



Soul Matters

April 2017

***What Does It Mean To Be
A Community of Transformation?***



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Let mystery have its place in you; do not be always turning up your whole soil with the plowshare of self-examination, but leave a little fallow corner in your heart ready for any seed the winds may bring, and reserve a nook of shadow for the passing bird; keep a place in your heart for the unexpected guests, an altar for an unknown God.

-Henri-Frederic Ariel

Make a bit of room. Leave a little space. That may not sound like anything radical or revolutionary. But it turns out that it is one of Life's favorite ways to make us into something new.

Be cautious with those cultural messages about aggressively tilling and turning up your whole soil. Watch out for all the heroic talk about striving and perfecting, struggle and control. Much of the time, transformation is a much subtler art. It's about stillness, listening and waiting to be led, not fighting with yourself and others to make sure you are in the lead.

In short, when it comes to transformation, the message of spirituality is "Be careful with what you've been taught and told because much of it takes us in exactly the wrong direction." Our challenge as a community of transformation is to remind each other to take a different tack. More often than not, it's about breathing rather than becoming better; patience not perfection; depth not dominance; attention not improvement.

That part about attention instead of improvement is especially important. It's so easy to get transformation mixed up with fixing. And fixing is transformation's biggest foe. Trying to purify or prove ourselves is the surest way to stay stuck. The pursuit of purity focuses us on our inadequacy and inferiority, causing us to overlook those unexpected guests that Henri-Frederic speaks of.

And, friends, we don't want to miss those unexpected guests! Those seeds brought by the wind and those passing birds are the partners that make transformation possible. They help us notice new paths. They invite us to walk with a new step. They awaken in us new songs. They remind us that transformation is not something we do alone. They assure us that transformation doesn't have to be a long and lonely struggle, but instead can be more like learning a new dance with a new friend. All we have to do is trust, take the hand of that "unknown God" and follow its lead.

So, friends, this month, leave some room on that dance floor of yours. Keep your eyes peeled. And when that unexpected guest reaches out its hand, don't be afraid.

Our Spiritual Exercises

Option A: A Transformative Yes

Ok, let's admit it: we say "no" more often than we can count-or than we are aware of. It's often our default mode. We are so good at coming up with reasons to say no. Not enough time. Too risky. One has to pick and choose. We don't deserve it. Delayed gratification. Distrust. I know better. I want to be in control.

The trouble is that "No!" is a lock on the door, a fence that separates, blinders that tragically narrow our sight. Or to use an Easter metaphor, it's the stone rolled *in front* of our cave.

So this month, let's roll that stone away. Let's take a risk and **SAY "YES," NO MATTER WHAT!**

Patricia Ryan Madson, drama professor and author, captures the possibilities inherent in this daring spiritual discipline. She writes,

"This is going to sound crazy. Say yes to everything. Accept all offers. Go along with the plan. Support someone else's dream. Say: yes"; "right"; "sure"; "I will"; "okay"; "of course"; "YES!" Cultivate all the ways you can imagine to express affirmation. When the answer to all questions is yes, you enter a new world, a world of action, possibility, and adventure... It is undoubtedly an exaggeration to suggest that we can say yes to everything that comes up, but we can all say yes to more than we normally do. Once you become aware that you can, you will see how often we use the technique of blocking in personal relationships simply out of habit. Turning this around can bring positive and unexpected results... Try substituting "yes and" for "yes but" — this will get the ball rolling."

Keep it simple. Your instructions are to try it for 2-3 days and see how it goes. To keep you on task, print out these words on a small card or piece of paper and place it somewhere you will see throughout the day:

"Accept all offers. Go along with the plan. Support someone else's dream. Say: yes"; "right"; "sure"; "I will"; "okay"; "Yes and..." not "Yes but..."

For some inspiration, watch this:

24 Hours of YES Challenge!

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jKQuY_X2WtY

Come to your group ready to share how it was harder than you thought, easier than you thought and lead you down paths that were more challenging and more gifted than you could have imagined!

Option B: Learning Your Way

The connection between transformation and learning is deep. To talk of transformation as learning is to remember that newness is not just about effort but also about insight. It's also a reminder that transformation is an on-going process not a one-and-done kind of thing. As Emily Lillian urges us, "Always be a work in progress!"

To engage us in this connection between transformation and learning, this exercise asks us to notice the ways in which we are already deep into the work of transformative learning. Here are your instructions:

**Make time to meditate on the below poem
&
then write a version of your own.**

You don't have to be a poet. All you have to do is complete the sentence "I am learning..." 5-10 times.

After you've written your own version, put it up somewhere where you will easily see it every day for a week or two. Come to your group ready to share what it was like to identify the learning you are in the midst of and what it was like to be more aware of it each day. Did identifying your learnings leave you proud? Surprised? Aware of something new? Did daily awareness advance your transformation? Change it?

I am Learning... by Amy Lloyd

i am learning to be brave
i am learning to speak my own language
i am learning what i want to become
i am learning what kind of life i want to live
i am learning to stand in my place without flinching
i am learning to go my own way
i am learning not to help people who don't want help
i am learning to embrace my powerful spirit
i am learning how to build my own bridges
complete with lions to guard against the foot-traffic
i am learning i have value to bring to those waiting to hear my voice
i am learning the intensity of my own burning passions
i am learning to keep digging in the murkiest of my own brokenness
i am learning to accept my imperfections as beautiful
i am learning to think in terms of unlimited possibilities
i am learning i will not always be understood in the way I intended
i am learning to apologize and then move freely forward
i am learning
and learning
and learning
new things
every minute
every day
i am a learning to be a part of the healing of the world
because i am willing to learn to be me

Option C: A Long Hard Look

Author Barbara Kingsolver is a master at celebrating the connection between perception, transformation and healing. She writes,

“In my own worst seasons I’ve come back from the colorless world of despair by forcing myself to look hard, for a long time, at a single glorious thing: a flame of red geranium outside my bedroom window. And then another: my daughter in a yellow dress. And another: the perfect outline of a full, dark sphere behind the crescent moon. Until I learned to be in love with my life again. Like a stroke victim retraining new parts of the brain to grasp lost skills, I have taught myself joy, over and over again.”

This exercise invites you to experience a similar gift of a “single glorious thing” from your own surroundings. Here are your instructions:

1. Take some time to identify a special “single glorious thing” that you have the opportunity to look at every day. Your daughter getting on the bus. The flower cart on your way to work. Your spouse brushing her hair or reading the morning paper. You will know it when you see it.
2. For at least 5 days in a row, use your phone/camera to take a picture of that glorious thing.
3. Before your group, make time to meditate on the collection of photos, either for a full hour of one day or 10 minutes for 3 days in a row. Pay attention to the differences and the similarities. Let the sameness and subtle differences enable you to see something new or appreciate it in a deeper way.
4. Come to your group ready to share what you discovered, and how this transformative looking “taught you joy over again” or “add color” to your world.

For some inspiration, watch this:

Auggie's Photo Album, from Smoke

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JGV_h36uZ5E

Your Question

As always, don't treat these questions like "homework" or a list that needs to be covered in its entirety. Instead, simply pick the one question that speaks to you most and let it lead you where you need to go. The goal is to figure out what being a part of a community of transformation means for you and your daily living. So, which question is calling to you? Which one contains "your work"?

1. Do you know what Life is inviting you to become? What's happened to your vision of what transformation looks like?
2. What were you taught in childhood about your ability to change yourself and/or the world? Are those lessons ones you need to remember or reject?
3. Is delayed gratification delaying your transformation?
4. Is believing "I don't deserve it" standing in your way?
5. Are you really longing to be transformed or could it be that your heart just wants to be understood?
6. Are you sure your transformation lies in following the light? Or might Life instead be calling you to befriend the dark? Is your challenge imagining what is possible or being honest about the past? Believing in your potential or accepting your shadow? (*"One does not become enlightened by imagining figures of light, but by making the darkness conscious."* - Carl Jung)
7. Who said this was going to be easy? Who said transformation wouldn't hurt?
8. Who needs you to grab them by the shoulders and shake them into transformation?
9. Who needs you to quietly "sit with them among the shards and gently turn their face toward the light"? ([Jan Richardson](#))
10. Have you outgrown your life?
11. What kind of thank you's do you need to say to your old life so you can walk into your new one?
12. Is your armor in your way?
13. Is it possible that your stone's already been rolled away and you've not noticed?
14. What is today – *this* day- asking you to become?
15. What if we are the "last generation that can do something about it?" (*"We are the first generation to feel the sting of climate change, and we are the last generation that can do something about it."* - Jay Inslee, Governor of Washington)
16. What's your question? Your question may not be listed above. As always, if the above questions don't include what life is asking from you, spend the month listening to your days to hear it.

Recommended Resources

As always, this is not required reading. We will not analyze or dissect these pieces in our group. They are simply meant to companion you on your journey this month, get your thinking started, and maybe open you to new ways of thinking about what it means to be *a community of Transformation*

Transformation

Trans – latin prefix, meaning across or through

Form – v. bring together separate parts or combine to create

Tion – latin suffix, the action of the verb

Literally: The act of bringing separate parts across or through

Wise Words

Always be a work in progress

- *Emily Lillian*

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.

- *Annie Lamott*

You cannot go on indefinitely being just an ordinary, decent egg. We must be hatched or go bad.

- *C.S. Lewis*

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to express affirmation. When the answer to all questions is yes, you enter a new world, a world of action, possibility, and adventure... It is undoubtedly an exaggeration to suggest that we can say yes to everything that comes up, but we can all say yes to more than we normally do. Once you become aware that you can, you will see how often we use the technique of blocking in personal relationships simply out of habit. Turning this around can bring positive and unexpected results [and transformation]... Try substituting "yes and" for "yes but" — this will get the ball rolling.

- *Patricia Ryan Madson*

Yearning for a new way will not produce it. Only ending the old way can do that.

- *Richard Rohr*

We are not meant to stay wounded. We are supposed to move through our tragedies and challenges and to help each other move through the many painful episodes of our lives. By remaining stuck in the power of our wounds, we block our own transformation. We overlook the greater gifts inherent in our wounds — the strength to overcome them and the lessons that we are meant to receive through them. Wounds are the means through which we enter the hearts of other people. They are meant to teach us to become compassionate and wise.

- *Caroline Myss*

Spiritual transformation is a death as well as a birth. The teachers who help us to grow know that it can't happen without this pain. They don't save us from it—in fact, what they do usually intensifies it.

- *Rev Amy Zucker Morgenstern*

In my own worst seasons I've come back from the colorless world of despair by forcing myself to look hard, for a long time, at a single glorious thing: a flame of red geranium outside my bedroom window. And then another: my

daughter in a yellow dress. And another: the perfect outline of a full, dark sphere behind the crescent moon. Until I learned to be in love with my life again. Like a stroke victim retraining new parts of the brain to grasp lost skills, I have taught myself joy, over and over again.

- *Barbara Kingsolver*

Nature does not ask permission. Neither do you have to. Blossom and birth whenever you feel like it.

- *Clarissa Pinkola Estés*

Nothing remains as it was. If you know this, you can begin again, with pure joy in the uprooting.

- *Judith Minty*

Prayer does not change God; it changes the one who offers it.

- *Kierkegaard*

If you see what needs to be repaired and how to repair it, then you have found a piece of the world that God has left for you to complete. But if you only see what is wrong and what is ugly in the world, then it is you yourself that needs repair.

- *Rabbi Menachem Mendel Schneersohn*

The trouble with steeling yourself against the harshness of reality is that the same steel that secures your life against being destroyed secures your life also against being opened up and transformed by the holy power that life itself comes from. You can survive on your own. You can grow strong on your own. You can even prevail on your own. But you cannot become human on your own. Surely that is why, in Jesus' sad joke, the rich man has as hard a time getting into Paradise as that camel through the needle's eye. Because with his credit card in his pocket, the rich man is so effective at getting for himself everything he needs; he does not see that what he needs more than anything else in the world can be had only as a gift. He does not see that the one thing a clenched fist cannot do is accept, even from le bon Dieu himself, a helping hand.

- *Frederick Buechner*

It is not the strongest of the species that survives, nor the most intelligent, but the one most responsive to change.

- *Charles Darwin*

All changes, even the most longed for, have their melancholy, for what we leave behind us is a part of ourselves; we must die to one life before we can enter into another.

- *Anatole France*

Nature often holds up a mirror so we can see more clearly the ongoing processes of growth, renewal, and transformation in our lives.

- *Anonymous*

The land must rest for seventy years to make up for the years when the people refused to observe the Sabbath.

- *2 Chronicles 36:21*

We are the first generation to feel the sting of climate change, and we are the last generation that can do something about it.

- *Jay Inslee, Governor of Washington*

All that you touch
you change.

All that you change
changes you.

The only lasting truth
is change.

God is change.

- *Octavia E. Butler*

Not everything that is faced can be changed. But nothing can be changed until it is faced.

- *James Baldwin*

One does not become enlightened by imagining figures of light, but by making the darkness conscious.

- *Carl Jung*

We have work to do. We can try on masks, we can hide behind masks, but I am asking you to look under the mask. Who is at the core? What [is waiting] to be transformed?

- *Soul Matters Member, Linnea Nelson*

Our survival adaptations are so tough, but our wounds are so delicate. To heal, we have to lift the armor carefully – it saved our lives, after all. It's like moving your best friend off to the side of the path. You don't trample on her, you don't hit her with a sledgehammer. You honor her presence like a warm blanket that has kept you safe and sound during wintry times.

- *Jeff Brown, Love it Forward*

The Healing Time

Finally on my way to yes
I bump into
all the places
where I said no
to my life
all the untended wounds
the red and purple scars
those hieroglyphs of pain
carved into my skin, my bones,
those coded messages
that send me down
the wrong street
again and again
where I find them
the old wounds
the old misdirections
and I lift them
one by one
close to my heart
and I say holy holy.

- *Pesha Gertler*

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*

For a New Beginning

In out-of-the-way places of the heart,
Where your thoughts never think to wander,
This beginning has been quietly forming,
Waiting until you were ready to emerge.

For a long time it has watched your desire,
Feeling the emptiness growing inside you,
Noticing how you willed yourself on,
Still unable to leave what you had outgrown.
It watched you play with the seduction of safety
And the gray promises that sameness whispered,

Heard the waves of turmoil rise and relent,
Wondered would you always live like this.

Then the delight, when your courage kindled,
And out you stepped onto new ground,
Your eyes young again with energy and dream,
A path of plenitude opening before you.

Though your destination is not yet clear
You can trust the promise of this opening;
Unfurl yourself into the grace of beginning
That is at one with your life's desire.

Awaken your spirit to adventure;
Hold nothing back, learn to find ease in risk;
Soon you will be home in a new rhythm,
For your soul senses the world that awaits you.
- *John Donohue*

Blessing When the World is Ending

This blessing
will not fix you,
will not mend you,
will not give you
false comfort;
it will not talk to you
about one door opening
when another one closes.
It will simply
sit itself beside you
among the shards
and gently turn your face
toward the direction
from which the light
will come,
gathering itself
about you
as the world begins
again.

- *Jan Richardson*

<http://adventdoor.com/2014/11/23/advent-1-blessing-when-the-world-is-ending/>

But now that so much is changing, isn't it time for us to change? Couldn't we try to gradually develop and slowly take upon ourselves, little by little, our part in the great task of love?

- *Rainer Maria Rilke*

Articles

Eleven News Sites to Help Us Save and Transform the Earth

<https://mediablog.prnewswire.com/2016/04/20/11-top-news-sites-for-out-of-this-world-environmental-coverage/>

The Resurrection is Not An Argument

By Giles Fraser

The resurrection is more an identity than an argument. That's why we turn it into participatory theatre, with incense and candles. It is who we are – our word for how we go on in the face of overwhelming odds. It's the Christian term for defiance... The resurrection is the name we give to the multiple ways we push back against the darkness.

<https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/belief/2016/mar/31/the-resurrection-isnt-an-argument-its-the-christian-word-for-defiance>

Podcasts and Talks

The Losses and Laughter We Grow Into

by Kevin Kling

A treasured figure on the national storytelling circuit, Kevin Kling's voice inhabits an unusual space — where a homegrown Minnesota wit meets Dante and Shakespeare. Born with a disabled left arm, he lost the use of his right one after a motorcycle accident nearly killed him. He shares his special angle on how life's humor and its ruptures can be transformed as we turn our losses into story.

<https://soundcloud.com/onbeing/kevin-kling-the-losses-and-laughter-we-grow-into/sets>

The Body's Grace – On Being Podcast

A moving take on transformation through the mind-body connection with author, yoga teacher and paraplegic, Matthew Sanford.

Text: <http://www.necessarshenanigans.com/matthew-sanford-the-bodys-grace/>

Video: <https://vimeo.com/330002>

Online Inspiration

Today I Rise - Short Film

"Where are you? Where are you, little girl with broken wings but full of hope? Where are you, wise women covered in wounds? ...Today is the day I will not sit still and not give in. Today I rise. I am bruised but I will walk again... I transform my anger to power... Today I rise..."

<https://vimeo.com/122762336>

Shake My Future - Dorothea Smartt

A poem to shake our complacency and stir up our commitment to climate justice...

Video:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=st5clGxZ75A>

Text and Podcast:

<http://www.poetryarchive.org/poem/shake-my-future>

The Present - Short Film

A short film celebrating the way we are transformed by the courage of another. By transforming ourselves we transform others.

<https://vimeo.com/152985022>

A School Transformed by Replacing Detention with Meditation

<https://www.facebook.com/MicMedia/videos/1240485765974211/>

The Kind of Transformation that The Church Offers

By Brene Brown

I went back to church thinking it would be like an epidural. But faith and church was not like an epidural but like a midwife... who just stood next to me saying push. It is suppose to hurt... People want love to be like unicorns and rainbows. But Jesus says love is hard, trouble and controversial. Love is not easy... I thought faith would say I will take away the pain and discomfort but what it ended up saying is "I'll sit with you in it." And I never thought that would be enough but it's perfect... Love weeps.

<http://www.mbird.com/2013/07/brene-brown-reflects-on-how-jesus-wept/>

Reconsidering the Transformation of The Cross

By Nadia Bolz Weber

The cross is actually about God saying I would rather die than be in the sin accounting business anymore. On the cross, we don't see a legal

transaction where Jesus pays our debt; on the cross we actually see God. The cross is God's self revelation.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=k60Ys9GXHSs&t=223s>

Movies

Notes on Blindness

In 1983, after decades of steady deterioration, writer and theologian John Hull became totally blind. To help him make sense of the upheaval in his life, he began documenting his experiences on audiocassette. The result is a poetic and intimate story of loss, rebirth and transformation.

Trailer: <https://www.theguardian.com/film/video/2016/jun/13/notes-on-blindness-trailer-video>

Review: <http://www.spiritualityandpractice.com/films/reviews/view/28313/notes-on-blindness>

The Fisher King

The wise and humane real-world fantasy *The Fisher King* wants to heal and transform its audience. Anchoring itself in the Grail myth and illuminating the stages of a contemporary hero's journey, it is a beautiful and touching testimony to the power people have to heal and transform each other.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NHaZuRo3DZ4>

Review:

https://www.rottentomatoes.com/m/fisher_king

Other People

A story of being brought back to life by accepting death.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8uMM7SH1Hh0>

Songs

Rise Up - Andra Day

You're broken down and tired
Of living life on a merry-go-round
And you can't find the fighter
But I see it in you so we gonna walk it out
And move mountains
We gonna walk it out
And move mountains

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kNKu1uNBVku>

The Cave - Mumford & Sons

But I will hold on hope
And I won't let you choke
On the noose around your neck
And I'll find strength in pain
And I will change my ways
I'll know my name as it's called again

Video: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=oMO4xdOS5jY>

Lyrics: https://play.google.com/music/preview/Tqzxsc3ja4na6ct5oz574sjf2q?lyrics=1&utm_source=google&utm_medium=search&utm_campaign=lyrics&pcampaignid=kp-lyrics

Stay Alive - José González

There is a truth and it's on our side
Dawn is coming, open your eyes.
Look into the sun as a new days rise...

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NucJk8TxyRg&index=3&list=RDRknUh1LapJs>

From The Water - William Fitzsimmons

The transformation of being pulled from the water!

"I will pull you from water
Let your lungs return to air
Take you back unto the shore
And lead you home"

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MH1r7dV6JEk>

Passion Play - William Fitzsimmons

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RhihGqZEWoc>

"I just want to be not what I am today
I just want to be better than my friends might say
I just want a small part in your passion play
Do you hear when I call in the midst of wrong?
Do you hear these here words while I sing you this song?
Are you caught up in me like I heard you say?
Or just some big cashier that I'll have to pay..."

I Want to Get Better - Bleachers

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=A81Z6hGjGJQ&app=desktop>

Changes - David Bowie

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1QICoxvPFXI>
(Acoustic cover)

Video Meditation - A Change Is Gonna Come
- *Sam Cooke*
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wEBlaMOmKV4>

Video Meditation - Earth Song - *Frank Ticheli*
“Through darkness and pain and strife, I'll sing, I'll be, live, see.”
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Aarowtnr-hs>

Books

The Great Spiritual Migration

by Brian McLaren

“When liberation spirituality frees the poor from the dehumanizing scripts of the oppressed, they can help the rich be liberated from their dehumanizing scripts of oppression.”

Global Chorus: 365 Voices on the Future of the Planet

edited by Todd MacLean

“Three hundred sixty-five messages for the future of our planet from gurus, politicians, athletes, humanitarians, children and others.

Their words will give you hope that we can make the transformations needed to save our environment.”

Originals: How Non-Conformists Move the World

by Adam Grant

Grant addresses the challenge of improving [and transforming] the world, from the perspective of becoming original. ...groundbreaking insights about rejecting conformity and transforming the status quo.

The Autobiography of Malcom X

by Malcolm X and Alex Haley

“This book pricked my consciousness and showed me the power of transformation and personal accountability.” - *Shaka Senghor*

Hope For the Flowers

by Trina Paulus

Its theme of life, moving through seeming death to a new and more beautiful life, has touched the hearts of millions of people.

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