



# The Path

The Spiritual Theme Newsletter of the First UU Society of Burlington

December 2, 2015

## What Does it Mean to Seek a Life of Possibility?



### Upcoming Services

Sundays 9 & 11 a.m.

**December 6**– Hanukah– Rev. Phyllis O’Connell

**December 10**– Service of Remembrance (6:00 p.m.)

**December 13**– Expectations and Possibilities– Rev. Phyllis O’Connell

**December 20**– Winter Solstice– Rev. Phyllis O’Connell/Martha Dallas

**December 24**– Christmas Eve  
4:00 p.m.– Family Service

6:00 p.m.– All ages

8:00 p.m.– All ages

**December 27**– TBA

The following introduction was written by Rev. Scott Taylor of the Soul Matters Collection:

“Of all our topics this year, possibility is arguably most central to our faith. It has distinguished Unitarian Universalists from the start. Whereas others saw depravity and sin at the core of human identity, we saw potential--sometimes with hardly any boundaries. When many were preaching that this world was fallen and we should look instead to the hope of an afterlife, we found ourselves falling in love with the possibility of heaven on earth. Theologically, you might say that we were the people that believed that God hadn’t given up on any of us and so we shouldn’t give up on life. I often like to think of us as the religion of “Why not?!”

So that’s our religion. But what about us personally? How open have you been recently to “Why not?” How’s your faith in possibility doing? These are the questions our session this month is designed to ask. Indeed, I love the way a friend puts the challenge. This is what she wrote me when I asked her how possibility played out in her life: “When I think of possibility, I think of all the things, people, opportunities, on which we close the door, automatically.

Such as, "I will never see eye to eye with my sister."

"I couldn't possibly leave this job to start my own business"

"I will never have close friends like..."

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"I will never really make a difference, so why bother?"

"UU's will always be a small select faith, why even consider that we could change the world?"

We tell ourselves so many small things about who we are and what we are capable of, that our own words drown out the possibility of anything else. I actually think there's comfort in that because it stops us from having to face our fears, our loneliness, our perceived inadequacies."

She goes on to say that, as of late, the spiritual journey for her has been largely that of asking the question, "Are you willing to consider the possibility that you are not who you think you are?" A better summation of our UU faith is hard to find!

So, again, what about you?

Are you willing to consider the possibility that you are not who you think you are?

Are you willing to consider the possibility that you might be more? That life could be more? That this very day could be more?!

I hope so. I hope that in some small way—and maybe even in some unexpected large ways—the spiritual assignments and reflection material leads you to answer "yes." Yes to more. Yes to the new. Yes to "why not?"

With gratitude for the many ways we help each other re-open the door."

Scott

## Thank You!

Thank you for participating in this month's theme and the Theme Circles groups, and for making this new project of the First UU possible!

During Rev Mara's parental leave, your Theme Circle's task force, Kristin Kany, Charity Clark Melinda Lee, with the expert assistance of Annemarie Granillo will be editing, adding, and in January, compiling, the monthly theme material for "The Path".

## 2015-2016 Themes



**January:** Time

**February:** Grace

**March:** Passion

**April:** Strength

**May:** Faith

**June:** Revelry



# Looking Ahead Seeking Input on February Theme

The creation of content for each edition of *The Path* is a collaborative effort. Your submissions of readings, stories, songs, videos, podcasts, visual images, questions, and spiritual exercises help supplement the basic materials on our designated theme that we receive from **Soul Matters**. While we may not be able to publish all submissions, they are all shared with First UU worship leaders so it can become rich fodder for Sunday services.

Because we need to be working a few months ahead, this month we welcome your contributions on the theme of "**Grace**". Please send by **Dec. 31**. Also, send any materials for next month's theme "**Time**" within the **next two weeks** since we are working on it now. The address is: [themecircles@uusociety.org](mailto:themecircles@uusociety.org). Thank you, in advance, for being part of this shared ministry!

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## Self-Care on the Spiritual Journey

I believe that if we're doing our job as a faith community well, then the spirituality territory we cover in our worship services, educational experiences, and social witness should be deeply relevant in our own individual lives. After all, one of the core purposes of congregational life is to inspire us to lives of meaning and purpose, but also to help us navigate

"all that is our life," the joys and the struggles, by being a community of wisdom, challenge, care, and mutual spiritual support.



When we go deeper into spiritual exploration together and individually, as theme-based ministry and our related **Theme Circle** are designed to encourage, however, we might encounter some tender spots in our own souls and/or find ourselves revisiting challenging times in our life histories. 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 only to the level that's comfortable for you.

Likewise, please know that we, the First UU staff, are here to offer support if you find yourself struggling with something surfaced by the monthly theme. Please reach out to find out more about the pastoral and spiritual care available in our First UU community and referrals to other related resources.

The easiest way to get in touch is to email [pastoralcareministries@uusociety.org](mailto:pastoralcareministries@uusociety.org), which forwards to whomover is on-call for pastoral care. Rev. Phyllis O'Connell ([phyllis@uusociety.org](mailto:phyllis@uusociety.org)), our parental leave minister, or Rev. Jennifer Pader, who provides supplemental pastoral care on a referral basis and will be covering the holiday weeks during Phyllis' tenure. You can also call the office at **802-862-5630**; someone will be able to assist you.

Each month, we will offer a spiritual exercise or a few that will allow you to engage more deeply with the theme. **Theme Circle** group members are invited to partake of at least one, and bring any related insights or reflections from their experience for sharing at their monthly meeting.

Dancing with possibility is not easy. It takes us into uncomfortable territory. To make that journey easier, we have a choice of spiritual exercises this month. Make no mistake; both are challenging. But for this to be meaningful, it's got to be a challenge that lures you at least a little. So pick the one that fits you best. Come to your meeting prepared to talk, not only about what this adventure taught you about yourself, but also why you picked the exercise you did.

## Spiritual Exercise #1

Look at the World through Robert Bly's Eyes...for 2 weeks

This exercise starts off simple, but then...

**STEP ONE:** Cut out the below poem by Robert Bly.

**STEP TWO:** Tape it someplace where you will encounter it every day. Your bathroom mirror for instance. Or your office desk. Or the dashboard of your car.

**STEP THREE:** For two weeks (yes, two weeks!), start the day off by reading it at least once. Really do this! By the end of two weeks, you should darn near know it by heart. The idea is get it stuck in your head. You may need to go back and read it mid-day just to get it "re-stuck." The goal is to feel like Robert is gently nagging you throughout your day.

**STEP FOUR:** Try to do what it says!

**STEP FIVE:** Come to your group and tell them how it allowed you to see the bears that were sitting outside your door.

### Things to Think by 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.



## Spiritual Exercise #2

### *Pick a “Can’t” and Commit to Proving it Wrong!*

This is also one that will likely require two weeks—at least.

**First**, take a few days to a week to think of the things in your life that you’ve placed a big fat “CAN’T” beside--or as my friend said, things on which you’ve “closed the door.” As you do this, try to find one “can’t” that a small piece of you second-guesses. In other words, as you go through the list, listen carefully for a faint inner voice that says, “Why not?” or “Are you sure?” Then commit yourself to taking this “can’t” on. Make a promise to yourself that you will do what it takes, for as long as it takes, to prove it wrong! It might be something personal like those in the list above. Something that you’ve always told yourself “is just not me” or “just not within my reach.” For instance: “I can’t lead; I’m a follower” or “I can’t be alone” or “I’m just an appreciator; I can’t create art.” You will know it by the itch, piece of you will simply be fed up. “I’m sick of dreading going to work.” “I’m sick of the way he talks to me.” “I’m sick of pretending I enjoy going to their house for dinner.” You know what we mean, don’t blow it off this time. Take that fed up feeling seriously.

**Prove that “can’t” wrong.** Make a commitment to being a participator in your life rather than a spectator.

You can also try coming at this from another angle: pick a supposed impossibility! Take a moment and read the Robert Fulghum piece in the “**For Inspiration**” section. If those guys can eat a chair, just think of what you could do! Be imaginative, even a bit nuts! What “chair” could you “eat”? Make Robert Fulghum and those students proud. But most of all, remember why they did it: to shake up their philosophy of life! So don’t just do it to prove that you’re brave, daring, or clever. Pick something that you think will make you look at life differently— a wide open playground; an amazing place where so much is possible!



The following poems, podcasts and movies are offered to inspire you as you wrestle with this month's spiritual exercises. Usually, you are invited to pick and choose whichever catch your eye. But this month, take the time to explore every single one, each has it's own special magic.

## **Rosamund and Benjamin Zander on "The Art of Possibility"**

Ben and Rosamund Zander's book is definitely worth reading, but below are a couple podcasts, a transcript and a video that give you a wonderful taste of their inspiring ideas and contagious energy.

## **Interview with Diane Rehm: <http://wamu.org/programs/dr/01/03/29.php>**

Transcript of another interview (for those who prefer to read rather than listen—but there's also a podcast for those who do want to listen): <http://www.ibm.com/developerworks/podcast/dwi/cm-int121906txt.html>

## **An Inspirational Talk by Ben Zander.**

It's presented as a talk about classical music, but don't be fooled, it's really about how we can inspire each other to believe in possibility—even how one person can make a world believe in possibility (And of course it is about classical music and how if you never thought it possible for you to like it...think again)

[http://www.ted.com/talks/benjamin\\_zander\\_on\\_music\\_and\\_passion.html](http://www.ted.com/talks/benjamin_zander_on_music_and_passion.html)

## **"The Chair Men" by Robert Fulghum**

*(from "What On Earth Have I Done?")*

We say the young have much to learn, but I find that they know and do things unfamiliar to me, so I am pleased to learn from them when I can. Example: Two young college students asked me for a ride, because they were late to work.

Their summer construction job was near my office so I was glad to oblige. On the way, I asked, "Besides working hard and playing hard, what's happening in your lives?"

They exchanged glances. Then one said. "We are eating a chair."

What?

Yes. It seems that their college philosophy teacher gave them an extra-credit assignment: Do something unique and memorable – not dangerous or foolish, but something creative, inventive and instructive. Write it up and explain what was learned and how it might apply to their philosophy of life.

So. They are eating a chair.

They bought a plain wooden kitchen chair at an unfinished furniture store. Using a wood rasp, they have been shaving away at the chair, mixing the dust into their granola for breakfast, and sprinkling the dust on their salads at dinner. So far they have consumed most of a leg, two rungs and a back piece. And while they don't want to overdo it, the pace is picking up. Still the project may not be finished before summers' end, so they may enlist friends, who, it seems, are enthusiastically willing to help eat a chair.

And yes, they consulted a physician to make sure the wood dust was not harmful. And no, it doesn't taste bad – especially if they mix in a little cinnamon at breakfast and a little lemon pepper at dinner. And, yes, they have learned a few things along the way.

"Like what?", I asked.

*(continued on page 7)*



(continued from page 6)

Like how amazing long-time goals can be achieved in incremental stages. Like how something seemingly idiotic affects your thinking about other things you do. For example, they routinely run about fifteen miles a week to stay in shape – around and around a lake. They wondered where fifteen miles a week would take them if they ran in a straight line. So they got a road map and have been marking off the mileage, headed south. They could be in Portland, Oregon, in a couple of weeks. But that's boring, so they have a European map now and are starting out in Vienna headed for Athens. Using guidebooks they're figuring out what there is to see and do along the way. They're touring the world in their minds.

And, of course, they're very pleased with themselves. They're sure they'll astound the professor when he asks for their report. "We ate a chair."

"It will blow the dude away," said one.

For all the goofiness of the project, these young men are learning patience and perseverance. Some things cannot be had except on a little-at-a-time, keep-the-long-goal-in-mind, stay-focused basis.

Love and friendship are like that. Marriage and parenthood, too. And peace and justice and social change. As wonderfully silly as it seems, eating a chair may lead my young college friends to wisdom and nobler aspirations.

In their foolishness lies the seed of What-Might-Be, little by little.



### **"Fitzcarraldo": Werner Herzog's Dance With the Possible**

On the one hand, this is a movie recommendation. However, to truly "get it", you need to treat this as an exploration of the making of a film. "**Fitzcarraldo**" is considered a "masterpiece" of the great German director, Werner Herzog. Below is a description of the movie. You will understand right away why this fits with our theme of possibility! In addition, there's information on a documentary of the making of the film, called *Burden of Dreams*. It's considered by some to be even more compelling than the movie. If you're not a fan of slower moving foreign films, than start with the documentary; you'll then not be able to resist watching "**Fitzcarraldo**". Also included below is a link to a review of a book written by Herzog about the making of the film; it's made up of his diaries while filming the movie. The book is called *Conquest of the Useless*. But read the review if nothing else! It may be as memorizing as the film itself.

### **Werner Herzog's "Fitzcarraldo": An Overview**

Brian Sweeney Fitzgerald (Klaus Kinski), known as Fitzcarraldo to the native Peruvians, is an avid opera lover and rubber baron who dreams of building an opera house in the Peruvian jungle. To accomplish this, he plans to reach an isolated patch of rubber trees and make his fortune. But these trees are not directly accessible by river because of dangerous rapids, so Fitzcarraldo runs his ship as close as possible via an alternate river and then enlists the aid of the native Peruvians to drag his ship over a mountain to the desired area. However, the natives seem to have their own agenda so they mysteriously acced to Fitzcarraldo's wishes. The results manage to both mock and affirm the dreams of determined figures like Fitzcarraldo, making absurdity out of the stuff of human endeavor without negating the beauty of that effort. There is hardly a more awe-inspiring or arresting image than that of Fitzcarraldo's ship pulling itself up the mountain with cables and pulleys, or of the ship resting in mid-ascent as seen through the thick morning fog of the jungle.

The tortured production history of Werner Herzog's "**Fitzcarraldo**" (ably recorded in Les Blank's documentary *Burden of Dreams*) tends to take the spotlight away from this deeply mesmerizing film. And that's unfortunate, because the film itself is even more fascinating than the trials and tribulations, amazing though they might be, that led to its being made. Part of the problem is the film's deliberate, some might say ponderous, pace, which invites the viewer to experience the slow immersion into the jungle that "**Fitzcarraldo**" and company experience. Herzog did something similar in *Aguirre, the Wrath of God*, sometimes aiming his camera at the river rapids for extended periods of time, with hypnotic results. This could never happen in a Hollywood film, and it should be treasured. --Jim Gay

### Video Clips of the Film

<http://www.imdb.com/video/screenplay/vi2678522137/>

[http://video.google.com/videosearch?](http://video.google.com/videosearch?sourceid=navclient&rlz=1T4ADBF_enUS254US254&q=Werner+Herzog's+Fitzcarraldo&um=1&ie=UTF-8&ei=rZ8dS__DPNTklQeV1M3yCQ&sa=X&oi=video_result_group&ct=title&resnum=4&ved=0CBsQqwQwAw#sourceid=navclient&rlz=1T4ADBF_enUS254US254&q=Werner+Herzog's+Fitzcarraldo&um=1&ie=UTF-8&ei=rZ8dS__DPNTklQeV1M3yCQ&sa=X&oi=video_result_group&ct=title&resnum=4&ved=0CBsQqwQwAw&qvid=Werner+Herzog's+Fitzcarraldo&vid=1701782671574022333)

[sourceid=navclient&rlz=1T4ADBF\\_enUS254US254&q=Werner+Herzog's+Fitzcarraldo&um=1&ie=UTF-8&ei=rZ8dS\\_\\_DPNTklQeV1M3yCQ&sa=X&oi=video\\_result\\_group&ct=title&resnum=4&ved=0CBsQqwQwAw#sourceid=navclient&rlz=1T4ADBF\\_enUS254US254&q=Werner+Herzog's+Fitzcarraldo&um=1&ie=UTF-8&ei=rZ8dS\\_\\_DPNTklQeV1M3yCQ&sa=X&oi=video\\_result\\_group&ct=title&resnum=4&ved=0CBsQqwQwAw&qvid=Werner+Herzog's+Fitzcarraldo&vid=1701782671574022333](http://video.google.com/videosearch?sourceid=navclient&rlz=1T4ADBF_enUS254US254&q=Werner+Herzog's+Fitzcarraldo&um=1&ie=UTF-8&ei=rZ8dS__DPNTklQeV1M3yCQ&sa=X&oi=video_result_group&ct=title&resnum=4&ved=0CBsQqwQwAw#sourceid=navclient&rlz=1T4ADBF_enUS254US254&q=Werner+Herzog's+Fitzcarraldo&um=1&ie=UTF-8&ei=rZ8dS__DPNTklQeV1M3yCQ&sa=X&oi=video_result_group&ct=title&resnum=4&ved=0CBsQqwQwAw&qvid=Werner+Herzog's+Fitzcarraldo&vid=1701782671574022333)

### Burden of Dreams: An overview of the documentary

For nearly five years, acclaimed German filmmaker Werner Herzog desperately tried to complete the most ambitious and difficult film of his career-Fitzcarraldo, the story of one man's attempt to build an opera house deep in the Amazon jungle. Documentary filmmaker Les Blank captured the unfolding of this production, made all the more perilous by Herzog's determination to shoot the most daunting scenes without models or special effects, including a sequence requiring hundreds of natives to pull a full-sized, 320-ton steamship over a small mountain. The result is an extraordinary document of the filmmaking process and a unique look into the single-minded passion of one of cinema's most fearless directors.

### Book Review of Conquest of the Useless: Reflections from the Making of Fitzcarraldo

[http://www.powells.com/review/2009\\_09\\_20.html](http://www.powells.com/review/2009_09_20.html)

From the review...

"...Fitzcarraldo and Herzog of Conquest, however different their individual circumstances, are all embodiments of the same principle: the refusal to accept any disjunction between what can be imagined and what can be achieved. Usually such a refusal has tragic consequences, for there is a gulf between human aspiration and ability. Herzog is not blind to this dour insight -- so many of his films end in failure and defeat -- and yet he celebrates the impulse to transcend our limitations as noble in itself, regardless of what follows. In his films, the ability to see the world as something other than what we've been told it is -- as a place where boats move over mountains or apples follow their own will -- is already a kind of victory."



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**

"So thoroughly and sincerely are we compelled to live, reverencing our life, and denying the possibility of change. This is the only way, we say; but there are as many ways as there can be drawn radii from one center."  
-**Henry David Thoreau, "Walden "**

"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"**

"The possible's slow fuse is lit by the imagination."  
- **Emily Dickinson**

"Trust yourself. Create the kind of self that you will be happy to live with all your life. Make the most of yourself by fanning the tiny, inner sparks of possibility into flames of achievement."  
-**Golda Meir**

I can still remember the afternoon, on my 15th birthday, when I opened up *'The Virgin and the Gypsy,'* D.H. Lawrence's novella, in my tiny cell in boarding school, and whole worlds of possibility opened out that I had never guessed existed. The language was on fire and sang of liberation.  
-**Pico Iver**

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



# Going Deeper: Further Resources Related to “Possibility”

## Further Reflection for All Ages

The Daily Compass is a UU website that is produced by the Church of the Larger Fellowship. It offers daily words and an image that encourage reflection and spiritual growth.

Check out the following 3 messages that relate to our theme of "**Possibility**". Also, you could sign up to receive a daily message via your email address.

[www.dailycompass.org/2015/08/01/possibility](http://www.dailycompass.org/2015/08/01/possibility)

[www.dailycompass.org/tag/possibility](http://www.dailycompass.org/tag/possibility) -- this one especially may work for children .

[www.dailycompass.org/2015/11/23](http://www.dailycompass.org/2015/11/23)

## Songs

"Imagine"- John Lennon

"Send Me on My Way"- Rusted Root

"Learn It All Again Tomorrow"- Ben Harper

"Always Look on the Bright Side of Life"-Monty Python

"Oh What a Beautiful Morning"- Ray Charles (from Oklahoma)

"New Day" - Tamar Kaprelian

"Shake it Off"- Florence and the Machine

"Move on Up"- Curtis Mayfield

"Here Comes the Sun"- The Beatles

"Beauty in the World"- Macy Gray



# Creative Space

Use this section to write, doodle, and create!

*AHA! Moments*

*Notes*





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Creative Space (Continued)

Sketching

**Credits:** This edition of “The Path” relies on material from the *Soul Matters Collective*, of which First UU is a member, and submissions from our First UU staff and members.

