



UNITARIAN UNIVERSALIST

CONGREGATION OF FREDERICK
Spirituality · Community · Justice

Saying Yes

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Here we are again: New Year's Eve. Over the last 365 days, our species and this planet have taken another circle around the sun. What have you learned in 2017? And in light of those lessons, **what do you want *more* of in your life in 2018? And what do you want *less* of?**

Along these lines, I appreciated a recent meditation from the UUA's Standing on the Side of Love campaign that said:

I know I need to say no sometimes.

I know I need to honor boundaries. To put my phone on airplane mode or send the request for emotional labor back *return to sender*.

Saying no lets me eat and sleep and be self-determined and practice faith that someone else can do it.

And also, it turns out there is nothing more powerful than a yes that we mean.

When I haven't seen you in a while and we have some tension and you ask me to tea —

And I say yes.

When that task in the meeting needs to be done and I know I can do it reallllly well—

And I say yes.

When someone needs a letter or a ride or a meal or a door knock —

And I say yes....

The best yeses are hard because they ask something of us.

The best yeses are easy because they let us be who we've always said we would be.

In that spirit, what people, places, things, and activities do you want to say yes to in 2018? And what people, places, things, and activities do you want to say *no* to in the new year?

As I have been thinking through my own responses to those questions, one book I have enjoyed reading is **Year of Yes by the television writer/producer Shonda Rhimes**. My first foray into Shondaland was more than a decade ago through her medical drama *Grey's Anatomy*. Since then, I've appreciated a number of her other shows, including the legal drama *How to Get Away with Murder* and the political drama *Scandal*.

Fascinatingly, **a few years ago, ABC's entire Thursday night prime time schedule was built entirely out of Rhimes's shows**: *Grey's Anatomy* at 8 p.m., *Scandal* at 9 p.m., and *How To Get Away with Murder* at 10 p.m. As impressive as I find that achievement, that lineup didn't impact me directly since I would rather catch up on series a year later on streaming without commercials, than watch them new with commercials. (That's how much I feel led to say *no* to commercials!) And I'm not alone because the news broke a few months ago that, despite her success on ABC, Shonda Rhimes is moving all her new shows to Netflix.

And although there's a lot to say about the cultural impact of the shift toward streaming, that's a tangent best left for another time. Instead, on this New Year's Eve, I would like to invite us to consider what lessons there might be for us in the life and experience of Shonda Rhimes.

Indeed, even before her successful career, she had an impressive resume: B.A. in English from Dartmouth and M.F.A. from the USC School of Cinema-Television. She is also the mother of three daughters (309-310). And Simon & Schuster initially contracted with her to write a book about being a mother while navigating a wildly successful career. But she discovered along the way that **the book she really wanted**

to write was about a year of experimenting with saying yes. Fortunately, the book publisher said *yes* as well.

One might assume that someone as successful as Shonda Rhimes must have a long standing practice of saying *yes* to a lot of things. But part of how she became successful was saying *no* to many invitations that would be distractions from her larger goals. Indeed, part of what inspired her “Year of Yes” is her sister saying, “You never say *yes* to anything” (1).

In response, Rhimes committed to experimenting for a year with saying:

Yes to everything scary.

Yes to everything that takes me out of my comfort zone.

Yes to everything that feels like it might be crazy.

Yes to everything that feels out of character.

Yes to everything that feels goofy. (33-34)

That ended up meaning a *yes* to invitations like delivering a commencement address at her *alma mater* of Dartmouth College (33), a *yes* to sitting in the presidential box at the Kennedy Center honors alongside Barack and Michelle Obama (15), and a *yes* to being a guest on shows like *Jimmy Kimmel Live* (49-50). Some of those *yeses* might feel pretty easy to some of you, but **as someone much more comfortable in a writer’s room than in front of a camera, Rhimes found many aspects of these appearances both terrifying and intimidating.**

As you can likely guess, Rhimes’ year of saying *yes* meant that she was even busier than her usual incredibly busy life (115-116). She has always felt a lot of pressure to succeed. In 2012, when she created *Scandal*, it was the first network drama with an African-American leading woman in thirty-seven years. As an African-American woman herself, Rhimes felt immense pressure for the show to find an audience (138). She writes that the even the old adage that women have to be “twice as good to get half as far as men” did not adequately describe the pressure she felt. She says, **“I didn’t want half. I wanted it all. And so I worked four times as hard”** (140).

Despite that pressure, one of the most moving parts of the book is when she does talk about parenthood. Part of her “Year of Yes” included saying yes to her children. In her words, “**Whenever Emerson or Beckett or Harper asks, ‘Wanna play?’ I am always going to answer YES.** Always. Because if I have to have my dress removed by a stranger, I should at least get to do something I enjoy. I should at least get to see that happy look on their faces” (121).

Now, there’s a lot more I could tell you about Shonda Rhimes, and her book *Year of Yes* is a fun and inspiring read. But the larger point is about the parallels in your life: what you feel led to say *yes* and *no* to in 2018.

On the edge of a new year, what do you feel called to *move toward* with a greater level of commitment? And what are you feeling led to *let go of* that has been a distraction or a detriment? To help with your discernment, I invite you consider a series of questions that I received a few years ago as part of a “Choose Health” program. As you receive these questions, notice if one of the following areas particularly resonates with you in this season of your life.

- **Physical Wellness:** When or how do you feel *physically alive*, your body skillfully engaged? What would you like to do to feel this way more often?
- **Emotional Wellness:** When or how do you feel emotionally engaged? Let yourself dream about something that would add more *joy* to your life.
- **Intellectual Wellness:** When or how does your *mind feel energized*, buzzing with electric vitality?
- **Financial Wellness:** What would help you feel more comfortable with your finances?
- **Social Wellness:** When or how do you feel *connected* to those you love and value?
- **Vocational Wellness:** When or how do you feel *fulfilled and optimistic* in your work?
- **Spiritual Wellness:** What individual or communal practice makes you feel more connected to something larger than yourself?

As you continue to reflect, you are invited in a few minutes to participate in two ritual responses as part of a UU tradition called [Fire Communion](#).

Looking back on 2017, is there something—a person, place, or habit—that has been a hindrance to your well-being? **Is there something that you feel called to let go of or say *no* to in the new year?** In a few moments, once the music starts playing, I invite you to come forward silently and write a word on a slip of paper that is symbolic of what you feel called to *let go of* in 2018. Then I invite you to light that slip of paper on fire. And while burning a slip of paper does not necessarily mean that the process of “letting go” is complete, I invite you to see this ritual as an important step in setting an intention to continue the process of letting go of a part of your life that has been life-negating for you. **You are also invited to light a votive candle to set an intention for something you want to do, affirm, or say yes to in the new year.**

As you discern what you feel led to say yes to in 2018, I will share with you one more quote from Shonda Rhimes:

Every single time you get the chance,
Stand up in front of people.
Let them see you. Speak. Be heard.
Go ahead and have the dry mouth.
Let your heart beat so, so fast.
Watching everything move in slow motion.
So what. You what?
You pass out, you die, you poop?
No.
(And this is really the only lesson you'll ever need to know.)
You take it in.
Year breathe this rare air.
You feel alive.
You are yourself.
You are truly finally always yourself. (90-91)

In that spirit, what do you feel called to set an intention of saying yes and *no* to in 2018?