The culture in which I was raised, at least for my family’s long sojourn in the American South, had a handy way of people announcing their intentions. Before taking most any action in certain parts of the South, it’s common to hear someone say: “I’m fixin’ to ________.” You can fill in the blank with whatever verb you wish. “I’m fixin” to get a haircut.” “I’m fixin’ to go to work.” “I’m fixin’ to solve the mysteries of the universe…” The possibilities are endless. The upside is that everyone within earshot knows what you are intending. The downside is being endlessly subject to a litany of people’s plans. On balance, though, it’s helpful to know what people are up to—or, at least, what they think they are up to. Sometimes, of course, there’s a difference between what we intend and what we do.

As we turn with the new year to the theme of “Intention,” the topic offers us an invitation to consider the process by which we set a course of action for ourselves. And it also gives us an opportunity to examine the gap between what we intend and what actually happens. There are differing schools of thought on the matter, with some feeling good and noble intentions can excuse unintended outcomes when things don’t play out as planned; while others believe only our actions count, and that intentions, in the end, don’t amount to much. Where do you find yourself on this question? Is it an either/or situation, or might it be both/and? And is there a difference in your response depending on whether you’re the one judging your own intentions and actions, or the one evaluating the intentions and actions of others? If there’s a difference, take time this month to consider why.

May you set off into this new year with solid intentions to examine the meaning of your intentions!

In faith and love,
Shawn
Questions to Live With

1. What does it mean to you to set an intention—be it for the day, an action, or a longer-term goal?
2. Is there something you feel the need to be more intentional about in the new year?
3. What do you need to be your truest, most-authentic self?
4. How do you manage the gap between your intentions and your actions?
5. How do you manage the gap between others’ intentions and their actions?
6. If not one of the above, what is your question about intention this month?

For Inspiration

The thought manifests as word; the word manifests as the deed. The deed develops into habit, and habit hardens into character. So watch the thought and its way with care and let it spring from love, born out of concern for all beings... as the shadow follows the body, as we think, so we become.
- from the Dhammapada

As any of us approaches middle age, we inevitably come up against our limitations: the realization that certain dearly-held fantasies may not be realized; that circumstances have thwarted us; that even with intention and will we may not be able to set our ship back on the course we’d planned.
- Claire Messud

Great intentions become tragic when delivered without careful thought.
- Michael Dooley

Intention involves such a small fragment of our consciousness and of our mind and of our life.
- Jasper Johns

What one does is what counts. Not what one had the intention of doing.
- Pablo Picasso

I think we’d like life to be a train... You get on, pick your destination and get off. Every day, you have to see where the wind is and check the currents and see if there’s anybody else on the boat with you who can help out. It’s a sailboat ride — the weather changes and the currents change and the wind changes. It’s not a train ride. That’s the hardest thing I’ve had to accept in my life. I just thought I had to pick the right train — and I worked hard to pick the right train. And darned if I didn’t get off at the end of it and find out that was just a midway station.
- Barbara Brown Taylor

You told me once that we shall be judged by our intentions, not by our accomplishments. I thought it a grand remark. But we must intend to accomplish—not sit intending on a chair.
- E. M. Forster, Where Angels Fear to Tread
If the myth of pure evil is that evil is committed with the intention of causing harm and an absence of moral considerations, then it applies to very few acts of so-called “pure evil” because most evildoers believe what they are doing is forgivable or justifiable.

- Stephen Pinker

The really magical things are the ones that happen right in front of you. A lot of the time you keep looking for beauty, but it is already there. And if you look with a bit more intention, you see it.

- Vik Muniz

Every journey begins with the first step of articulating the intention, and then becoming the intention.

- Bryant McGill, Voice of Reason

I am who I am doing what I came to do.

- Audre Lorde, Sister Outsider

When you know your intention, you are in a position to choose the consequences that you will create for yourself. When you choose an intention that creates consequences for which you are willing to be responsible, that is a responsible choice.

- Gary Zukav

Compassion is an unstable emotion. It needs to be translated into action, or it withers. The question is what to do with the feelings that have been aroused, the knowledge that has been communicated. If one feels that there is nothing “we” can do – but who is that “we”? – and nothing “they” can do either – and who are “they” – then one starts to get bored, cynical, apathetic.

- Susan Sontag

There comes an hour of sadness
With the setting of the sun,
Not for the sins committed,
But the things I have not done.

- Minot Judson Savage

Be humble for you are made of Earth. Be noble for you are made of stars.

- Serbian proverb

And that is just the point... how the world, moist and beautiful, calls to each of us to make a new and serious response. That’s the big question, the one the world throws at you every morning. “Here you are, alive. Would you like to make a comment?”

- Mary Oliver

By banishing doubt and trusting your intuitive feelings, you clear a space for the power of intention to flow through.

- Wayne Dyer

Do all the good you can, By all the means you can, In all the ways you can, In all the places you can, At all the times you can, To all the people you can, As long as ever you can.

- John Wesley

At every moment in every person’s life there is work to be done, always work to be done, some of it small, some of it Great. The Great Work, in a sense, always has to do with healing the world, changing the world, and, as a necessary predicate to that, understanding the world. You rise every morning aware that you are called to this work. You won’t live to see it finished. But if you can’t hear it calling, you aren’t listening hard enough. It’s always calling, sometimes in a big voice, sometimes in a quiet voice.

- Tony Kushner

Teachings come from everywhere when you open yourself to them. That’s the trick of it really. Open yourself to everything and everything opens itself to you.

- Richard Wagamese

The Journey (January 2022 | Volume 1, Issue 4)
Optional Spiritual Exercise

As we begin a new year, resolve to set an over-arching intention for the month of January. Then, at the start of each week (you pick the day), set an intention to carry you through the next seven days. And then, finally, with each day—either the night before or first thing in the morning—set an intention for the day ahead. You can decide the size and scope of your intentions; there’s no right or wrong way to do this. You may write them down. Or not. Then, at the end of the day/week/month, check in with yourself about how things played out and how you feel about it.

“Wheat”

Let a stalk of wheat be your witness to every difficult day. Since it was a flame before it was a plant, since it was courage before it was grain, since it was determination before it was growth, and, above all, since it was prayer before it was fruition, it has nothing to point to but the sky.

Remember the incredibly gentle wheat stalk which holds its countless arrows fixed to shoot from the bowstring—you, standing in the same position where the wind holds it.

- Ishihara Yoshiro, translated by N. Koriyama and E. Lueders, Like Underground Water

“For the Seeds”

the ends are packed tight in this little means. it remembers generations, millennia, since the ancestors rooted, flowered, and moved inland from an ancient shore. it is a coded prayer for the future. come be unbroken

- Bill Wylie-Kellermann, Dirty Prayers: Pocket Prayers to Read in the Garden

And did you get what you wanted from this life, even so?
I did.
And what did you want?
To call myself beloved, to feel myself beloved on the earth.

- Raymond Carver
Join Us

Join a Journey Group

Journey Groups are a great way to go deeper with our monthly theme by sharing with a small group of people for a couple of hours each month. Groups meet online on Zoom and are scheduled at different times during the month.

For more information, visit our website https://firstunitariantoronto.org/journey-groups/, or look for the link in First Light.

Upcoming Themes

February – Contentment | March – Money
April – Awakening | May – Beauty

Upcoming Services
Sundays at 10:30

January 2
“The All-Important Spark”- Fire Communion Service
Rev. Shawn Newton

January 9

January 16
“How, then, shall we live?”, Rev. Shawn Newton

January 23
“The Best Laid Plans”, Rev. Lynn Harrison

January 30
“Good Intentions”, Rev. Lynn Harrison