

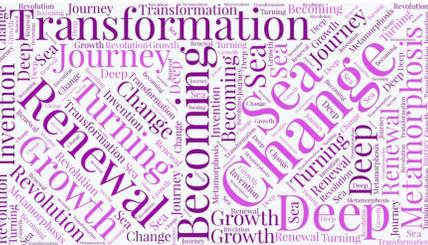


# TOUCHSTONES

a monthly journal of Unitarian Universalism

April 2018

## Transformation



### Introduction to the Theme

Rev. Kirk Loadman-Copeland

Much of what we do in life involves either no change; we really do like our routines and habits, or first-order change, which involves a logical extension between past and current practices. It is doing more or less of what we are already doing. First-order change is reversible, which means it's relatively easy to change our mind and abandon the project. New learning is not required and the story of what we are doing remains essentially unchanged.

Second-order change is deciding or being forced to do something in a radically different way than you have done

it before. It typically involves a new way of seeing things. It might begin informally, but it does require new learning and the creation of a new story to explain and make sense of things. And it involves transformation, which is to say profound, qualitative changes in who you are and what you do, changes that make a discernible difference. Real second-order change is irreversible because the avenues to returning to the old way are no longer viable options. This is to say that we won't go back even if we could because the old story no longer works for us.

To speak of bread as a symbol of transformation is to speak literally and figuratively. Master baker Peter Reinhart talked about the series of transformations that occur that result in bread. Wheat is grown, harvested and converted into flour. Flour is combined with water, salt, and yeast and becomes alive as the bread rises. The bread is baked

*(Continued on page 6)*

## Wisdom Story

### The Bundle of Sticks

*Aesop fable retold by Elisa Pearmain, adapted*

Once upon a time, an old woman lived on a beautiful farm in the country.

From her window, she could see pasture land, fields of grain, barns filled with animals,



orchards and forests beyond. The farm was special to the old woman because it had been in her family for many generations. She had lived there her whole life, and grew up to be a mother, and raised her family of six children. Now her husband was dead, and she, too, was in the last days of her life.

The old woman should have been content after such a fortunate life, but she was not. She lay on her bed worrying about her grown children. They could not seem to get along. She heard them quarreling day and night. Even though some of them were good at farming, and some at working with the animals, some at carpentry, and others at cooking or preserving the food they grew, they each thought their job was the most important and that the others didn't work hard enough. They were all grown-ups now, but they held grudges against each other from things in the past, and they were jealous of each other's good fortune.

The old woman tried talking to her children about living in peace, yet they seemed to grow increasingly bitter by the day. She felt sure that they would not be able to keep the family farm after she had died, because they could not seem to

*(Continued on page 2)*

### Transformation & the Common Good

Lynn Ashbeck writes, "Can anything get done in Washington?" This is a daily refrain in headlines, ...on Twitter, and from cynical pundits ...on news shows. But the 'closer to home' question is, "Can anything really be done to solve our community's daily issues... much less move the needle on our most intractable problems...?"

That question represents an opportunity for us ...to concretely explore the relationship between transformation, power, and the common good.

...Though the answers are complex, ... our questions remain simple...: How do we get from transactions to transformation? From authority to power? From self-interest to the common good? And how is it that ...we often seem to mistake one for the other?

Source: <http://cctfresno.org/the-transformation-of-power-for-the-common-good/>

*Touchstones Consulting is committed to the work of articulating a liberal theology. This journal is supported by subscriptions from Unitarian and Unitarian Universalist congregations throughout the world.*

# Reimagining the Common Good

## Gathered Together

(Continued from page 1) **The Bundle of Sticks** work together or appreciate each other's gifts.

Then one day as her strength waned, she had an idea. She called her children to her bedside. "I have one last favor to ask of you," she said. "I would like each one of you to go to the forest and find two sticks. Bring them here tomorrow and I will explain."

The children did as she asked and came to her room the next day, with two sticks each.

"Thank you children," the old woman said. "Please put one of your sticks down, and see if you can break the other one in half." The children easily broke their sticks in half. Then the old woman asked the children to pass her the remaining whole sticks.

"Let us gather the remaining sticks into a bundle," she said. Then the old woman passed the bundle back to her children and said, "Please pass this bundle of sticks among yourselves and tell me — is it as easy to break the bundle as it was the single stick?"

The children passed the bundle among themselves, but none of them could break the bundle of sticks.

"You my children, are like these sticks," the old woman said. "If you go your separate ways, quarrelling, and holding resentments toward one another, you will each be alone like the individual sticks. The difficulties of life will easily hurt you. But if you work together, appreciate each other's strengths, cherish what you share in common, and care for each other, you will be strong like the bundle of sticks, and nothing in life can break you. Find strength and joy in one another's company, and you will live well and accomplish much."

The children were transformed by their mother's lesson. From that day forward, they let go of past grudges, focused on what they shared in common, appreciated each other's strengths, and worked together. The old woman died peacefully, and the farm remained in the family for many generations.

Source: <http://www.wisdomtales.com/characterstories.html>

## The Paradox

### Becoming You

Rev. Marlin Lavanhar



The concept of personal transformation has become, for some, a trendy phenomenon that can seem more about exotic gurus, designer yoga mats and organic fruit smoothies than about living a soulful life of integrity and courage. Sometimes the purpose becomes hidden by or confused with the pomp and paraphernalia. A wise person wrote: "... change occurs when one becomes what he is, not when he tries to become what he is not. Change does not take place through a coercive attempt by the individual or by another person to change him, but it does take place if one takes the time and effort to be what he is—to be fully invested in his current positions."

In other words, "the paradox of transformation" is that it is about becoming more fully who we are, rather than becoming something different. That does not mean that an addict remains an addict or an abuser continues to abuse or a liar becomes a better liar or a hater becomes more hateful. It means that we discover a deeper truth about ourselves and we find a way to live into that truth. It is helpful to begin a transformational journey by seeking our true core and essence.

...Let us never allow our core purpose and principles to become hidden by, or confused with, the external trappings and surface structures of our community and culture. Like the caterpillar that turns into a butterfly, when we come to the messy, challenging parts of becoming who we are meant to be, let us have the courage to hang on long enough to realize our full potential.

Source: excerpt from *Simple Gifts Journal*, All Souls Unitarian Church, Tulsa, OK

## Life Happens

### Nothing in Life is Stable

Joan Chittister



Assuming that tomorrow will be the same as today is poor preparation for living. It equips us only for disappointment or shock. To live well, to be mentally healthy, we must learn to realize that life is a work in progress.

Life happens in small stages. The quantum leaps in life — great new promotions, stunning losses — even when they happen, take a lot of growing into if we are to become what they exact in us.

Because change is of the essence of life, we know that anything is possible. The only thing we don't know is what it will do to us. "Change is the constant," Christina Baldwin wrote, "the signal for rebirth, the egg of the phoenix." All we really need to learn to do is to accept the present with open arms and let it do what it must to us.

Nothing is stable in life. Nothing can be taken for granted. Nothing is static. Everything goes on changing. Sometimes



in great, bold, striking ways. Sometimes in tiny little incremental

changes that sneak up on us unaware—like weight and height and age. Don't be afraid of becoming different than you are—just be sure you enjoy the gifts of each and every stage as well as bemoan its burdens.

Life just goes on demanding new life from us all the time.

The spiritual task is to keep measuring the shades of difference that are all around us in life and keep adjusting to them.

Source: <http://www.spiritualityandpractice.com/book-reviews/excerpts/view/24291>

## Readings from the Common Bowl



**Day 1:** “You are destined to fly, but that cocoon has to go.” Nelle Morton

closing of the heart far more than the closing of the mind that keeps folk from transformation and deepening.”

Jean Houston

**Day 3:** “Spiritual transformation ... doesn’t happen by accident. We need a repeated discipline, a genuine training, in order to let go of our old habits of mind and to find and sustain a new way of seeing.” Jack Kornfield

**Day 4:** “In the kind of world we have today, transformation of humanity might well be our only real hope for survival.” Stanislav Grof

**Day 5:** “Life is occupied in both perpetuating itself and in surpassing itself. If all it does is maintain itself, then living is only not dying.” Simone de Beauvoir

**Day 6:** “Personal transformation can and does have global effects. As we go, so goes the world, for the world is us. The revolution that will save the world is a personal one.” Marianne Williamson

**Day 7:** “It is never too late to be who you might have been.” George Eliot

**Day 8:** “Scared and sacred are spelled with the same letters. Awful proceeds from the same root word as awesome. Terrify and terrific. Every negative experience holds the seed of transformation.” Alan Cohen

**Day 9:** “We learn and grow and are transformed not so much by what we do but by why and how we do it.” Sharon Salzberg

**Day 10:** “As human beings, our greatness lies not so much in being able to remake the world—that is the myth of the atomic age—as in being able to remake ourselves.” Mohandas K. Gandhi

**Day 11:** “The curious paradox is that when I accept myself just as I am, then I can change.” Carl Rogers

**Day 12:** “I never told a victim story about my imprisonment. Instead, I told a trans-

formation story—about how prison changed my out-

look, about how I saw that communication, truth, and trust are at the heart of power.” Fernando Flores

**Day 13:** “Transformation in the world happens when people are healed and start investing in other people.” Michael W. Smith

**Day 14:** “When we quit thinking primarily about ourselves and our own self-preservation, we undergo a truly heroic transformation of consciousness.” Joseph Campbell

**Day 15:** “Transformation is not five minutes from now; it’s a present activity. In this moment you can make a different choice, and it’s these small choices and successes that build up over time....” Jillian Michaels

**Day 16:** “We seek not rest but transformation. We are dancing through each other as doorways.” Marge Piercy

**Day 17:** “We do not need magic to transform our world. We carry all the power we need inside ourselves already.” J.K. Rowling

**Day 18:** “We imagine that we want to escape our selfish and commonplace existence, but we cling desperately to our chains.” Anne Sullivan

**Day 19:** “For me, forgiveness and compassion are always linked: how do we hold people accountable for wrongdoing and yet at the same time remain in touch with their humanity enough to believe in their capacity to be transformed?” bell hooks

**Day 20:** “The main dangers in this life are the people who want to change everything or nothing.” Nancy Astor

**Day 21:** “The most important thing to remember is this: To be ready at any moment to give up what you are for what you might become.” W. E. B. Du Bois

**Day 22:** “We frail humans are at one time capable of the greatest good and, at the same time, capable of the greatest evil. Change will only come about when each of us takes up the daily struggle ourselves to be more forgiving, compassionate, loving, and above all joyful in the knowledge that, by some miracle of grace, we can

change as those around us can change too.” Mairead Maguire

**Day 23:** “Small acts, when multiplied by millions of people, can transform the world.” Howard Zinn

**Day 24:** “Perhaps the Egyptians chose the beetle as a god of creation, and not some more noble creature, because that lowly image hints at the possibility that transformation begins at the bottom level and attains the highest.” Normandi Ellis

**Day 25:** “The truth is that our finest moments are most likely to occur when we are feeling deeply uncomfortable, unhappy, or unfulfilled. For it is only in such moments, propelled by our discomfort, that we are likely to step out of our ruts and start searching for different ways or truer answers.” M. Scott Peck

**Day 26:** “When we blindly adopt a religion, a political system, a literary dogma, we become automatons. We cease to grow.” Anaïs Nin

**Day 27:** “In times of change, learners inherit the Earth, while the learned find themselves beautifully equipped to deal with a world that no longer exists.” Eric Hoffer

**Day 28:** “No person is your friend who demands your silence, or denies your right to grow.” Alice Walker

**Day 29:** “We are not born all at once, but by bits. The body first, and the spirit later; and the birth and growth of the spirit, in those who are attentive to their own inner life, are slow and exceedingly painful. Our mothers are racked with the pains of our physical birth; we ourselves suffer the longer pains of our spiritual growth.” Mary Antin

**Day 30:** “What the caterpillar calls the end of the world, the master calls a butterfly.” Richard Bach



**Day 31:** “The most authentic thing about us is our capacity to create, to overcome, to endure, to transform, to love and to be greater than our suffering.” Ben Okri



## Faith and Theology

### Everyone a Caterpillar

Rev. Kirk Loadman-Copeland



Eric Carle tells the story of *The Very Hungry Caterpillar* like a magician. We are so captivated by all the hungry little caterpillar is eating, that we think that this is what the story is about.

It is not until the last page, that we realize that it is a story about transformation. We attend to the outward action, unable to imagine, just like the caterpillar, that our destiny, if we pay sufficient attention, may be the winged life. And this is the larger reality; it is not a story just about caterpillar transformation, but about the possibility of our own transformation.

In her poem, *Black Swallowtail*, poet Mary Oliver tells Eric Carle's story differently. She writes, "The caterpillar/ interesting but not exactly lovely,/ humped along among the parsley leaves/ eating, always eating. Then/ one night it was gone and in its place/ a small green confinement hung by two silk threads/ on a parsley stem. I think it took nothing with it/ except faith and patience. And then one morning/ it expressed itself into the most beautiful thing." Faith and patience: those are incredibly important spiritual attributes if we seek transformation.

Like the hungry little caterpillar, Eve ate the apple and nothing has ever been the same since. She gave birth to human possibility. So, what is it that you hunger for? How will you feed that hunger? And by feeding it, how will you be transformed? Be careful. These are provocative and essential questions, and we often get the answers wrong. We feed the wrong thing in the wrong way, and

become addicted to things that betray our humanity. We spend too much time feeding the body, and not enough time feeding

the soul, forgetting that if we truly feed our souls, how we treat our bodies will profoundly change, as will the way that we live our lives.

It is just a simple children's story, yet we would be wise to ponder its deeper meanings and higher aspirations. The caterpillar, from the moment it hatches, is on an incredible journey that it cannot imagine, and the same can be true for us. The journey is simply this: from no-life to caterpillar-life to cocoon-death to butterfly-transformation.

Once we read *The Very Hungry Caterpillar* for the first time, every other reading has us transfixed by butterfly transformation. It is, after all, quite a miracle: incredible beauty and the ability to fly. But ask yourself this, "Which is more miraculous, leaving the cocoon to fly or leaving the egg to enter the world as a caterpillar?" Choose life, and then choose transformation.

As you think about your own life, ask yourself again and again: "In this moment, am I a caterpillar or a butterfly?" And expect the answer to keep changing. If we compare our life span to that of a caterpillar, we literally have hundreds of lifetimes, with the possibility of being transformed again and again. Transformed into what, you may ask? And there is the mystery. No one knows. A caterpillar looking at a butterfly is oblivious to the fact that the butterfly is the caterpillar's mirror. Ask yourself in any cycle of time, perhaps a month or a year, is this caterpillar time, cocoon time, or butterfly time?

Emerging from a cocoon to become a butterfly is quite a miracle, this transformation from being earthbound to flying, as is the birth from an egg to become a caterpillar, a transformation from no-life to life. Neither of these, per se, requires much of us. They are outcomes of processes that we cannot control. The leap of

faith, the act of courage, is to accept the fact that our caterpillar life is ultimately not adequate to our dreams, and to begin spinning the silk thread, building the cocoon, and undertaking the hard work of transformation, which is usually hidden from everyone else's eyes.

Most of the time, we refuse the cocoon life, unwilling to die to our present self in order to be born again, unwilling to rely on faith and patience as tools of transformation. As the Japanese poet Matsuo Baso wrote, "A caterpillar/ this deep in fall-/ still not a butterfly." Still not a butterfly, because we fear losing the certainty of who we are for the uncertainty of who we might become. To faith and patience, we must add trust, or as someone wisely wrote, "What the caterpillar calls the end, the world calls a butterfly."

In addition to the fear that prevents us from creating and entering the cocoon, there is the fear of leaving the cocoon. There is what I would call the existential caterpillar decision: Will we choose to "soar immortal, outlasting the sun and moon, or lie forever unwakened in our blind cocoon?" I hope that we not remain captive to our fear, afraid of change, but choose to become, as one of our hymns has it, "architects of our faith." As we



learn to negotiate the caterpillar transitions of our lives, we will learn to soar higher and higher in our butterfly aspirations. Tiong Chung Hoo wrote, "a changing world/at her fingertip/a caterpillar." I would add, a changing world within our soul — caterpillar possibility

It is just a simple child's story, yet we all need such stories to encourage us to ponder the meaning of our life, which is not about emerging from our cocoon life for butterfly reality, but the decision, made as often as necessary, to seek the hard work and transformation of the cocoon.

# Family Matters

## Hungry, Very Hungry

Rev. Kirk Loadman-Copeland

It started as so many things do, with no real intention or planning. It was a Monday, the apple was ripe and, despite the grief that an apple brought to Eve millennia ago, she ate it—red and delicious. On Tuesday, the two green-gold pears reflected the soft light of the sunshine as it shimmered among the pear leaves. Two pears nibbled on seemed to satisfy, seemed more than enough, but then, not enough. On Wednesday, there were these three luscious plums. They had the sweet scent of plum, but a taste both sweet and tart. You would have thought that the apple, pears, and plums would have been enough, except the strawberries in the strawberry patch on Thursday were so red and succulent that no one could pass them up. Well maybe others, but not her. They tasted as good as they looked, maybe better. That night she had sweet, red, strawberry dreams. On Friday, perhaps being a bit thirsty, she enjoyed the sweet, tangy juice of five oranges.

Looking back, no one could have ever predicted what happened next. After all, although her appetite had steadily grown throughout the week, the fruit was nourishing and sensible. On Saturday, she got up early, perhaps because she was absolutely ravenousness. She did not know it, but she was about to commit the sin of gluttony. No one has ever asked where the food came from, but everyone continues to be amazed.



She began eating and couldn't stop. Some have heard this amazing story so many times that they can recite the rather eclectic menu from memory: one piece of chocolate cake, one ice-cream cone, one pickle,

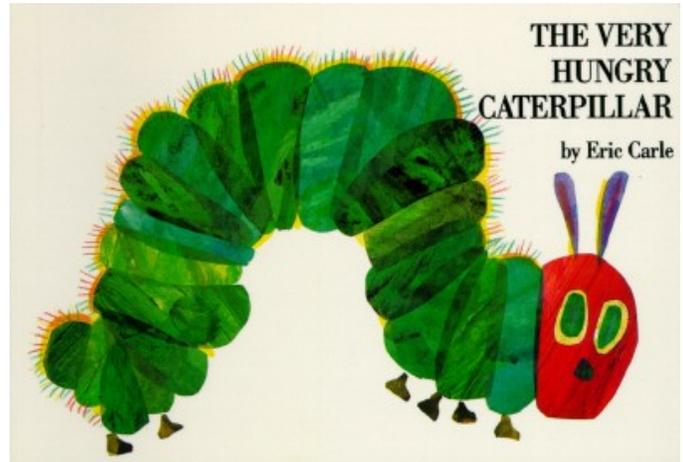
one slice of Swiss cheese, one slice of salami, one lollipop, one piece of cherry pie, one sausage, one cupcake, and one slice of watermelon. That night the hungry little caterpillar had a very big stomach ache as act one came to an end.

It is just a simple children's story, yet it teaches children how to count and learn the days of the week. It is just a simple children's story, yet Eric Carle's lovely book is widely regarded as one of the best children's books ever written. It may never have been written with all of those holes marking the ravenous rampage of a little caterpillar. The idea for the story came to Carle one day when he was punching holes with a hole-puncher into a stack of paper. It is just a simple children's story, yet we learn that too much of a good thing is not always such a good thing.

Fortunately, after bingeing, it was again Sunday and the caterpillar used the Sabbath to rest, eating just a little bit of one nice, green leaf. Then, as you turn the page, you find, not a tiny and very hungry caterpillar, but, and I quote, "a big, fat caterpillar." Eric Carle's artistic imagination cannot come close to capturing reality, since from birth a caterpillar can grow in size by 30,000 times, proof that a little caterpillar must be incredibly hungry. So hide your apples and chocolate cake.

On one page you see a big, fat caterpillar and then, on the next page, a big, fat cocoon. The caterpillar is gone, both artistically and literally. Now Carle could have made the book a lot longer by adding a number of pages showing just a cocoon with nothing happening. After all, a monarch butterfly spends two weeks in the cocoon. It probably seems like an eternity to the caterpillar, because it is.

Beyond our eyes and a child's imagination, something unimaginable is happening within the cocoon. Does the caterpillar in the cocoon still dream of strawberries? Does the pupa even remember what it



was like to be an earthbound caterpillar? Does it remember its soft body and short legs? Does it remember just how slow it walked or how much it ate? And did the caterpillar ever look at a butterfly and feel an unexplained, but profound longing?

So we turn the page a final time to see a beautiful butterfly. In beauty it is ended. Eric Carle wrote, "I believe the passage from home to school is the second biggest trauma of childhood; the first is, of course, being born. Indeed, in both cases we leave a place of warmth and protection for one that is unknown. The unknown often brings fear with it. In my books, I try to counteract this fear, to replace it with a positive message."

### Family Activity: Tunnel Vision

A cocoon is a kind of tunnel. The caterpillar goes in one end and comes out the other end as a butterfly. If you could go into the tunnel and come out the other end as anything you wanted, what would that be? Invite a discussion with your children about what each of you would want to be as you left the tunnel.

### Family Activity: The World of Eric Carle

Visit these web pages and enjoy!

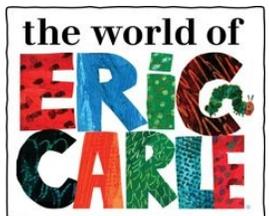
<http://www.eric-carle.com/>

[faqs.newsletters.downloads.games.html](http://www.eric-carle.com/faqs.newsletters.downloads.games.html)

See Eric Carle read *The Very Hungry Caterpillar* at this link:

[http://www.eric-carle.com/](http://www.eric-carle.com/ec_reads_vhc.html)

[ec\\_reads\\_vhc.html](http://www.eric-carle.com/ec_reads_vhc.html)



## Transformation: Soul Work

(Continued from page 1) **Intro to the Theme**

and becomes, for us, the staff of life, a necessary staple to sustain human life, to sustain our life as we partake of the bread.

The poet Thomas McGrath (1916-1990) wrote a poem called *The Bread of This World* in which he wrote, "On the ... white plains of the floured and flowering kitchen table/ The holy loaves of the bread are slowly being born:/ Rising like low hills in the steepled pastures of light —/ Lifting the prairie farmhouse afternoon on their arching backs. ... /...we who will eat the bread when we come in/ Out of the cold and dark know it is a deeper mystery/ That brings the bread to rise:/ it is the love and faith/ ...of women, moving like floury clouds/ In farmhouse kitchens, that rounds the loaves and the lives/ Of those around them.../ just as we know it is hunger —/ Our own and others—that gives all salt and savor to bread. ..."

Following a recipe, we make a loaf of bread. But there are other recipes. The one I have in mind is by Rev. Roger Bertschhausen. He wrote, "So, to recap, here's the recipe for my belief about God: *Ingredients:* 1 cup agnosticism, ½ cup Emerson's Oversoul, ½ cup of Hindu view of God, ½ cup process theology, 1 teaspoon liberation theology (for leavening), 1 tablespoon Star Wars' 'Force,' ¼ teaspoon forgiveness, ½ teaspoon gratitude, and ½ teaspoon joy. *Directions:* 1. Combine Emerson's Oversoul and the Hindu view of God in a small bowl and mix. 2. Combine all ingredients (including the Oversoul/Hindu mixture) together in large bowl and mix. 3. Spread batter evenly into container—namely, me. 4. Bake in an oven preheated to 98.6 degrees for 45 years and 356 days. 5. Let cool and enjoy!"

As you think about your own life, what are the ingredients that have shaped your life? What additional ingredients will you seek going forward and how will you combine them in your life as you continue to grow and change.

Unitarian minister A. Powell Davies said that "the purpose of life is to

grow a soul." To say this is to suggest that at birth there are many ways in which we can express our humanity as we grow and some of these involve the essence of who we are.

So how do we grow? Anaïs Nin said it best: "We do not grow absolutely, chronologically. We grow sometimes in one dimension, and not in another; unevenly. We grow partially. We are relative. We are mature in one realm, childish in another. The past, present, and future mingle and pull us backward, forward, or fix us in the present. We are made up of layers, cells, constellations."

We come to religious community with a deep yearning for more: more meaning, more purpose, and more connection. We come with a holy discontent and the desire for transformation. Using the journey metaphor, we come in search of a path and fellow-pilgrims to accompany us on the journey. Unitarian Universalist minister Michael Schuler writes that people come to our churches because, "They have become frustrated with a life that feels shallower, more tedious, and less intrinsically meaningful than it should." They want "a fresh perspective, a renewed sense of purpose, and the possibility of greater daily gladness."

The necessity of transformation becomes more pressing because it is no longer isolated to how we live individually, but of how human beings live collectively on our fragile and imperiled planet. We undertake transformation by following a path, one not unlike the eightfold path of Buddhism, which stresses essential components like right action, right livelihood, and right mindfulness. How we live matters more than we ever imagined.

The container for this work is at hand. It is religious community. The invitation is simple: take up the soul work that calls to you. Proceed with diligence, commitment, and compassion and you will be amazed at the transformation that will eventually occur. As Richard Holloway said, the trick is "to change elegantly rather than awkwardly when the time is ripe."

## Improvisation

### Composing a Further Life

Mary Catherine Bateson



Part of the challenge, then, in growing older, is to discover the ways, arising from a lifetime of experience and in spite of reduced strength and stamina, in which it continues to be possible to contribute. The corresponding challenge to society is to recognize that contribution and to benefit from it instead of dismissing it.

...As we gradually become a four-generation society ...great-grandparents are as common as grandparents were in the past.... We may find that longevity contributes as much to our humanity as has the extension of childhood. In the meantime, however, the fear of becoming useless and dependent erodes the spirit as definitions are turned into fact, for the most toxic aspect of aging is the negative beliefs that seniors may come to have about themselves and about each other.



Aging today has become an improvisational art form calling for imagination and willingness to learn. Increased longevity will challenge us not only to revise expectations but also to discover unexpected possibilities, arranging life in new and satisfying patterns, and to explore how newly perceived possibilities relate to earlier life choices. In the process we will encounter gradual—or sometimes sudden—shifts of consciousness and identity that accompany awareness of the new situation.

Source: <http://www.spiritualityandpractice.com/book-reviews/excerpts/view/20588/composing-a-further-life>

## Worthy Beliefs

### A Time for Transformation

Rev. Stephen Edington

...[Here] are some of the "worthy beliefs" ...that have proven to be transformative for me. ...First, ...I believe that this is the only world and universe we have.... What we have here is enough—enough to give our lives meaning and purpose and deep relatedness.... This gets me ...to my second worthy belief....



It is how we see and how we choose to see, that makes the difference and that is transformative for us. ...We are ...called to infuse with meaning the world we've been given to live in, and to see beyond its surface manifestations.

My third ...is that life... both blesses and wounds us, and we are called to hold fast ...in the face of both.

...A corollary ...is that as part of the great chain of life we can be both bearers of joy, and we can also wound. We may be thanked when we are bearers of blessings; and we have to seek forgiveness... when we wound others or wound our earth.

My fourth "thing worth believing:" ... I believe that this world ...with all of its unhealed and un-reconciled parts—is still worthy of our efforts ...however meager, to transform it. ...

Fifth, ...I believe that "We can never contain the beauty in which we live and move and have our being, whether we live or die we are contained within this beauty."

...A sixth belief ...under girds the five I've already shared...: "Life is holy and every moment is precious." (from Kerouac's *On the Road*)

Source: excerpt from the sermon, *A Time for Transformation* by the Rev. Stephen Edington



## Lao Tzu's Path

### Let Go into Transformation

William Martin

This is a path of letting go.....



If we hold on to our opinions, our minds will become dull and useless. Let go of opinions.

If we hold on to possessions, we will always be at risk. Let go of possessions.

If we hold on to ego, we will continue to suffer. Let go of ego.

Working without thought of praise or blame is the way of true contentment.

This is a path of letting go so there will be room to live.

Thinking ourselves somehow separate from life, we conclude that our safety and well-being are dependent on our ability to control our circumstances. ...Lao-tzu teaches us to let go. We let go of the belief that control is possible. ...We let go of the countless conditioned beliefs that have promised safety and happiness, only to deliver anxiety and suffering. We eventually let go of even the ideas of who we are as a separate ego.



This path accepts that developing an ego is an essential element in human growth. But it also suggests that this development might be a *stage* of human development rather than its end product. Developing a cocoon is a natural and essential part of being a caterpillar. But the time comes when the cocoon softens, wears out, and opens up. What if this is the case for all our opinions, possessions, and even for our ego? What if, when the cocoon of ego opens, instead of the feared abyss we find a butterfly?"

Source: <http://www.spiritualityandpractice.com/book-reviews/excerpts/view/14566>

## Breaking into Beauty

### Transforming Brokenness

Robert Waldron



The idea of taking what was broken, what many would consider useless, and transforming it into something more lovely haunted me.... The poet Edward A. Robinson says that "most things break," including people. We all break down at some point in our lives either with physical or psychic illness. This is a fact of life. But great things can emerge from such breakage. I think of the poet Theodore Roethke who suffered a nervous breakdown but on recovery said, 'That wasn't a breakdown but a break-up!' because he became a saner and more whole person, perhaps even a greater poet. Ignatius of Loyola founded the Society of Jesus after an illness and a spiritual crisis. John of the Cross wrote his greatest poetry while in prison, as monks of his order tried to break his spirit. The poet Francis Thompson, broken by his addiction to opium, emerged from his dark night to compose his luminous spiritual autobiography, *The Hound of Heaven*.

T. S. Eliot emerged from his brokenness chronicled in *The Waste Land* to write his spiritual masterpiece of faith, *The Four Quartets*.

...Of all the spiritual writers I have read...,



no one understands brokenness so acutely, compassionately, and wisely as... [Henri Nouwen]. He deeply delved into his own woundedness, so profoundly that he could subsequently refer to himself as a "wounded healer." By walking with Nouwen, I've come to understand his wounding and how he transcended it. ...Our wounds [can] ... break us into beauty.

Source: <http://www.spiritualityandpractice.com/book-reviews/excerpts/view/14124>

## Small Group Discussion Guide

### Theme for Discussion: Transformation

**Preparation prior to Gathering:** (Read this issue of *Explorations* and the questions.)

**Business:** Deal with any housekeeping items (e.g., scheduling the next gathering).

**Opening Words:** A Zen master said to a monk, "You must see the universe in your cup." The monk looked into his cup, but didn't see the universe, so he threw the cup away. The Zen master said, "Oh, poor cup. We think the cup is too small to hold the universe. Intellectually, we can't see how it could fit. But wherever we go, the whole universe always appears—in a cup, a window, in a smile, in a word."

**Chalice Lighting** (James Vila Blake, adapted) (In unison) *Love is the spirit of this church, and service is its law. This is our covenant: to dwell together in peace, to seek the truth in love, to serve human need, and to help one another.*

**Check-In:** How is it with your spirit? What do you need to leave behind in order to be fully present here and now? (2-3 sentences)

**Claim Time for Deeper Listening:** This comes at the end of the gathering where you can be listened to uninterrupted for more time if needed. You are encouraged to claim time ranging between 3-5 minutes, and to honor the limit of the time that you claim.

**Read the Wisdom Story:** Take turns reading aloud parts of the wisdom story on page 1.

**Readings from the Common Bowl:** Group Members read selections from Readings from the Common Bowl (page 3). Leave a few moments of silence after each to invite reflection on the meaning of the words.

**Sitting In Silence:** Sit in silence together, allowing the *Readings from the Common Bowl* to resonate. Cultivate a sense of calm and attention to the readings and the discussion that follows (*Living the Questions*).

**Reading:** "Most people can look back over the years and identify a time and place at which their lives changed significantly. Whether by accident or design, these are the moments when, because of a readiness within us and a collaboration with events occurring around us, we are forced to seriously reappraise ourselves and the conditions under which we live and to make cer-

tain choices that will affect the rest of our lives." *Frederick F. Flack*

#### Living the Questions

Explore as many of these questions as time allows. Fully explore one question before moving to the next.

1. What is your attitude toward change: positive, negative, or neutral? Why?
2. Did your family have expectations about change or transformation? What were they?
3. Is there a transformation story or experience that inspires you? How does that story inform the way you live today?
4. What is your attitude toward transformation? Are you willing to be transformed? What are your hopes and fears about transformation?
5. Do you have any spiritual practices that help you grow in awareness of possibilities for transformation in your own life? What are they and how do they impact you?
6. How can our congregation become a center of transformation?
7. What in your life is undergoing transformation currently?
8. What societal transformation would you like to see? Why?

The facilitator or group members are invited to propose additional questions that they would like to explore.

**Deeper Listening:** If time was claimed by individuals, the group listens without interruption to each person the time claimed. Using a timer allows the facilitator to also listen fully.

**Checking-Out:** One sentence about where you are now as a result of the time spent together and the experience of exploring the theme.

**Extinguishing Chalice** (Elizabeth Selle Jones) *We extinguish this flame but not the light of truth, the warmth of community, or the fire of commitment. These we carry in our hearts until we are together again.*

#### Closing Words

Rev. Philip R. Giles (In unison) *May the quality of our lives be our benediction and a blessing to all we touch.*



## Inner Growth

### The Mystic Heart

Wayne Teasdale



Spiritual practice, the work of our transformation, is the means of inner growth and change toward human maturity glimpsed in the best of religious experience. It is critically important in authentic spirituality, and thus in a multi-faith approach to spirituality.... Without a spiritual practice of some kind, spirituality is a hollow affair; it has no substance and is reduced to the formalism of external religiosity.

Daily spiritual practice is the technology of inner change. Without it, such change is inconceivable. ...All spiritual practices are transformative, be they contemplative forms of prayer, meditation, and sacred reading; a restful, active participation and presence in liturgy and ritual; music and chanting; yoga and certain martial arts; hiking and even walking. They change us within and make this inner change consistent with our actions in the world in our daily lives. Seekers and saints of every tradition have cultivated a spiritual practice and have thus cultivated a profound self-knowledge.

Source: <http://www.spiritualityandpractice.com/book-reviews/excerpts/view/13467>

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