth, the music gets more deeply into your body and spirit, enabling the feeling to stay with you and “set the tone” for the entire day.

Be in Nature

Get out and connect with nature rather than the morning news. Let the smells, sights and weather on your skin remind you of your deeper and wider connections. Begin the day with a wider sense of who you are. Feeling a part of something larger helps you maintain perspective during the day. Feeling connected to the interdependent universe reminds you that you are not alone. Here’s one version of a [walking meditation](#) if you’re looking for some inspiration.

Be Silent

It’s the most basic of spiritual practices: Empty yourself and let yourself sit only with silence and your breath. Here’s a [5-minute breathing meditation](#) and a [TED talk](#) to help you out if you’re new to this practice.

Inspire Yourself

Start your morning off with something that inspires you: a podcast, a poem, an inspirational audio book, a work of art from the internet or simply a quote. We find it so easy to begin our days with what is weighing us down. Why not turn things on their head and start with something that lifts you up?

1. What does it mean to live a life of intention?
2. How do you shape your days? Do they unfold with intention? What gets in the way or sidetracks your efforts to live intentionally?
3. Are you sometimes too intentional? Sometimes adhering to our intentions can block us from other important spiritual values, such as spontaneity or empathy or openness. How do we find the right balance between living with intention and letting go of our intentions when “life calls us on”?
4. Those working in the field of anti-oppression have long noted the difference between “intention” and “impact.” Sometimes, despite good intentions, the impact of actions can still be harmful. What do you make of this distinction? How have you experienced it in your life?
5. How did you relate to this month’s Introduction on Intention? Did it resonate with you at all? Do you feel tugged toward setting resolutions to be “better” at this time of year? Do you feel inspired to make space to find the deeper you?

Resources for Exploration and Reflection

Word Roots

From Latin *intentus*: “to stretch out, lean toward.” In 17th century English law: “state of mind with respect to intelligent volition.”

Wise Words

“It is not enough to be busy. So are the ants. The question is: What are you busy about?” -*Henry David Thoreau*

“Those who have a why to live for can bear almost any how.” -*Friedrich Nietzsche*

“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 E. Frankl*

“Your day is pretty much determined by how you spend your first hour.” -*Anon*

“Any dead fish can go with the flow — you have to be intentionally alive to swim against the current.” -*Ann Voskamp*

Cat: Where are you going?

Alice: Which way should I go?

Cat: That depends on where you are going.

Alice: I don’t know.

Cat: Then it doesn’t matter which way you go.

-*Lewis Carroll, Alice in Wonderland*

“A person will worship something, have no doubt about that. We may think our tribute is paid in secret in the dark recesses of our hearts, but it will out. That which dominates our imaginations and our thoughts will determine our lives, and our character. Therefore, it behooves us to be careful what we worship, for what we are worshipping we are becoming.”

-*Ralph Waldo Emerson*

“Great minds have purpose, others have wishes.” -*Washington Irving*

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“With goals, the future is always the focus: Are you going to reach the goal? Will you be happy when you do? What’s next? 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 ever-present ‘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... 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. What would it be like if you didn’t measure the success of your life just by what you get and don’t get, but gave equal or greater priority to how aligned you are with your deepest values?” -*Phillip Moffitt, from [“The Heart’s Intention”](#)*

“‘Sacred space’ is another way of saying ‘with intention.’”
-*S. Kelley Harrell*

“Let me tell you why I come to church. I come to church—and would whether I was a preacher or not—because I fall below my own standards and need to be constantly brought back to them. I am afraid of becoming selfish and indulgent, and my church—my church of the free spirit—brings me back to what I want to be. I could easily despair; doubt and dismay could overwhelm me. My church renews my courage and my hope. It is not enough that I should think about the world and its problems at the level of a newspaper report or magazine discussion. It could too soon become too low a level. I must have my conscience sharpened—sharpened until it goads me to the most thorough and responsible thinking of which I am capable. I must feel again the love I owe to others. I must not only hear about it but feel it. In church, I do. I am brought toward my best, in every way toward my best.”
-*Rev. A. Powell Davies, Unitarian Minister*

“You too can be carved anew by the details of your devotion.” -*Mary Oliver*

“Conscious change is brought about by the two qualities inherent in consciousness – intention and attention... Whatever you put your attention on will grow stronger in your life. Whatever you take your attention away from will wither, disintegrate and disappear.” -*Deepak Chopra*

“I am in earnest - I will not equivocate - I will not excuse - I will not retreat a single inch; and I will be heard.”
-*William Lloyd Garrison*

“Gratitude is not an emotion that comes upon us without our control. It is not dependent on what happens to us, but on our intention. Like good posture, it is a practice, an attitude that is entirely our choice in every moment... A friend of mine told me once after a particularly lovely day she came home, sat in her easy chair and said out loud, ‘Thank You.’ And she swears she heard a voice say out loud, ‘You’re welcome.’ Practice gratitude. For everything. For what you see out the window, for what you hear from your co-workers, say ‘Thank You.’ When your kids walk in the room, when you take a breath, when your spouse tells you how to drive, when to stub your toe, say ‘Thank You.’ Practice gratitude and eventually you will be able to hear the universe say, ‘You’re welcome.’” -*Steve Garraas-Holmes*

Today I want to greet joy
Without a trace of suspicion
I want to open my eyes to the light
Without a blink of dread
I want to look at my past
Without a whisper of shame
I want to look at my future
Without a hint of fear
Today I want to dance
Without pausing to think
I want to belly laugh
Without caring who hears
I want to open my arms
and twirl in the sun
Until I fall breathless
free to be myself
full of the joy
that I open to allow
completely letting go
Without even a smudge of suspicion
or a wink of hesitation
That’s my intention
It’s what I want
-*Amy Loyd*

“Habits eat good intentions for breakfast.” -*John Ortberg*

Resources

“Folks write down the name of someone who fills them with frustration, disappointment, and/or resentment, and then I propose that their person is doing the best he or she can. The responses have been wide-ranging... One woman said, ‘If this was true and my mother was doing the best she can, I would be grief-stricken. I’d rather be angry than sad, so it’s easier to believe she’s letting me down on purpose than grieve the fact that my mother is never going to be who I need her to be.’” -*Brené Brown, Rising Strong*

“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*

“I hope that in this year to come, you make mistakes. Because if you are making mistakes, then you are making new things, trying new things, learning, living, pushing yourself, changing yourself, changing your world. You’re doing things you’ve never done before, and more importantly, you’re Doing Something. So... Make New Mistakes. Make glorious, amazing mistakes. Make mistakes nobody’s ever made before. Don’t freeze, don’t stop, don’t worry that it isn’t good enough, or it isn’t perfect, whatever it is: art, or love, or work or family or life. Whatever it is you’re scared of doing, Do it.” -*Neil Gaiman*

Songs and Music

One Life - *James Morrison*

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Bq4LJc6eVKs>

Today I’m Gonna Try and Change the World

Cover of song written by Johnny Reid

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ccm_6HwUbs

Landslide - *Stevie Nicks and Lindsey Buckingham*

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1sQ7cuYgizw> and

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=eYQzKDD_T0M

(Ashley Stevenson cover)

“Well, I’ve been afraid of changing...”

Defying Gravity (cover)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bijDjmQhF1Y>

“Something has changed within me/Something is not the same/I’m through with playing by the rules of someone else’s game/Too late for second-guessing/Too late to go back to sleep/It’s time to trust my instincts/Close my eyes and leap!”

Sleep When We Die - *Kenna* (Talk and song - MUST WATCH! Song starts at minute 12:20.)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dPQ-Ez5j270>

Musician and activist Kenna speaks on purpose, intention and social change, and then sings a powerful version of his song, “Sleep When We Die.” A must watch and must listen! “I want you to like my music, but I want you to love my purpose...” “Entertain your crazy!”

100 Years - *Five for Fighting*

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tR-qQcNT_fY or

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bO65i93oYUk>

(cover) “When you only got hundred years to live...”

Videos

What is Your Purpose in Life? - People ages 6-100 answer

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mK66az43EOI&t=26s>

Resolutions: I Promise - Spoken Word Poem

Natalie Patterson

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kuEShILy4MA>

Living With Intent - TED Talk - *Mallika Chopra*

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UTwRlZ13NYI>

A video celebrating everyday people doing everyday things with intention. And a reminder about three questions that determine the quality of our days: Who am I? What do I want? How can I serve?

Turning Mass Intention Into Mass Action - *Todd Rogers*

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Fn82cNy52a4>

The three secrets of turning intention into action: making a plan, applying peer pressure and reinforcing identity!

Reinvent Your Life - *Charles Bukowski*

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9CQII0P4piQ>

What Will Your Verse Be?

https://www.youtube.com/watch?time_continue=85&v=R_zsMwCOoEs

Excerpted from the film *Dead Poets Society*. Intentionally choosing the “verse” that our lives will contribute.

You Are About to Get Your Life Back

[https://www.facebook.com/upliftconnect/](https://www.facebook.com/upliftconnect/videos/1040500262753621/)

[videos/1040500262753621/](https://www.facebook.com/upliftconnect/videos/1040500262753621/)

The Power of Choice

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mfx6aSCutEo>

The challenge of choosing growth or safety, and doing it with intention.

Resources

Choice & Doubting Our Decisions - Alan Watts

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=D7CH9cRN8Rg>

The challenges of intentionality and the inevitability of doubting our decisions. What to do? Be gentle with yourself and treat yourself like a cloud!

Man Filmed a Tree in the Woods for a Year

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=CGccrPoAr5I>

The gift of intentional and sustained intention.

Auggie's Photo Album

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JGV_h36uZ5E

"You'll never get it if you don't slow down my friend..."

Ten Minutes of Intentional Mindfulness - TED Talk

https://www.ted.com/talks/andy_puddicombe_all_it_takes_is_10_mindful_minutes

Let Justice Roll! - Marble Collegiate Community Gospel Choir, narrated by James Earl Jones. Narration includes excerpts from Dr. Martin Luther King's "Letter from the Birmingham City Jail."

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vRlyRot2UgE>

The Story of the Confederacy, Controlling History & Intentional Misinformation

<https://www.facebook.com/ezraklein/videos/784311181756486/>

Podcasts

Outside In - Invisibilia Podcast

<http://www.npr.org/programs/invisibilia/485606589/outside-in?showDate=2016-07-29>

This episode explores the effort to change oneself by intentionally changing one's outer circumstances. If you purposefully rearrange something on the surface, does internal change follow?

Oops - RadioLab Podcast

<http://www.radiolab.org/story/91721-oops/>

Stories of unintended consequences that arose from good intentions.

Articles

"Am I in the River?" by Myke Johnson

<https://findingourwayhome.blog/2015/10/27/am-i-in-the-river/> "The intention creates its own magic..."

Intentionally Talking to Our Children About Difference

<http://www.upworthy.com/a-viral-video-celebrating-kids-who-dont-see-difference-may-be-missing-a-larger-point?c=upw1&u=41aa6fc0057fcfdc850d917bc669deaf216c544e>

Intentional Mealtime - UTNE Reader

<http://www.utne.com/mind-and-body/mindful-eating-ze0z1211zsau>

What If You Intentionally Made Time to Just Think?

http://www.businessinsider.com/i-created-a-2-hour-rule-based-einsteins-habits-2017-8?utm_source=Dan+Pink%27s+Newsletter&utm_campaign=fa95415343-EMAIL_CAMPAIGN_2017_09_12&utm_medium=email&utm_term=0_4d8277f97a-fa95415343-313330493&goal=0_4d8277f97a-fa95415343-313330493

Books

The Power of Habit by Charles Duhigg

How to intentionally change your habits and take back your life.

The Art of Pilgrimage by Phil Cousineau

Using intention to bring a new perspective to everyday "journeys." "Phil Cousineau invites us to extend our vision of pilgrimage to something beyond an actual journey to Jerusalem, Mecca, or Machu Picchu. He invites us to think about unique times or stages in our lives that might hold a special difficulty. Perhaps extended time at the bedside of a loved one in hospice could be seen as a pilgrimage of sorts. Or walking with a child through a health crisis, or a learning challenge. Maybe a short-term job assignment, or an unwelcome task that comes our way could be reframed in this way. Perhaps even just a regular day on the calendar could be reimaged."

Where We Belong by Hoda Kotb

From a review: "Kotb writes about individuals who realized their path in life was either veering off in a completely new direction or was getting too far off course from where they knew they belonged. By following their passions, their gut, and their heart, these people intentionally took their life in a new and more meaningful direction. From the investment banker who became a minister after years of working on Wall Street, to the young woman from a blue-collar background whose passion took her to Harvard Medical School, to the high-powered PR exec who found herself drawn to a pioneering residential community, to a 'no-kids' guy who now helps children all over the world."

The Miracle of Mindfulness by Thich Nhat Hanh

Offers reflections and practical exercises as a means of learning the skills of mindfulness.

Movies

Smoke

https://www.rottentomatoes.com/m/1062983_smoke and https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JGV_h36uZ5E (clip).

A story about moving from wandering through life to living it intentionally.

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http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0453562/?ref=nm_sr_1

The story of Jackie Robinson and unfailing intention, endurance and belief in one's inherent worth.

Field of Dreams (PG)

http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0097351/?ref=fn_tt_tt_1

A classic on the theme of faith and intention: "If you build it, they will come."

Billy Elliot

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

A young miner's son's intention to become a ballet dancer changes his life, and the lives of those around him.

Ratatouille (G)

http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0382932/?ref=nm_sr_2

A tiny rat with the big intention to become a gourmet chef. What else is there to say?!

