

The Path

Introduction from Soul Matters

“Let mystery have its place in you; do not be always turning up your whole soil with the plowshare of self-examination, but leave a little fallow corner in your heart ready for any seed the winds may bring, and reserve a nook of shadow for the passing bird; keep a place in your heart for the unexpected guests, an altar for an unknown God.” - *Henri-Frédéric Amiel*

Make a bit of room. Leave a little space. Keep a lookout for the unexpected. These directions may not sound like anything radical or revolutionary. But it turns out that these are often life’s favorite ways to help us emerge into something new.

Amiel’s reminder about leaving room and letting some things be is especially important as we move into the season of spring. During this time of year, it’s not just farmers but all of us who turn to the work of “tilling and turning up our whole soil.” All around us, the culture shouts its heroic talk about striving and perfecting. Struggle is the dominant metaphor of the day. We talk of “fighting” to become all we can be. Images of sprouts breaking through concrete start showing up everywhere. Yet, we need to be careful because, more often than not, emergence and transformation is a much subtler art. It’s about stillness, listening and waiting to be led, not conquering, struggle and taking charge.

In other words, when it comes to emerging into something new, the message of spirituality is “Be careful with what you’ve been taught and told because much of it takes us in exactly the wrong direction.” As a people of emergence, we are called to take a different tack. We’ve been entrusted with the wisdom that emergence is most often about breathing rather than becoming better, patience not perfection, depth not dominance, acceptance not striving, attention not constant improvement.

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What Does It Mean to Be a People of Emergence?



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That part about attention instead of improvement is especially important. It's so easy to get transformation mixed up with fixing. And fixing is emergence's biggest foe. Trying to perfect or prove ourselves is the surest way to stay stuck. The pursuit of constant improvement and perfection focuses us on our inadequacy and inferiority, causing us to overlook those unexpected guests that Amiel speaks of.

And, friends, we don't want to miss those unexpected guests! Those seeds brought by the wind and those passing birds are the partners that make emergence possible. They help us notice new paths. They invite us to walk with a new step, and they awaken in us new songs. They remind us that new life is not something we do alone. They assure us that transformation doesn't have to be a long and lonely struggle, but instead can be more like learning a new dance with a new friend. All we have to do is trust, take the hand of that "unknown God" and follow its lead.

So, this month, leave some room on that dance floor of yours. Keep your eyes peeled. And when that unexpected guest reaches out its hand, make sure you're ready to take hold.

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: Notice Your Noes & Let Some Yesses Loose

Okay, let's admit it: We say "no" more often than we can count - or more often than we are aware. It's our default mode. We are so good at coming up with reasons to say no: 'There's not enough time. It's too risky. You've got to prioritize. You've got to be realistic. Adults know how to delay gratification. I've been burned before.

These Noes keep us safe. That's important and needs to be affirmed. But it's also true that many of our knee-jerk Noes cut us off from new life, like that lawn spray that kills the weeds but eliminates the wildflowers, as well. Or to use an Easter metaphor: Often, with our Noes, we roll the stone in front of our own tombs.

So this month, to honor spring's celebration of wildflowers and Easter's call to roll away the stone, you are invited to let some Yesses loose and see what kind of new life emerges. Here are your instructions put as simply as possible:

Try to say "Yes" as often as you can!

Patricia Ryan Madson, drama professor and author, captures the possibilities inherent in this seemingly playful, but seriously daring spiritual discipline. She writes,

"This is going to sound crazy. Say yes to everything. Accept all offers. Go along with the plan. Support someone else's dream. Say: "yes"; "right"; "sure"; "I will"; "okay"; "of course"; "YES!" Cultivate all the ways you can imagine to express affirmation. When the answer to all questions is yes, you enter a new world, a world of action, possibility, and adventure... It is undoubtedly an exaggeration to suggest that we can say yes to everything that comes up, but we can all say yes to more than we normally do. Once you become aware that you can, you will see how often we use the technique of blocking in personal relationships and life simply out of habit. Turning this around can bring positive and unexpected results..."

Keep it simple. Try it for 2-3 days and see how it goes. Just catch yourself right before the word "No" spills from your lips and say "Yes" instead. To keep yourself on task, consider printing out these words on a small card or piece of paper and place it somewhere you will see it throughout the day: **"Accept all offers. Go along with the plan. Support someone else's dream. Say: "yes"; "right"; "sure"; "I will"; "okay"; "Yes and..." not "Yes but..."**

Along the way, try to pay attention to your relationship to Yesses and Noes. What kind of Yes:No ratio rules your life? How do your Yesses and Noes impact those around you? Who taught you that Yesses are risky and Noes are safe? Who desperately needs your Yes, but you've been too busy to notice?

Come to your group ready to share what you learned, what surprised you and what emerged by simply letting Yes loose! Here are a handful of resources to guide and inspire you:

- **The YES Challenge!** https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jKQuY_X2WtY
- **My Year of Saying Yes to Everything - TED Talk** <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gmj-azFbpkA>
- **Yes Is What Makes a Life - TED Talk** <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1vBVXrHanoc>
- **Improv lesson - "Yes and..."** <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NmafmrIeet0>
- **Called to Say Yes** (poem) <https://www.journeywithjesus.net/poemsandprayers/560-edwina-gateley-called-to-say-yes>

Spiritual Exercises

Option B: Emerge From the Tomb of Worry

“We suffer more often in imagination than in reality.” - *Seneca*

When it comes to the tombs that keep us trapped, worry tops the list for many of us. The tragedy is that, as Seneca points out, many of those worries are imagined. In other words, we are the creators of worry, not just victims of it. And to the degree we contribute, we can also escape and free ourselves.

If worry and anxiety is what you are wrestling with, then here’s your exercise this month:

Identify your imagined worry and work with one strategy to address it.

Spend some significant time this month engaging and meditating on the below list of resources. Take a day and dive deeply into them all or spread them out and tackle one at a time as your daily meditation practice. Use them not just to better understand worry and anxiety, but to figure out the one particular worry that exists more inside *your* head and heart than out there in the world. Just naming that imagined worry might be enough for the month. But if you can, also consider using the resources to identify a strategy to begin separating yourself from that worry. Come to your group ready to share your journey.

Recommended Resources on Emerging From the Prison of Worry, Anxiety and Stress

- A Stoic’s Key to Peace of Mind & the Antidote to Anxiety <https://www.brainpickings.org/2017/08/27/seneca-anxiety/>
- An Antidote to the Age of Anxiety, According to Alan Watts <https://www.brainpickings.org/2014/01/06/alan-watts-wisdom-of-insecurity-1/>
- Bobby McFerrin’s “Don’t Worry, Be Happy”: A Neuropsychology Reading <https://www.brainpickings.org/2011/09/23/bobby-mcferrin-dont-worry-be-happy-neuroscience-psychology/>
- How to Lower Your “Worryability”: Italo Calvino’s 1950 New Year’s Resolution <https://www.brainpickings.org/2014/01/02/italo-calvino-worryability-new-years-resolution/>
- How Not To Worry <https://www.brainpickings.org/2013/03/18/you-can-master-life-1934/>
- Don't Be Afraid of Fear - *Alan Watts* <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7f583ZSdmt0>



Spiritual Exercises

Option C: Leaning Into and Emerging From a Week's Worth of Poetry

There are many sources of awakening and emergence. Poetry is among the most potent. Below are seven different poems, each with its own unique call to emerge into something new. Take a week and use them as your daily meditation practice, letting the voice of the poets help you better identify the particular voice of new growth inside you. How is life calling you to emerge into deeper or greater living? What form of new being and becoming are you being invited to lean into? Treat these poems as partners helping you answer those questions.

Come to your group ready to share which single poem spoke to you the most. What did it help clarify for you? What challenge, guidance or comfort did it offer?

DAY ONE:

Last Night - *Antonio Machado*

Text: <https://allpoetry.com/Last-Night-As-I-Was-Sleeping>

Spoken and video meditation: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mNfSKMLNquE>

DAY TWO:

Those Who Don't Feel This Love - *Jallaludin Rumi*

Text: https://www.openhandweb.org/those_who_dont_feel_this_love_rumi

Spoken and video meditation: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=KjO4j7Ph5Z8>

DAY THREE:

Die Slowly (Lentamente Muore) - *Pablo Neruda*

Text: <http://eleternoretorno.blogspot.com/2005/06/pablo-neruda-die-slowly.html>

Video meditation: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=G6V7t5VByuY&list=PL804FB1BDEFCDDBA2&index=14>

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

DAY FOUR:

There is No Going Back - *Wendell Berry*

Poem and visual meditation: <https://davesikkema.wordpress.com/2013/09/14/no-going-back/>

DAY FIVE:

I know. I try to avoid it too - *Amy Lloyd*

See text of poem in "Resources" section.

DAY SIX:

Song of the Shattering Vessels - *Peter Cole*

Text: <https://www.poetryfoundation.org/poetrymagazine/poems/56233/song-of-the-shattering-vessels>

DAY SEVEN:

Open-Hearted Beauty - *Ablaam Lala Abduljalil*

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

As always, don't treat these questions like "homework" or a list that needs to be covered in its entirety. Instead, simply pick the single question that speaks to you most and let it lead you where you need to go. The goal is to figure out what being a part of a people of emergence means for you and your daily living. So, which question is calling to you? Which one contains "your work"?

1. Is one well-crafted and comfortable life what you really want? Was there a time when you planned on experiencing many lives in this one lifetime you've been given?
2. Have you taken the time to mourn and give thanks for your old life? Have you rushed too quickly into the excitement of your new journey? Even if it was time to leave it, your old life gave you great gifts (even if they were laced with pain). Have you taken time to say goodbye and thank you?
3. Is your armor in your way?
4. Have you been sitting and simmering in stress for so long that it now feels normal? Is it time for you, like the proverbial frog in boiling water, to notice that a boiling pot is no place to live?
5. Has worry become your tomb?
6. It's said that we don't fear change, but the loss and letting go that comes with change. You do know what you need to let go of, right? But do you know why you are holding on so tight?
7. Are you moving on or running away?
8. They say we heal only to the degree that we look at our role in the pain of our past. Are your wounds still open because you continue to turn a blind eye about your part in things?
9. Are you the one who needs to be more gentle with yourself? Is it time to forgive yourself for the mistakes that were made in the past?
10. Is it possible that emergence from pain requires your figuring out its gift? Is it possible that instead of asking, "How do I escape?" you need to first ask, "What is life trying to get me to see?"
11. Instead of feeling punished or wronged, what if you choose to see your current mess as life telling you, "It's time to re-boot!"
12. Is regret over what could have been preventing you from fully leaning into what's being offered?
13. What if we become beautiful only by helping others find their beauty?
14. What if we become free only by helping others find their freedom?
15. Are you in the way of someone's emergence?

What's your question? Your question may not be listed above. As always, if the above questions don't include what life is asking from you, spend the month listening to your days to hear it.

Word Roots

From the Latin *emergere*, “to bring to light.”

Wise Words

“Forget about what's happened; don't keep going over old history. Be alert, be present. I'm about to do something brand-new. It's bursting out! Don't you see it?”

- *Isaiah 43 18-19 (The Message)*

“Always be a work in progress.” - *Emily Lillian*

“When you're finished changing, you're finished.”

- *Benjamin Franklin*

“It is never too late to be what you might have been.”

- *George Eliot*

“You cannot go on indefinitely being just an ordinary, decent egg. We must be hatched or go bad.” - *C.S. Lewis*

“Yearning for a new way will not produce it. Only ending the old way can do that.” - *Richard Rohr*

“All changes, even the most longed for, have their melancholy, for what we leave behind us is a part of ourselves; we must die to one life before we can enter into another.”

- *Anatole France*

“Maybe you went through it so it would awaken you.”

- *Lalah Delia*

“Right where you are is where you need to be. Don't fight it! Don't run away from it! Stand firm! Take a deep breath. And another. And another. Now, ask yourself: Why is this in my world? What do I need to see?” - *Anonymous*

“Let difficulty transform you. And it will. In my experience, we just need help learning how not to run away.”

- *Pema Chodron*

“The degree to which you are willing to embrace the pain of recovery is the degree to which you will experience healing.” - *Anonymous*

“I Know. I Try to Avoid It Too” by [Amy Lloyd](#)

Have you sat with grief?

Have you let it wring you dry?

Leave you swollen and exhausted
in its wake?

Allowed the pain from the inner depths of hell,
deeper than you knew existed,
to ooze out,

bubble up into your heart,
so that your tears could begin
to wash you clean?

Have you asked yourself
the questions with no answers?
then allow them to just co-exist with you?

Have you walked, and talked,
with death and your losses?

The innocence murdered
Precious time stolen

Hearts trampled?

Are you familiar with vulnerability?
With allowing your deepest feelings,
painful feelings,

raw feeling,
real feelings,

to come out of the grave
where you try to hide them?

I know how hard it is,
I know.

I try to avoid it too.

I also know the truth.

It must be done.

It is the broken road to healing.

To life!

The more we feel,
the more we can feel.

Go deep, my friend
Open wide.

Sit a spell and let it bubble.

Feel it all.

It will feel rotten for a while,
then comes the morning...

“I say unto you: one must still have chaos in oneself to be able to give birth to a dancing star.” - *Nietzsche*

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Resources

“Three Dollars Worth of God” *by Wilbur Rees*

I would like to buy \$3 worth of God, please.
 Not enough to explode my soul or disturb my sleep,
 but just enough to equal a cup of warm milk
 or a snooze in the sunshine.
 I don't want enough of God to make me love my enemy
 or pick beets with a migrant.
 I want ecstasy, not transformation.
 I want warmth of the womb, not a new birth.
 I want a pound of the Eternal in a paper sack.
 I would like to buy \$3 worth of God, please.

“Magic Carpet” *by Shel Silverstein*

You have a magic carpet
 That will whiz you through the air,
 To Spain or Maine or Africa
 If you just tell it where.
 So will you let it take you
 Where you've never been before,
 Or will you buy some drapes to match
 And use it
 On your
 Floor?

In out-of-the-way places of the heart,
 Where your thoughts never think to wander,
 This beginning has been quietly forming,
 Waiting until you were ready to emerge.
 For a long time it has watched your desire,
 Feeling the emptiness growing inside you,
 Noticing how you willed yourself on,
 Still unable to leave what you had outgrown.
 It watched you play with the seduction of safety
 And the gray promises that sameness whispered,
 Heard the waves of turmoil rise and relent,
 Wondered would you always live like this...

- [John O'Donohue](#)

“That broken thing you keep trying to put back together is
 keeping your life from that beautiful thing that is waiting to
 be built.” - @REHABTIME

“We have work to do. We can try on masks, we can hide
 behind masks, but I am asking you to look under the mask.
 Who is at the core? What [is waiting] to be transformed?”

- *Linnea Nelson*

“My most lasting transformations happened in the subtleties, in those private moments of decision as to which path to walk. In every moment, there is a choice: Will I open, or close? Will I take responsibility, or blame? Will I download the learning, or deflect? Will I go to my edge, or fall back to safety? Will I honor my intuition, or listen to the world? Millions of moments of decision that inform who we become. Getting out of Unconscious Prison is a life-long journey. True path is built with many tiny choices.”

- *Jeff Brown*

“Our whole spiritual transformation brings us to the point where we realize that in our own being, we are enough.”

- *Ram Dass*

“Transformation means complete and total metamorphosis... And certainly some of us may be ready to embrace that... But I think that most weeks I am like a lot of our parishioners—not all, but most—when I say that I'm not looking for a religion that tells me from the get-go that I need a complete overhaul. I'm looking for a religion that first and foremost welcomes me as I am, a busy, flawed, often bewildered person who is doing her best in a complicated world... We're not talking semantics here; we're talking about a foundational theological statement: Are you good enough to walk into Unitarian Universalism as you are, or do we need you to change into something other than you are? Can't have it both ways. I take the side of welcoming you as you are... That's the Unitarian Universalist theological position, the non-Calvinist-no-original-sin religion I was born into, and I'm still drawn to it. Inherent dignity. Inherent worth. Our theology says you need not be transformed first. Come as you are and be blessed.”

- *Rev. Jane Rzepka*

“To be hopeful in bad times is not just foolishly romantic. It is based on the fact that human history is a history not only of cruelty, but also of compassion, sacrifice, courage, kindness. What we choose to emphasize in this complex history will determine our lives. If we see only the worst, it destroys our capacity to do something. If we remember

Resources

those times and places – and there are so many – where people have behaved magnificently, this gives us the energy to act and at least the possibility of sending this spinning top of a world in a different direction. And if we do act, in however small a way, we don't have to wait for some grand utopian future. The future is an infinite succession of presents, and to live now as we think human beings should live, in defiance of all that is bad around us, is itself a marvelous victory.” - *Howard Zinn*

“Look at the facts of the world. You see a continual and progressive triumph of the good. I do not pretend to understand the moral universe; the arc is a long one, my eye reaches but little ways; I cannot calculate the curve and complete the figure by the experience of sight; I can divine it by conscience. And from what I see I am sure it bends towards justice.” - *Theodore Parker*

“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*

“Listen to the MUSTN'TS” by *Shel Silverstein*

Listen to the MUSTN'TS, child,
 Listen to the DON'TS
 Listen to the SHOULDN'TS
 The IMPOSSIBLES, the WONT'S
 Listen to the NEVER HAVES
 Then listen close to me—
 Anything can happen, child,
 ANYTHING can be

Songs and Music

Black as Night - *Nabko and Medicine for the People*
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=lkGBLLjAXEA&list=RDm3rLLALWYyk&index=9>
 “I believe in the good things comin’
 Out of darkness, lion heart pumpin’
 Into white light, all things runnin’
 Who have I been, who am I becomin’...”

Follow The Sun - *Xavier Rudd*

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0E1bNmyPWww&list=RDm3rLLALWYyk&index=11>
 “Tomorrow is a new day for everyone,
 Brand new moon, brand new sun...”

Passion Play - *William Fitzsimmons*

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RhhGqZEWOC>
 “I just want to be not what I am today...”

Stay Alive - *José González*

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NucJk8TxyRg&index=3&list=RDm3rLLALWYyk&index=11>
 “There is a truth and it's on our side
 Dawn is coming, open your eyes...”

Rise Up - *BiFrost Arts*

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=x2Kft4bfsSk>

Roll Away the Stone - *Kelly Joe Phelps*

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RK_4Srp9KAO

Feeling Good - *Nina Simone*

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=D5Y11hwjMNs>
 “It's a new dawn
 It's a new day
 It's a new life
 And I'm feeling good...”

More “Emergence Songs” are found on the *Soul Matters April Spotify playlist*. Click [here](#) to listen and download.

Online

Rebirth Not Resistance! - *Michelle Alexander*

<https://www.facebook.com/timeforallofus/videos/1389620207797043/>
 A call to rethink the idea of resistance and reclaim ourselves as part of a bold and beautiful movement of rebirth instead!

Reinvent Your Life - *Charles Bukowski*

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9CQI0P4piQ>

Resources

Goo and You - Radiolab podcast

<http://www.radiolab.org/story/goo-and-you/>

Producer Molly Webster peers inside a caterpillar pupa and witnesses some of the most complex and confounding biology happening on Earth, stumbling into ancient questions of change. What in us carries on as we emerge into something new? What of our future self is already in us now?

Shake My Future - Dorothea Smartt

Video: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=st5clGxZ75A>

Text: <http://www.poetryarchive.org/poem/shake-my-future> A poem to shake our complacency and stir up our commitment.

A Lyrical Bridge Between Past, Present and Future

[TED Talk by David Whyte](#) (must watch!)

David Whyte meditates on the place where our present turns into our future, life-giving heartbreak and the illusions that keep us from emerging into the new lives waiting for us.

What Will Change in Your Lifetime?

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

The Operating Definition of Racism Needs an Overhaul

<https://www.facebook.com/splinternews/videos/2114834551875845/>

Emerging racial justice conversations: tackling the racial income gap.

The Spiritual Work of Black Lives Matter

On Being podcast

<http://discover.onbeing.org/episodes/patrisse-cullors-and-robert-ross-the-spiritual-work-of-black-lives-matter-may2017/>

Black Lives Matter, the questions it makes us ask and the new world that emerges when we dare to answer.

Passover and Easter - *On Being* podcast

<https://onbeing.org/programs/sandy-eisenberg-sasso-richard-hays-and-linda-loving-passover-and-easter/>

The miracles that emerge from suffering and violence.

Reconsidering the Transformation of the Cross

Nadia Bolz Weber

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=k60Ys9GXHSs&t=223s>

New and emerging understandings of the cross.

Articles and Books

7 Signs You're Experiencing a Major Spiritual Transformation (and emerging into something new)

Natasha Che

https://www.huffingtonpost.com/natasha-che/7-signs-youre-experiencing-a-major-spiritual-transformation_b_7958282.html

Reflection: Change as a Catalyst for Transformation

Richard Rohr

<https://cac.org/change-catalyst-transformation-2016-06-30/> Falling apart as the doorway to emergence of the new.

Homo Deus: A Brief History of Tomorrow

by Yuval Noah Harari

<https://www.goodreads.com/book/show/31138556-homo-deus>

"On humanity's future, and our emerging quest to upgrade humans into gods... As the self-made gods of planet Earth, what destinies will we set ourselves, and which quests will we undertake? *Homo Deus* explores the projects, dreams and nightmares that will shape the twenty-first century—from overcoming death to creating artificial life. It asks the fundamental questions: Where do we go from here? And how will we protect this fragile world from our own destructive powers?"

