



JOURNEYS
Theme Packet for April 2016
The Unitarian Fellowship of Peterborough

What does it mean to be people of
Transformation?

This is how change happens:
We imagine who we're called to be,
looking backward through the layers,
squinting forward in the dark -
many lives, many hands
form and re-form us.
We inspire one another,
imagine health in one another,
instigate in one another
transformations no one could predict,
and then,
by grace and by our will,
turning, learning, falling, growing,
we stand where we are now - looking back -
amazed at where we've come from,
where we've traveled,
how we've changed.

~ Rev. Victoria Safford

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WONDERINGS *about* TRANSFORMATION

Transformation -- put most simply -- is change. It can be an “aha” moment, a circumstance that changes us forever, or a subtle experience that nonetheless shapes who we are and who we will be from that day forward.

Yet the word itself seems to imply a bigger kind renewal that comes from a spiritual awakening, a conversion, a mystical epiphany...an enlightenment. If we imagine transformation only in this BIG way, it can seem daunting and surely unattainable. Why get our hopes up at all?

And for some, to suggest that what we all should be aiming for is some kind of a full transformation is the same thing as saying that who we are now, just as we are, is not acceptable, not enough.

Still, our UFP Purpose Statement declares that here we ‘foster personal transformation.’ But because every possibility holds a shadow...a fear, a caution, a lie...we need to grapple with what transformation means. In my grappling, I found some quotes that are helpful.

“There’s a part of every living thing that wants to become itself,” writer Ellen Bass observes, “the tadpole into the frog, the chrysalis into the butterfly, a damaged human being into a whole one.”

Looking at transformation this way, it is akin to metamorphosis, a process of becoming which changes us, but only in the way that helps us to become more of who we already are. Becoming whole, or finding our way back to our wholeness. Seen this way, it’s difficult for me to resist wanting this kind of transformation.

Another helpful saying is an old Zen Buddhist one: “You are perfect just the way you are...and you could use some improvement.” I know I need to better embrace both parts of that adage. Yet, the humility this perspective seeds in me might just be the catalyst I need. As Andrew Harvey, a modern-day mystic, has pointed out, “The very things we wish to avoid, neglect, and flee from turn out to be the ‘prima materia’ from which all real growth comes.”

I can’t determine what transformation should mean for you, or even if you should consider it desirable. Rather, I invite all of us into a month of reflecting on all of the possibilities and implications of transformation. As shared by essayist Normandi Ellis, we are each “human

becoming in the spirit of growth, change, and development that is part and parcel of this life.”

We are humans becoming. We are. And we are becoming.

~ Rev. Julie

trans · for · ma · tion

tran(t)sfər' māsH(ə)n/

1. a thorough or dramatic change in form or appearance.
2. a change or alteration, especially a radical one
3. a metamorphosis during the life cycle of an animal.
4. the induced or spontaneous change of one element into another by a nuclear process (in physics)
5. a seemingly miraculous change in the appearance of scenery or actors in view of the audience (in theatre)
6. the act of transforming or the state of being transformed

STORIES *about* TRANSFORMATION

The Story of the Phoenix

One day in the beginning times, the sun looked down and saw a large bird with shimmering feathers. They were red and gold--bright and dazzling like the sun itself. The sun called out, "Glorious Phoenix, you shall be my bird and live forever!" Live forever!

The Phoenix was overjoyed to hear these words. It lifted its head and sang, "Sun glorious sun, I shall sing my songs for you alone!"

But the Phoenix was not happy for long. Poor bird. Its feathers were far too beautiful. Men, women, and children were always casing it and trying to trap it. They wanted to have some of those beautiful, shiny feathers for themselves. "I cannot live here," thought the phoenix. and it flew off toward the east, where the sun rises in the morning.

The Phoenix came to a far away, hidden desert. And there the phoenix remained in peace, flying freely and singing its songs of praise to the sun above. After many years, the Phoenix grew old and had lost much of its strength. "I don't want to live like this," thought the Phoenix. "I want to be young and strong."

So the Phoenix lifted its head and sang, "Sun, glorious sun, make me young and strong again!" Day after day the Phoenix sang, but when the sun still didn't answer, the Phoenix decided to return to the place where it had lived before.

The journey was long, and because the Phoenix was old and weak, it had to rest along the way. Each time it landed, it collected pieces of cinnamon bark and all kinds of fragrant leaves, and tucked some in among its feathers.

When at last the bird came to the place that had once been its home, it landed on a tall palm tree where it built a nest with the cinnamon bark and lined it with the fragrant leaves. Then the Phoenix collected some sharp-scented gum called myrrh, made an egg from the myrrh and carried the egg back to the nest.

The Phoenix sat down in its nest, lifted its head, and sang, "Sun, glorious sun, make me young and strong again!" This time the sun heard the song and shone down on the mountainside with all its power.

Suddenly there was a flash of light, flames leaped out of the nest, and the Phoenix became a big round blaze of fire. After a while the flames died down. The tree was not burnt, nor was the nest. But the Phoenix was gone. In the nest was a heap of silvery-gray ash.

The ash began to tremble and slowly heave itself upward. From under the ash there rose up a young Phoenix. It was small and looked sort of crumpled, but it stretched its neck and lifted its wings and flapped them. The young Phoenix lifted its head and sang, "Sun, glorious sun, I shall sing my songs for you alone! Forever and ever!"



<http://www.phoenixarises.com/phoenix/legends/story.htm> (adapted)



The Stream: A Sufi Story



A stream, from its course in the far-off mountains, passing through every kind and description of countryside, at last reached the sands of the desert. Just as it had crossed every other barrier, the stream tried to cross this one, but found that as fast as it ran into the sand, its waters disappeared.

It was convinced, however, that its destiny was to cross this desert, and yet there was no way. Now a hidden voice, coming from the desert sand itself, whispered: "The wind crosses the desert, and so can the stream."

The stream objected that the wind could fly, and this was why it could cross a desert.

"By hurtling in your own accustomed way you cannot get across. You will either disappear or become a marsh. You must allow the wind to carry you over to your destination. Allow yourself to be absorbed in the wind."

This idea was not acceptable to the stream. After all, it had never been absorbed before. It did not want to lose its individuality. And, once having lost it, how was one to know that one's identity could ever be regained?

"The wind," said the sand, "performs this function. It takes up water, carries it over the desert, and then lets it fall again."

"How can I know that this is true? Can I not remain the same stream that I am today?"

"You cannot," the whisper said. When it heard this, echoes began to arise in the thoughts of the stream. Dimly it remembered a state in which it – or some part of it? – had been held in the arms of a wind.

And the stream raised its vapor into the welcoming arms of the wind, which gently and easily bore it upwards and along, letting it fall softly as rain once they reached the roof of a mountain, many, many miles away, where it then became a river.

QUESTIONS *for reflection on* TRANSFORMATION

- If transformation means it is possible to do a "new thing," what would that be for you? And what would make it possible?
- Have you ever had an experience like that of the Phoenix, or the stream? What do you see in these stories?
- What needs transforming in your life now? If you have spiritual, emotional or physical transformational goals, what gets in the way?
- Can you chart the external transformations in your life – those milestones that informed you that you had changed – events like graduations, weddings, bringing children into your life, losses, moves? What about internal ones?
- Can you recall a transformative experience, one you came out of feeling like a different person?
- Does the idea of transformation inspire/excite you? Why or why not?
- What hooks or pitfalls exist, if any, in the notion of transformation?



INSPIRATIONS *on the theme of* TRANSFORMATION

Life is a moving, breathing thing. We have to be willing to constantly evolve. Perfection is constant transformation. ~ *Nia Peeples*

It wasn't until I accepted myself just as I was in this moment, that I was free to change. ~ *Carl Rogers*

You are perfect just the way you are...and you could use some improvement. ~ *Zen Buddhist master*

We need to realize that our path to transformation is through our mistakes. We're meant to make mistakes, recognize them, and move on to become unlimited. ~ *Yehuda Berg*

Transformation literally means going beyond your form. ~ *Wayne Dyer*

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

Your body, which is bonding millions of molecules every second, depends on transformation. Breathing and digestion harness transformation. Food and air aren't just shuffled about but, rather, undergo the exact chemical bonding needed to keep you alive. The sugar extracted from an orange travels to the brain and fuels a thought. The emergent property in this case is the newness of the thought; no molecules in the history of the universe ever combined to produce that exact thought. ~ *Deepak Chopra*

It is absolutely essential that the oppressed participate in the revolutionary process with an increasingly critical awareness of their role as subjects of the transformation. ~ *Paulo Freire*

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*

The full and joyful acceptance of the worst in oneself may be the only sure way of transforming it. ~ *Henry Miller*

You are destined to fly, but that cocoon has to go. ~ *Nelle Morton*

Meditation is the process of transformation and beautification of soul from a leaf-eating caterpillar to a nectar-sipping butterfly. It grows with the wings of love and compassion. ~ *Amit Ray*

To live meant feeding my former self to my current self. ~ *Cameron Conaway*

You cannot go on indefinitely being just an ordinary, decent egg. We must be hatched or go bad. ~ *C.S. Lewis*

Becoming hurts. ~ *Kat Howard*

Fairy tales are stories of triumph and transformation and true love, all things I fervently believe in. ~ *Kate Forsyth*

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

Travel for me is all about transformation, and I'm fascinated by those people who really do come back from a trip unrecognizable to themselves and perhaps open to the same possibilities they'd have written off not a month before. ~ *Pico Iyer*

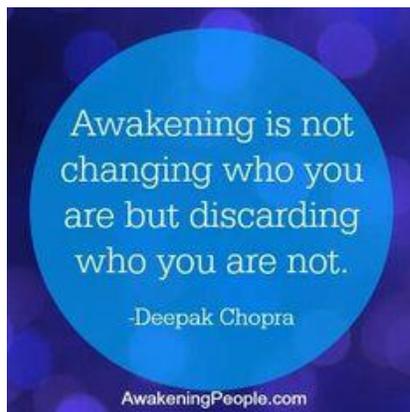
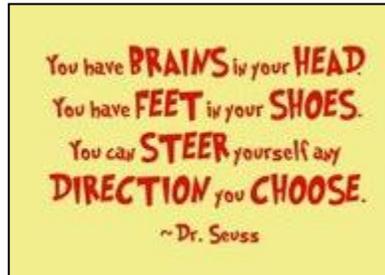
I think that any time of great pain is a time of transformation, a fertile time to plant new seeds. ~ *Debbie Ford*

I take pleasure in my transformations. I look quiet and consistent, but few know how many women there are in me. ~ *Anaïs Nin*

When she transformed into a butterfly, the caterpillars spoke not of her beauty, but of her weirdness. They wanted her to change back into what she always had been. But she had wings. ~ *Dean Jackson*

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*

It is the closing of the heart far more than the closing of the mind that keeps folk from transformation and deepening. ~ *Jean Houston*



Practicing TRANSFORMATION

Option A: A Before and After Story:

"I've always loved 'Before and After' stories, in books, magazines, and TV shows. Whenever I read those words, I'm hooked. The thought of a transformation - any kind of transformation - thrills me. And that's the promise of habits." ~ Gretchen Rubin

Consider a 'before' ...a stuck place in your life...and write a little fable about it. Begin by fleshing out how things are, and then imagine what could be. Write several different versions of 'after.' Place the 'before' next to the 'after' and see if you can imagine/create the path that leads from one to the other.

(Shaun McNiff in [Trust the Process](#) recommends transforming problems by writing about them.)

Option B: Create a Transformation Ritual

"Rituals, anthropologists will tell us, are about transformation. The rituals we use for marriage, baptism or inaugurating a president are as elaborate as they are because we associate the ritual with a major life passage, the crossing of a critical threshold, or in other words, with transformation." ~ Abraham Verghese

Name either a transformation that you are currently going through, or one you'd like to catalyze. Create a ritual...with words, candles, flowers, stones, dance...that mirrors the transformation in some way. Then set aside a time to go through that ritual in a sacred manner, whatever that means for you. Perhaps invite some friends to be present to witness it.

Option C: Art and Transformation



"Only the images by which we live can bring transformation."

~ Helen Luke

As an example of this, Jan Vermeer's *Young Woman with a Water Jug* portrays a woman standing beside a table that holds a pitcher and a bowl. The splendor of the light pouring through the partly open window seems to revitalize the woman and all the objects in the room. This evocative painting mirrors the illuminating powers of the spiritual practice of transformation.

So, browse some works of art...on line, in books, in galleries...and choose a couple that speak to you of transformation. Get a nice colour photo/copy of these works of art and place them where you can see them regularly.

You might like to watch this video for inspiration: A short film retelling Titian's *Metamorphosis* for The National Gallery, London. <https://vimeo.com/45593763>

Option D: Play it Out!

Do a little research on [Play Back Theatre](#).

Invite your most theatrical friends to explore a transformation with you. Tell them the story you are trying to change or understand, and ask them to play it out for you to watch. It will give you some new perspective.

(Caroline W. Casey in [Making the Gods Work for You](#) explains why all your demons seem to act up just when you are ready to change.)

Do not resist transformation!
The cocoon that once protected you can
all too easily become a prison.

Resources *on* TRANSFORMATION

Children's Books *on* TRANSFORMATION

A Bad Case of Stripes by David Shannon
Alice's Adventures in Wonderland by Lewis Carroll
Ellison the Elephant by Eric Drachman
First the Egg by Laura Vaccaro Seeger
The Gardener by Sarah Stewart
If I Ran the Zoo by Dr. Seuss
The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe by C. S. Lewis
The Magic Ball of Wool by Susanna Isern
Pinduli by Janell Cannon
Say Hello, Lily by Deborah Lakritz
The Ugly Duckling by Hans Christian Andersen
The Very Hungry Caterpillar by Eric Carle
Windows with Birds by Karen Ritz

ON THE WEB

[Transformation vs. Acceptance](#) – Revs. Doug Taylor and Jane Rzepka

The Evolution of Peggy Olson (Madmen)
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=S1QdZgVTIB0>

[Unlock the Intelligence, Passion, Greatness of Girls](#): Leymah Gbowee's TedTalk

[The Joy of Lexicography](#), Erin McKean's Ted Talk – The transformation of the dictionary

Danielle Girl Grows Up Into An Old Woman: Emulating The Aging Process
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tTBIFC-oAnw>

Monarch Butterfly Metamorphosis time-lapse
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ocWgSgMGxOc>

Metamorphosis: The Beauty & Design of Butterflies
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=AZk6nZGH9Xo>

[How Language Transformed Humanity](#): Mark Pagel's Ted Talk

Why Transformation Efforts (in congregations) Fail: <http://www.surfaceetosoul.org/why-transformation-efforts-fail/>

[Five Steps to Transform Your Life](#), by Robert Betz

MUSIC

[Age of Aquarius](#), *The 5th Dimension*

[Les Miserables](#) (2012 movie soundtrack)

[Metamorphosis](#) (*Tadpole Into a Frog*), song about frog life cycle for elementary science lessons

[Metamorphosis](#), Enya

[St. Matthew's Passion](#), JS Bach

[This Too Shall Pass](#), OK GO

Table Grace *on* TRANSFORMATION

Field at Table by Nancy Shaffer

When I begin to bless this food
and close my eyes I lose myself
first just in green: how
do leaves grow themselves this
green and how do they
grow at all to be so large and
how do they make themselves from
soil which in itself is only brown and
sunlight helps and water but
how is the end of this, green? How
can I bless this food? It blesses me.
Thank you, I say, for this bowl
which also is field, this green
which is meal before
I eat. Thank you, I say,
that this green becomes me.
Thank you for mysteries, this life.



MOVIES

28 Days (15, 2000) - An alcoholic enters a rehab program and makes a valiant effort to turn her life around.

Big Fish (PG, 2003) - A frustrated son tries to determine the fact from fiction in his dying father's life.

Black Swan (15, 2010) - A committed dancer wins the lead in "Swan Lake" only to find herself struggling to maintain her sanity.

Citizen Kane (A, 1941) - Following the death of a publishing tycoon, reporters scramble to discover the meaning of his final utterance.

The Emperor's New Groove (U, 2000) - The Emperor is turned into a llama by his ex-administrator, and must now regain his throne with the help of a gentle llama herder.

The Englishman Who Went Up a Hill But Came Down a Mountain (PG, 1995) - When a cartographer tells a village that their mountain is only a hill, the offended community sets out to change that.

Erin Brockovich (15, 2000) - An unemployed single mother becomes a legal assistant and almost single-handedly brings down a California power company accused of polluting a city's water supply.

Gran Torino (15, 2008) - Disgruntled war veteran sets out to reform his neighbor, a Hmong teenager who tried to steal Kowalski's 1972 Gran Torino.

It's a Wonderful Life (U, 1946) - An angel helps a compassionate but despairingly frustrated businessman by showing what life would have been like if he never existed.

The Land Girls (12, 1998) - Three Englishwomen experience a freedom that is intoxicating and edifying during World War II.

Muriel's Wedding (15, 1994) - Muriel finds life dull and spends her days alone in her room listening to Abba music and dreaming of her

wedding day. Slight problem, Muriel has never had a date.

Nanny McPhee (U, 2005) - A governess uses magic to rein in the behavior of seven ne'er-do-well children in her charge.

On the Waterfront (A, 1954) - An ex-prize fighter turned longshoreman struggles to stand up to his corrupt union bosses.

Phenomenon (PG, 1996) - An ordinary man sees a bright light descend from the sky, and discovers he now has super-intelligence and telekinesis.

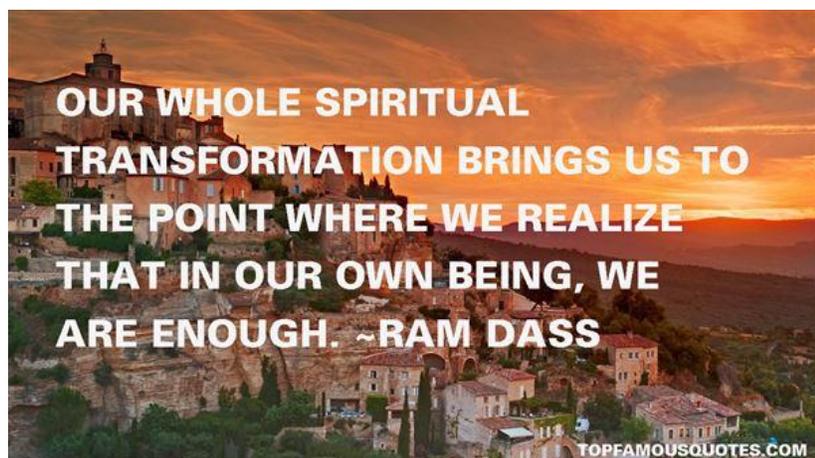
Philadelphia (12, 1993) - When a man with AIDS is fired because of his condition, he hires a homophobic lawyer as the only willing advocate for a wrongful dismissal suit.

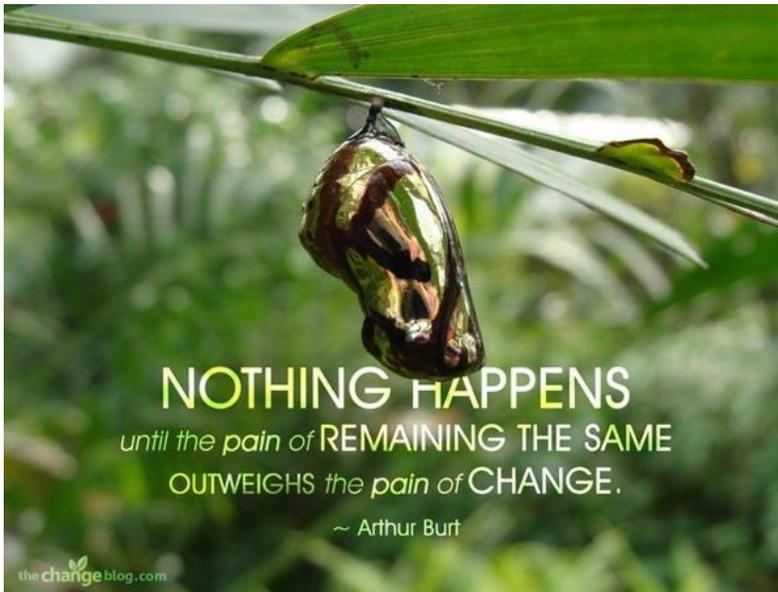
The Pianist (15, 2002) - A Polish Jewish musician struggles to survive the destruction of the Warsaw ghetto of World War II.

Seven Years in Tibet (PG, 1997) - A cocky and egocentric Austrian mountaineer undergoes a spiritual transformation in Tibet.

The Silence of the Lambs (18, 1991) - A young F.B.I. cadet confides in an incarcerated killer to receive his help on catching another serial killer.

Silver Linings Playbook (15, 2012) - After a stint in a mental institution, a former teacher moves back in with his parents. Things get more challenging when he meets a mysterious girl with problems of her own.





BOOKS

Personal Transformation by Kiril Sokoloff and the Dalai Lama - A wildly successful investment guru tells of his struggle with loss and loneliness after beginning a decline into deafness, and about his discovery of joy and transformation.

The Curious Case of Benjamin Button by F Scott Fitzgerald - The story of someone born as an old man and who mysteriously goes backward through life.

Metamorphosis by Franz Kafka - The nightmarish story of traveling salesman who wakes one morning to find himself transformed into a monstrous insect.

The Garden by Robin Craig Clark = A delightful fable about growing up, becoming lost, and finding your way home.

The Path to Love by Deepak Chopra - Chopra invites the spirit to work its wonders on the most complex and rewarding terrain of all: the human heart.

The Woman Who Changed Her Brain by Barbara Arrowsmith-Young - Powerfully illustrates the brain's profound impact on how we participate in the world. Our brains shape us, but we can also shape our brains.

War and Peace by Leo Tolstoy - As this epic novel progresses, three characters transcend their specificity, becoming some of the most moving—and human—figures in literature.

The Earth House by Jeanne DuPrau - On their first visit to a Zen center, two women discover something that speaks to them on a level deeper than their everyday experience, and they begin to make a new plan for their lives.

Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde by Robert Louis Stevenson Depicts the struggle of two opposing personalities – one essentially good, the other evil – for the soul of one man.

Dancing the Dream by Jamie Sams - Presents a map of the sacred paths of initiation and transformation in Native American tradition.

Running to the Mountain by Jon Katz - A middle-aged media critic, goes on a retreat seeking personal transformation.

The Knitting Sutra by Susan Gordon Lydon - The author reveals how knitting has been a catalyst to her personal transformation.

Chalice Lighting on TRANSFORMATION

May this flame, symbol of
transformation since time began,
fire our curiosity,
strengthen our wills,
and sustain our courage
as we seek what is good within and
around us. ~ Bets Wienecke

The Unitarian Fellowship of Peterborough
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