

Theme of April – Transformation:
The Practice of Letting Go

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 ultimately a personal one.

~Marianne Williamson

Introduction

To transform means to go beyond or through (trans-) one's own body or shape (form) into another one. It's more than simply growing or changing; it's radical change, change at the root, a sea change. How do you make that happen? Can it be gradual or is it always fast? When transformation seizes you, and you feel like a snake shedding its skin or a caterpillar poised in the dark, ready to break through the shell in a new shape, how do you let go of what you were? Surely we are all trying to enact our own transformation into something more, something different: into a person less held back by fear or more patient or with a bigger heart. What do we retain and what do we let go of?

Questions for Discussion and Discernment on your own, around the table, or with each other:

1. What, if anything, in your life is undergoing transformation currently?
2. How do you perceive "letting go" as something that may assist in the process of transformation?
3. Are there things or behaviors in your life that you wish you could let go of? What or how do you envision transforming in the process?
4. Is there a personal or social transformation of which you have been a part?
5. Are there social transformations you yearn for or would like to see now or in the future? What can you do to help these come to fruition?

Quotes and short readings

Rather than trying to find our true selves – struggling to figure out "who we are" – in transformation, we bring forth the possibility of creating ourselves, so that life is a creative expression of our stand.

Transformation does not increase or improve the options we have before us. Rather, in the moment of transformation, there is the presence of choice, as the phenomenon of creating possibilities – no more, no less. The actual choosing remains of our own making – no more likely, nor guaranteed. Yet, in the recognition and ownership of the choice appears true freedom of action – an action born solely of the courage to be.

~excerpt from a presentation on "The Heart of the Matter" by Werner Erhard, 1982

Transformation is not an event. It doesn't have the properties of things or experiences. It has no position, no location in time, no beginning, no middle, and no end. It doesn't look like anything or feel like anything. You could say it's a shift in the basis of experience from self as point of view or from self as direct experience to self as self, or self as simply being.

~ Werner Erhard

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.

~Anais Nin

Love and supportive environments help people transcend negative transformations, something that one doesn't necessarily capture in scientific studies.... the 'mysterium tremendum,' or the conditions that allow people to better access 'that mysterious, creative and transformative power many call God.'

God may not be the name you choose for healing transformative power, but my friends when the world turns upside down, when that which was dependable becomes undependable, and that which was certain turns uncertain, may you and may I experience mysterium tremendum. May we experience that tremendous mystery, that eternal mystery of life that is creative, healing and transformative. I pray for those I have spoken with since Katrina, and I pray for all suffering catastrophe that they have the healing benefit of love and of a supportive environment, but most of all I pray that they, that you may experience 'mysterium tremendum, that mysterious, creative and transformative power many call God.'

~Jacqueline Luck, Sermon : "Despair to Transformation, or What do we do when cops despair?"

Full text of sermon: <http://www.uua.org/worship/words/sermons/21566.shtml>

The common ground between individual and collective religious experiences of renewal, Obama discovered, was transformed and exalted feelings. Religious communities, he now realized, are not just sources of wisdom for moral ideas; they are also healing vessels for the regeneration of broken emotional souls. "The gospel songs, the happy feet, and the tears and shouts all spoke of a release, an acknowledgment and finally a channeling of those emotions."

~UU world's article on "Obama's Religious Roots"

Grief, despair, and fear are really neither positive nor negative but simply human emotions: it is our attitude toward them that's negative. The dark emotions can be our best, albeit most demanding, spiritual teachers, when we can get beyond the compulsion to control them. By learning how to attend to, befriend, and surrender to the energies of grief, despair, and fear, we create the conditions for something new to arise in ourselves and in the world. We discover an unexpected gateway to healing and transformation. We

release ourselves from the strangled grip of pain into an amazing alchemy by which grief, despair, and fear are transmuted to gratitude, faith, and joy.

~ from Healing Through the Dark Emotions, By Miriam Greenspan, First Unitarian Church of Rochester, NY

The concept of 'spiritual transformation' in psychology come from [Kenneth Pargament](#) and [Raymond Paloutzian](#):

Pargament says that "at its heart, spiritual transformation refers to a fundamental change in the place of the sacred or the character of the sacred in the life of the individual. Spiritual transformation can be understood in terms of new configurations of strivings". Paloutzian says that "spiritual transformation constitutes a change in the meaning system that a person holds as a basis for self-definition, the interpretation of life, and overarching purposes and ultimate concerns"

Help us to be the always hopeful gardeners of the spirit who know that without darkness nothing comes to birth as without light nothing flowers.

~May Sarton

Saul on the Road to Damascus

Meanwhile, Saul was still breathing out murderous threats against the Lord's disciples. He went to the high priest and asked him for letters to the synagogues in Damascus, so that if he found any there who belonged to the Way, whether men or women, he might take them as prisoners to Jerusalem. As he neared Damascus on his journey, suddenly a light from heaven flashed around him. He fell to the ground and heard a voice say to him, "Saul, Saul, why do you persecute me?"

"Who are you, Lord?" Saul asked.

"I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting," he replied. "Now get up and go into the city, and you will be told what you must do."

The men traveling with Saul stood there speechless; they heard the sound but did not see anyone. Saul got up from the ground, but when he opened his eyes he could see nothing. So they led him by the hand into Damascus. For three days he was blind, and did not eat or drink anything.

~Acts 9:1-9

Personal stories of transformation from church members:

In an early part of my career, I had a very difficult client. Every decision I made was scrutinized and challenged; I never got a moment to do the work I wanted to do. I had this client as someone who couldn't trust that I knew what I was doing and would do a good job. It was very frustrating.

One day, in the midst of a work session, I just needed a break. I excused myself, walked into the hallway to clear my head, when BAM! the realization hit me: my client wasn't trying to be difficult, he was just so focused on a successful conclusion that the niceties had been sacrificed. Once I made this shift, my relationship with this client transformed from adversarial to collaborative to friendship.

I used to get angry easily. I often perceived other people as having bad intentions when they did not. If someone didn't call me or was late to meet me, I'd take it as a personal slight. The hurt manifested itself in anger. I lost more than one relationship by sending a carefully crafted email to someone in response to a perceived slight. I thought writing the anger would get it out of me, but it didn't.

In time, though, my heart, like the Grinch's heart, grew a few sizes bigger. Once, I was supposed to meet a woman at the Lechmere T stop so that we could go to the Harbor Islands. I got to the station on time, and I waited. And waited. And waited. This was before the time of cell phones. Eventually I went home and called her. I don't even remember what the mix-up was, but whatever it was, we laughed about it. I realized, walking down the street to meet her to spend the day together, that I was not angry.