

**The Power of Intention**  
**January 2, 2022**  
**Rev. Dr. Judith E. Wright**

A new year has arrived! 2022!

In our poetry class this past week

Shirley Richardson read Alfred Lord Tennyson poem *Ring Out, Wild Bells*

A poem put to music in our hymnal that celebrates the arrival of a new year.

As part of welcoming 2022, let's listen to this famous poem:

Ring out wild bells, to the wild, wild sky,

The flying cloud, the frosty light:

The year is dying in the night,

Ring out wild bells and let it die.

Ring out the old, ring in the new.

Ring happy bells, across the snow.

The year is going, let it go.

Ring out the false, ring in the true.

Ring out the grief that saps the mind,

For those that here we see no more,

Ring out the feud of rich and poor,

Ring in redress to humankind.

Ring out false pride in place and blood,

In civic slander and the spite;

Ring in the love of truth and right,

Ring in the common love of good.

Although Tennyson wrote this poem in 1850, his words relate well to us today as we let go of 2021, and enter into 2022.

Apparently, the custom in England at that time was to ring the bells at midnight on New Year's Eve,

with the bells half muffled for the death of the old year, and then the muffing is removed, to welcome joyously, the new year.

We here in the Lakes Region welcomed 2022 with no bells that I know of, but instead, lots of fireworks at midnight. And, the sense of letting go of the old and opening to the new remains a theme that touches us all.

With the new year before us, some of us, perhaps many of us, are stopping to take stock of the past year, and make some resolutions for the coming year.

A resolution is a strong will determination, with a targeted goal, such as not eating so much sugar,

exercising more, having more quality time with family and friends, getting our finances in order.

working for a certain social justice cause, and so forth.

As many of us know, New Year's resolutions have proven to be difficult to uphold over a period of time as the new year progresses.

A different way of approaching this challenge is to use the power of intention.

Intention is a course of action that we may choose to follow.

Intention setting can help us hone new pathways in our lives.

Buddhist teacher Phillip Moffitt clarifies for us the difference between setting goals and setting intentions.<sup>1</sup>

“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,

(and instead gave) equal or greater priority to how aligned you are with your deepest values?"

I believe that wherever we put our attention in life, whatever we attend to, grows stronger, and what we do not focus on, loses its strength over time.

So, setting our intention can ground us in living the kind of life we wish to live.

Setting our intention invites us to pay good attention to whatever we are doing, and to extend ourselves to do even better, if we can.

We may find ourselves, in setting our own intentions, that we are not following what many around us are doing, but instead, following our own unique paths.

Ann Voskamp, Canadian writer and blogger, expressing well the courage it takes to follow and live one's own values.

I believe that we, as UUs, do as Ann suggests, - going against the flow, for ours is a faith that is one of integrity with its free and responsible search for truth and meaning.

Ann says: "*Any dead fish can go with the flow – you have to be intentional to swim against the current.*"

This is the why of ours being indeed a chosen faith.

---

<sup>1</sup> Phillip Moffitt. Article; The Heart's Intention. <https://dharma wisdom.org/the-hearts-intention/>

We best learn how to discern others' intentions. It's useful to hold the view that people around you

have good intentions as well. This is often a shift in how we may perceive others, as our human brains have been wired for our survival evolutionary wise to perceive the world through a negative bias, - at least initially.

So, instead of immediately assuming that a person is angry about something, or has some hidden agenda, instead, we can hold each person as having good intent.

One way we do this is with our covenant which we say each Sunday, and with other agreements we make as a congregation.

Assuming good intent by ourselves and others is part of our belief as UUs that people are inherently good, even though we sometimes may break our promises to one another.

The good news here is that we, as Unitarian Universalists, can renew whatever promises we may have broken. When we miss the mark, we can come back and do better.

One downside of this human quality of intention is the possibility that we may choose to hide behind our intentions, when whatever act we may have done or whatever words we may have spoken

have had a negative impact on another being, hurt another.<sup>2</sup>

Most likely we do this unconsciously or unknowingly. Not understanding that what we are saying or doing

may be perceived as racist or sexist or homophobic or in other ways harmful to those impacted.

We may defend ourselves by saying things like "It was not my intent to ..."

Here we need to weigh our intention not to harm against the harm such words or actions may create.

Do we, by saying such statements as "I never intended...."

protect ourselves and our egos at the negative cost of further marginalization of those most impacted?

This isn't easy. Our intentions are to create no harm, and yet, we may find that our choice of words

or even actions, do so. If we find ourselves in such a pickle, we best pause and discern how not to create such harm in the future.

Just one example comes quickly to mind.

A number of years ago I arrived at a hotel for one of our UU General Assemblies.

I had two heavy bags, and I looked for someone to help me with them.

I turned to a man who was a person of color, and assumed that he was a porter on staff.

Then too late, I realized that he was a participant, just as I was, at the conference.

He knew and I knew immediately of my false assumption about him.

I was mortified, and I realize now that my assumption was indeed harmful to him.

---

<sup>2</sup>Rev. David A. Miller

<https://uucf.org/intent-vs-impact-resolutions-new-year/>

Sermon - Intention and Impact, Rev. Dr. Cynthia L. Landrum

<https://libertyuu.org/services/intention-and-impact/>

I didn't know enough at the time to apologize.

I, of course, had no intention of hurting him, but I did have an impact on him, in spite of my intentions.

We stumble through these experiences until we learn better ways of being.

So, intentions are tricky.

We best look at how we are living up to our values, and make corrections when we go astray, to realign ourselves with what really matters.

If our intentions are out of step with our impact, then we need to step back and understand that the world doesn't exist solely as we view the world.

We best adjust our ways to ensure our values are upheld by whatever we do.

Perhaps positive intentions for the new year may include for us to not know, but instead to listen, to reflect, to not always have to be right, to replace our defensiveness with a sense of humility.

Sometimes we may make New Year resolutions because we have a sense of not being totally okay.

There may be a sense of "wanting to improve" that reinforces our sense of self-judgment –we see ourselves as falling short on whatever the goals we set.

We can get caught in a negative cycle of self-statements such as "I am not enough," or "I am not okay."

And failing to meet our resolutions can make us even more miserable.

We can interrupt this negative chain of events.

While we cannot change the past, we can move into the present.

Tara Brach, a famous Buddhist teacher, in her teaching on intention<sup>3</sup>

states that we can break such negative patterns by pausing – pausing in the present moment.

Tara says that by pausing for five seconds or more, we then have available to us other possible ways of acting and being.

She invites us to pause and know that awareness can alter such negative habits of thought.

She uses the metaphor of waves on the ocean surface, as how we can get caught day in, day out in patterns that take us away from what we truly value and hold dear in life.

Only by pausing, by going deeper, by going beneath the surface of the waves can we discover our true intentions, what we value most in life.

By stopping, and staying in the moment, we may discover what Rumi, the Sufi mystic meant when he said:

*Let yourself be drawn by the stronger pull of that which you truly love.*

---

<sup>3</sup> Talk - Wise Intention: the Compass of Our Hearts (Part 1A), Tara Brach

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9tfDJdGi-JY&t=127s>

Talk - Wise Intention: the Compass of Our Hearts (Part 1B) - Tara Brach

[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ri\\_yIHouBkQ](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ri_yIHouBkQ)

He also said:

*Sometimes you hear a voice through the door calling you –This turning towards what you deeply love saves you.*

This turning towards what we love is discovering our deepest intentions.

Tara Brach suggests that we take a few minutes every day and sit quietly. Then listen for what really matters to us.

What are we longing for?

What feels really real inside of ourselves?

This is not a conceptual experience, but one that embodies all of whom we are.

What is it that you hold deeply inside yourself that guides your life?

We best wait patiently to listen to ourselves, to find our deepest intentions for how we want to live out our highest values.

Finding our deepest intentions can lead us to a life well lived.

Author Ann Lamott <sup>4</sup>warns us to be sure to do so, when she says:

“Oh my God, what if you wake up some day and you never got your memoir or novel written; or you didn’t go swimming in warm pools and oceans all those years because your thighs were jiggly

and you had a nice big comfortable tummy; or you were just so strung out on perfectionism and people-pleasing that you forgot to have a big juicy creative life, of imagination and radical silliness and staring off into space like when you were a kid?

It’s going to break your heart. Don’t let this happen.

Repent just means to change direction — and NOT to be said by someone who is wagging their forefinger at you.

Repentance is a blessing. Pick a new direction and aim for that. Shoot the moon.”

Author Ann Lamott’s giving us some advice on how best to set our intentions.

So, this New Year I hope that each of us will take the time to look beneath the waves of our everyday lives, sit quietly and perhaps have some good resolutions arise, but more importantly to discern the deepest intentions of our lives, which can guide us through this turbulent world.

In our poetry class, Shirley R, also read Amanda Gorman’s poem for this new year.

I will close this sermon with Amanda’s poem, not so very different from Tennyson’s, 200 years ago, yet reflecting the unique challenges of our time, as well as Amanda’s unique poetic style.

“New Day’s Lyric”

May this be the day

We come together.

Mourning, we come to mend,

Withered, we come to weather,

Torn, we come to tend,

Battered, we come to better.

---

<sup>4</sup> Ann Lamott quote found in Soul Matters for Worship, January 2022.

Tethered by this year of yearning,  
We are learning  
That though we weren't ready for this,  
We have been readied by it.  
We steadily vow that no matter  
How we are weighed down,  
We must always pave a way forward.  
This hope is our door, our portal.  
Even if we never get back to normal,  
Someday we can venture beyond it,  
To leave the known and take the first steps.  
So let us not return to what was normal,  
But reach toward what is next.  
What was cursed, we will cure.  
What was plagued, we will prove pure.  
Where we tend to argue, we will try to agree,  
Those fortunes we forswore, now the future we foresee,  
Where we weren't aware, we're now awake;  
Those moments we missed  
Are now these moments we make,  
The moments we meet,  
And our hearts, once all together beaten,  
Now all together beat.  
Come, look up with kindness yet,  
For even solace can be sourced from sorrow.  
We remember, not just for the sake of yesterday,  
But to take on tomorrow.  
We heed this old spirit,  
In a new day's lyric,  
In our hearts, we hear it:  
For auld lang syne, my dear,  
For auld lang syne.  
Be bold, sang Time this year,  
Be bold, sang Time,

For when you honor yesterday,  
Tomorrow ye will find.  
Know what we've fought  
Need not be forgot nor for none.  
It defines us, binds us as one,  
Come over, join this day just begun.  
For wherever we come together,  
We will forever overcome.<sup>5</sup>

Peace and love to you. Happy New Year!

---

<sup>5</sup> (@amandascgorman)