



TOUCHSTONES

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Transformation

Wisdom Story



Introduction to the Theme

The UUA's Article II Study Commission chose transformation as one of the seven values to replace our existing seven principles. In introducing transformation, they write, "We adapt to the changing world." Yet transformation goes far beyond adapting. They then write, "We covenant to collectively transform and grow spiritually and ethically. Openness to change is fundamental to our Unitarian and Universalist heritages, never complete and never perfect." Please note that openness to change, while important, is essentially passive.

The above focus seems to be on collective transformation, which is impossible unless individual transformation

happens first. Transformation originally meant "change of shape," which has the sense of external change, but our focus at the individual level is deep internal change.

The enduring symbol of transformation is that of the caterpillar to a butterfly. While we are mesmerized by the external change of shape, profound internal changes also occur. In the cocoon, the caterpillar dissolves into the pupa and is reconstructed into a butterfly—a dramatic transformation.

Transformation is about change, but not all change leads to transformation. Much of what we do in life involves either no change; we really like our routines and habits, or first-order change, which consists of a straightforward extension between past and present. First-order change happens on the surface and is incremental. It sometimes has the feel of New Year's resolutions like weight loss or a new exercise regimen that are pursued briefly and then abandoned. First-order change does not nec-

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Homer's Wings

Rev. Caitlin Cotter Coillberg

I don't know that it happened this way, but I do know that it's true, that long ago and far away—or more likely, recently and quite nearby, high up in the mountains on a black cherry tree—an egg was laid on a leaf.

And in the light of the full moon, out of that egg hatched a little brownish caterpillar with white markings that would look, to any bird who might chance by, perhaps like bird droppings.

The caterpillar's name was Homer. Homer looked around, in surprise and wonder, to find himself alive in the world. "Better eat your egg casing, little friend," said a black and spiky caterpillar nearby. Homer did just that, and then turned to look at his new friend.

"Welcome to the world!" said the other caterpillar, whose name was Alex. "It's delicious—here, try some of this leaf!" Together the two caterpillars munched on leaves that spring, through rain and sun, sunrises and sunsets. ...



Alex taught Homer all he needed to know about life on a leaf: how to stay safe, how to munch, how to enjoy the feeling of the wind stirring the tree and the sun slowly warming the mountains each morning. Together they gazed each night up at the beautiful moon.

But one day, the black spiky caterpillar started something totally new and different. "What are you DOING?" asked Homer, as Alex carefully put down silk on the underside of a twig in the newest

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Transformation & the Common Good

Small actions contributing to the common good are important. Still, there are powerful forces chipping away at it, intent on reversing the gains made over time that increased the good available to all. It is never a zero-sum game because the self-interest of the haves can never be satisfied. Significant gains in the common good have always been driven by transformation, like the independence movement in India that overthrew British rule, the civil rights movement securing civil rights and voting rights, the demolition of the Berlin Wall and the collapse of the Soviet Union, and the end of Apartheid in South Africa. This is third-order transformation, and it is vital to the common good.

A Theme-Based Ministry Project

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Reimagining the Common Good

We Are Change

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collection of leaves and began hanging upside down. "Making a chrysalis!" said Alex. "A what?!!" "You'll see." And over the next couple of days, in the shelter of the leaves, the spiky black caterpillar shifted and shed its skin and became a strange lumpy brown thing, hanging there, not making any conversation.

What could this mean? Then, one day, out of the strange lumpy brown



chrysalis pushed an even stranger new creature. Homer watched as this new creature pumped blood into its black and white and bright orange wings—WINGS?!—and unfurled a strange new mouth. "WHAT?" cried Homer.

The new creature turned to look at him. "Oh little friend," it said, "It's still me! Alex! ...But now I'm a butterfly—an Admiral butterfly, to be specific," Alex said proudly. "But you CHANGED!" cried Homer. "You were as constant as the moon, and you have CHANGED."

Alex smiled gently. "Oh friend," they said, "We're supposed to change! Why, even the moon is different night to night. Sometimes we see all of it, sometimes only a sliver, and sometimes we can't see it at all." "But I don't want to change," lamented Homer, scared and sad.

"Change is part of who we are." Said the butterfly who was Alex, "and now our friendship must change too. I must fly away in search of flowers and other butterflies, and eventually I will fly south to stay warm in the winter. You must continue to eat and grow and stay safe from the birds, but you will change too. Just remember: you are loved, and whatever your body does, you are a beautiful friend and I'm glad I've known you." And with that Alex took to the sky.

All that summer Homer the little brown caterpillar ate and grew and

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Transform Anger

Listening As an Act of Transformation

Doug Lipman

Two villagers came to a rabbi with a dispute. When the rabbi invited them to sit down and talk about it, they glowered at each other.... At last, they sat at the rabbi's table ...casting angry glances at each other.

Then the rabbi said, "Do you have anything more to say, Shlomo?" Yes, Shlomo asserted, he had more to say. The rabbi kept listening ...until at last Shlomo said, more calmly, "No. I have nothing more to say."

Next, the rabbi turned toward the other villager, Moshe, and asked, "What happened?" The rabbi listened to him and asked him questions until he, too, said, "I have nothing more to say."

The rabbi rose ...saying, "I will deliberate on this and come back with a decision."



Less than a minute later, the rabbi returned, sat back down at the table, and said, "I have reached my verdict." The rabbi described the verdict to them. Shlomo and Moshe looked at each other and each said, "All right. That solves it." They shook hands and left.

Another man had been in the room and had watched all this. He said to the rabbi, "You found the solution in just a minute. Why did you let them talk so long, when you knew the answer right away?"

The rabbi said, "If I had not listened to each one's full story, each would have resented my decision. It wasn't my judgment that solved the problem. What solved it was listening to their entire stories."

Source: <https://www.awakin.org/v2/read/view.php?tid=2297>

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 opin-



ions. 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>

Readings from the Common Bowl



Day 1: “Don’t just learn, experience. Don’t just read, absorb. Don’t just change, transform.”
Roy T. Bennett

Day 2: “And then the day came when the risk to remain tight in a bud was more painful than the risk it took to blossom.”
Anaïs Nin

Day 3: “Find the courage to ask questions and to express what you really want. Communicate with others as clearly as you can to avoid misunderstandings, sadness and drama. With just this one agreement, you can completely transform your life.”
Don Miguel Ruiz

Day 4: “There can be no transformation of darkness into light and of apathy into movement without emotion.”
Carl Jung

Day 5: “Every true love and friendship is a story of unexpected transformation. If we are the same person before and after we loved, that means we haven’t loved enough.”
Elif Shafak

Day 6: “Simple kindness to one’s self and all that lives is the most powerful transformational force of all.”
David R. Hawkins

Day 7: “Now there is a final reason I think that Jesus says, ‘Love your enemies.’ It is this: that love has within it a redemptive power. And there is a power there that eventually transforms individuals. ...So, love your enemies.”
Martin Luther King Jr.

Day 8: “When you change the way you look at things, the things you look at change.”
Wayne Dyer

Day 9: “There are painters who transform the sun to a yellow spot, but there are others who with the help of their art and their intelligence, transform a yellow spot into sun.”
Pablo Picasso

Day 10: “I do not ask to walk smooth paths nor bear an easy load. I pray for strength and fortitude to climb the rock-strewn road. Give me such courage and I can scale the hardest peaks alone, and transform every stumbling block into a stepping stone.”
Gale Brook Burket

Day 11: “Any transition serious enough to

alter your definition of self will require not just small adjustments in your way of living and thinking but a full-on metamorphosis.”
Martha Beck

Day 12: “As my sufferings mounted, I soon realized that there were two ways in which I could respond to my situation—either to react with bitterness or seek to transform the suffering into a creative force. I decided to follow the latter course.”
Martin Luther King, Jr.

Day 13: “Even a thought, even a possibility, can shatter and transform us.”
Friedrich Nietzsche

Day 14: “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 15: “Transformation comes more from pursuing profound questions than seeking practical answers.”
Peter Block

Day 16: “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

Day 17: “The truth is that there is nothing noble in being superior to somebody else. The only real nobility is in being superior to your former self.”
Ralph Waldo Emerson

Day 18: “Transformation is not change, but finding the essence of who we are.”
Mary Manin-Morrissey

Day 19: “That’s what fiction is about, isn’t it, the selective transforming of reality? The twisting of it to bring out its essence?”
Yann Martel

Day 20: “If you are trying to transform a brutalized society into one where people

can live in dignity and hope, you begin with the empowering of the most powerless. You build from the ground up.”

Adrienne Rich

Day 21: “Action on behalf of life transforms. Because the relationship between self and the world is reciprocal, it is not a question of first getting enlightened or saved and then acting. As we work to heal the earth, the earth heals us.”

Robin Wall Kimmerer

Day 22: “How does one become a butterfly?” she asked pensively. “You must want to fly so much that you are willing to give up being a caterpillar.”
Trina Paulus

Day 23: “I’m only interested in people engaged in a project of self-transformation.”
Susan Sontag

Day 24: “I never told a victim story about my imprisonment. Instead, I told a transformation story—about how prison changed my outlook, about how I saw that communication, truth, and trust are at the heart of power.”
Fernando Flores

Day 25: “Make your interactions with people transformational, not just transactional.”
Patti Smith

Day 26: “It is all very well to copy what one sees, but it is far better to draw what one now only sees in one’s memory.

That is a transformation in which imagination collaborates with memory.”
Edgar Degas

Day 27: “I was transformed the day / My ego shattered, / And all the superficial, material / Things that mattered / To me before, / Suddenly ceased / To matter.”
Suzy Kassem

Day 28: “We are all butterflies. Earth is our chrysalis.”
LeeAnn Taylor

Day 29: “We must not wish for the disappearance of our troubles but for the grace to transform them.”
Simone Weil

Day 30: “It’s not about perfect. It’s about effort. And when you bring that effort every single day, that’s where transformation happens. That’s how change occurs.”
Jillian Michaels

Day 31: Everything in your life is there as a vehicle for your transformation. Use it!”
ram dass





Faith and Theology

A Theology of Transformation

A liberal theology of transformation focuses on experiences that bring about changes that may include a shift in awareness, heart, conscience, character, beliefs, values, actions, and more, depending on the circumstances. There are countless examples of profound transformation.

Prince Siddhartha, who eventually became the Buddha, began his transformation with chariot rides outside the palace where he lived. Siddhartha's charioteer, Channa, exposed him to aging, illness, and death. He renounced his status and wealth and became an aesthetic for six years without answers. Finally, he meditated under the Bodhi Tree for 49 days and achieved enlightenment.

Jesus spent 40 days in the wilderness, where he was tempted and ultimately transformed. He left the Judean desert and began his powerful public ministry in Galilee.

In theological language, conversion refers to a transformative experience. From its Latin root, it literally means "a turning around." In Christianity, it is considered a one-time ecstatic experience in which a person is born again. The prototype for conversion was when Paul (previously Saul) experienced a vision of Jesus on the road to Damascus (Acts 9:1-9). His conversion changed him from persecuting followers of Jesus to becoming a powerful and effective advocate for Christianity. Many credit Paul with creating Christianity because his efforts led to its institutionalization.

This example of instantaneous conversion became the model in colonial America through the religious revitalization movement (1730s & 1740s) known as the Great Awakening. It began because Evangelical Protestant ministers were concerned about the small number of conversions. Jonathan Edwards, perhaps the most effective preacher of his generation, shared this concern. Still, he

also believed that not all who expressed an outward profession of faith due to conversion were truly transformed in heart

and life. His 1741 sermon, *Sinners in the Hands of an Angry God*, became the model to generate an emotional, ecstatic religious experience to produce immediate conversions at revival meetings.

Our forebear Charles Chauncey, a proto-Unitarian, thought that the revivalists corrupted religion. Like the Unitarians to follow, he believed in a gradual, life-long process of conversion that involved understanding, judgment, and will, as well as an emotional and spiritual component.

A compelling argument for gradual conversion appeared in a December 3, 1907 letter by D.H. Lawrence, then a 22-year-old college student in England, sent to Robert Reid, minister of his family's church. Lawrence wrote, "I have been brought up to believe in the absolute necessity for a sudden spiritual conversion [...] like that of Paul's. Naturally, I yearned for the same.... Now I do not believe in ...such conversion." Lawrence explained, "I believe that a person is converted when first he [or she] hears the low, vast murmur of life [...] I believe that one is born first unto oneself—for the happy developing of oneself, while the world is a nursery, and the pretty things are to be snatched for, and the pleasant things tasted; some people seem to exist thus right to the end. But most are born again on entering maturity; then they are born to humanity, to a consciousness of all the laughing, and the never-ceasing murmur of pain and sorrow that comes from the terrible multitudes of brothers [and sisters]. Then, it appears, to me, one gradually formulates one's religion, be it what it may. A person has no religion who has not slowly and painfully gathered one together, adding to it, shaping it; and one's religion is never complete and final, it seems, but must always be undergoing modification."

Unitarian Universalist minister Rob Hardies extends the metaphor of "born again" to its logical conclusion. He writes, "...on this issue of being born again, I come down on the side of the

Unitarian poet, e. e. cummings, who once wrote: 'We can never be born enough.' We can never be born enough. The soul—the curious soul, at least, the alive soul—always longs to be made new. To be evermore whole. To be reborn. Not because we were born wrong the first time. But because we grow and learn and change. And so my wish for us is that we be born again... and again... and again."



Evangelical Christianity insists on traditional conversion's binary of "In Christ" (good) and Not in Christ (damned). By contrast, progressive Christianity embraces a pluralistic conversion. Its binary is "In Christ" (good) and "In Faith" (good) because it values the diverse faith commitments of other religions. Since pluralistic conversion has similarities to liberal religion's understandings of conversion, the following contrast is with traditional conversion

Traditional conversion has the feel of something being done to you. Unitarian Universalism's understanding is that conversion is something you do. You are not the object of conversion but the subject. In addition, traditional conversion is a singular, dramatic event with the sense of being one and done. We view conversion as an ongoing transformation, a life-long journey because, per Lawrence, "one's religion is never complete and final, it seems, but must always be undergoing modification." Traditional conversion is centered in Christ, and the central task is to remain in Christ. Liberal religion does not narrow the field of transformation but throws it wide open.

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Teaching Transformation

Teaching children about transformation is important to make them aware of how it operates and point them to the possibility of transformation within themselves. Transformation is a type of change that differs from simple change, called first-order change.

Simple change involves small, superficial, and often temporary adjustments that may include external influences. It is short-term and easily reversible. Your child may take up a new hobby because their friend did, only to abandon it a few weeks later.

Transformation is called second-order change. Simplistically, it is defined as a “change in shape.” Of course, in this regard, children have the “Transformer” movies featuring Optimus as an example. In nature, they have the caterpillar-chrysalis-butterfly transformation or juvenile tadpole-mature tadpole-frog.

In people, transformation may begin with feelings of discomfort, questioning, challenging existing or conflicting beliefs, and increased self-awareness that prompts introspection and personal growth. Sometimes, significant life events trigger it, like moving to a new neighborhood, a divorce, or losing a loved one, but it can also emerge more gradually, prompted by internal considerations. Transformation leads to a departure from previous ways of thinking and behaving as one assumes a changed identity. It is persistent and enduring.



For children and youth, it may begin as they outgrow friends or discover some activity to which they commit that drives transformation, like riding horses, playing music, or becoming involved in a sport or hobby that commands their ongoing attention and demands deep change. Transformation, which affects multiple aspects of a person’s life or personality simultaneously, can have ripple effects on relationships, some positive and some less so.

Developmental transitions also involve transformation rather than simple change: infant-toddler-child-teenager-young adult. It is important that parents adapt to these changes and provide broad-based support and guidance.

Source: Touchstones

Family Activity:

Watching Transformation

Butterfly Life Cycle: Show how a caterpillar transforms into a butterfly through stages – egg, larva, pupa, and adult. See *Butterfly: A Life* by National Geographic at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kVm5k99PnBk> (2:01)

Lady Bug: See *The Stunning Life Cycle of a Ladybug* by The Dodo at https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ws_D5nXOAJg (3:21)

Metamorphosis of Frogs: Explore the transformation of frogs from tadpoles to adult frogs. See *This Is How a Tadpole Transforms into a Frog* by The Dodo at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gmlaclb3K2o> (3:10)

Plant Growth: Use seeds to demonstrate how plants grow from a seed to a sprout, then to a mature plant. See *Life Cycle Of Sunflower Time Lapse 75 Days - Seed to Seeds* by Amazing Tube at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=owPRdbaMdY> (2:23) and *Growing Cranberry Bean Time Lapse - Seed To Pod in 42 Days* by Boxlapse at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mqwP4OhTF3s&t=7s> (2:21)

Seasonal Changes: Illustrate the transformation of a tree through seasons – winter, spring, summer, and fall. See *A year in the life of an oak tree* by Woodland Trust at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zdKYWiVy9FY> (1:05) and *One year in 40 seconds* by Eirik Solheim at https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=lmFXIXOO_E (0:45)

Water Cycle: Teach how water transforms from liquid to vapor to precipitation in the water cycle. See *Water Cycle | How the Hydrologic Cycle Works* by the National Science Foundation at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=al-do-HGuIk> (6:46)

Watch and discuss the above with your children. In each case, is it change or transformation, which may not be easy tell?

Caterpillar Dreams

Which is the more miraculous:

1. Egg to Larva,
2. Larva to Caterpillar,
3. Caterpillar to Chrysalis, or
4. Chrysalis to Butterfly?

Each involves a dramatic transformation, and all are necessary for the butterfly to arrive at its intended essence. I know that the larva is considered a caterpillar, but at birth, it does not look like a mature caterpillar, hence step #2 above, and it will have to shed its skin four or five times. Each of these steps is natural, but none are easy. This is the nature of powerful transformations.

As you think about your life, ask yourself repeatedly: “In this moment, am I a caterpillar, a chrysalis, or a butterfly?” And expect the answer to keep changing. If we compare our life span to that of a caterpillar-chrysalis-butterfly, 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 chrysalis would barely notice it, and a caterpillar looking at a butterfly is oblivious that the butterfly is the caterpillar’s mirror. And the chrysalis is unseeing, which is true for all of us sometimes. Ask yourself in any period of time, perhaps a month or a year, if this is caterpillar time, chrysalis time, or butterfly time.

Emerging from a chrysalis 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-being to being. Neither of these, per se, requires much. They are outcomes of processes that cannot be controlled. 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. The cocoon should remind us that

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Goodwill, Holy Discontent & Unwavering Determination

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

essarily require new learning, and it is easily reversible. Most telling, it does not require a new story about who a person has become. This does not mean that first-order change has no value. Improving time management, practicing active listening, connecting more often with family and friends, creating a budget and tracking expenses, enhancing self-care, or starting to recycle are all worthy changes. Still, they are changes in behavior, not in being.

Second-order change is deciding or being forced to engage life in a radically different way. Second-order change is disruptive and often requires stepping outside one's comfort zone, challenging established norms or paradigms, and embracing uncertainty and ambiguity. Experiences that can result in second-order change include entering an intimate relationship, getting married, becoming a parent, or changing careers, especially when it involves moving into a new field or from working in a staff position to becoming an entrepreneur. The call to ministry initiates a second-order change. Other examples include coming out, addiction recovery, a change in ideology, or a spiritual awakening, perhaps prompted by joining a UU congregation. Even becoming a pet owner can trigger second-order change due to increased responsibility and the need for empathy, compassion, patience, and resilience, resulting in a sense of purpose and improved mental health.

Tragedy can also evoke second-order change, like breaking up, getting divorced, losing a job, facing a life-threatening illness, dealing with serious injury from an accident, or the death of a loved one.

All of these examples of second-order change can lead to transformation, which is to say that second-order change involves an event and a response. Often, transformation is the response, but not always, which attests to the challenges inherent in transformation. Transfor-

mation involves personal growth—even grief is a journey of personal growth and healing, a change in one's identity and priorities, new perspectives, and social changes. Transformation implies a significant and usually irreversible alteration to one's life, partly because we may not want to or can't return to who we were. It requires a new story to incorporate and make sense of our changed reality. Transformation can involve existential questions requiring introspection, leading to a deeper understanding of self, new meanings, and a new sense of purpose.

Individual transformation is complex, challenging, unique, and enriching, but, as mentioned above, the UUA Article II Study Commission focuses on collective transformation. However, the nature of the transformation is not articulated. Collective transformation is third-order change.



Examples of third-order change include

1. **Cultural/Political Revolutions** (e.g., the Velvet Revolution in Czechoslovakia, now the Czech Republic, the end of Apartheid in South Africa, and the reconciliation process with First Nations in Canada),
2. **Paradigm Shifts in Science** (e.g., Copernican Revolution, Darwinian Evolution, Germ Theory of Disease, Quantum Mechanics, Plate Tectonics, Relativity, and Artificial Intelligence) and
3. **Major Societal Transformations** (e.g., the Industrial Revolution, Women's Right to Vote, the Civil Rights Movement resulting in legislation regarding civil rights and

voting rights, Gay Liberation and Marriage Equality, the Digital Revolution/Social Media, and the impact of consequential Supreme Court decisions).

In the context of the UUA, collective transformation is an institutional transformation of the UUA and its member congregations and the transformation of individuals necessary to support institutional transformation. The goal of the transformation is articulated, in part, by the covenant in three of the proposed values.

- ◆ *Interdependence: We covenant to cherish Earth and all beings, we acknowledge our place in the great web of life, and we work to repair harm and damaged relationships.*
- ◆ *Justice: We covenant to dismantle racism and all forms of systemic oppression.*
- ◆ *Equity. We covenant [...] to build and sustain fully accessible and inclusive communities.*

These help answer the question of "Where to, what next?" Much work has been done supporting these covenantal goals, but transformation has not been accomplished.

A pyramid represents the structure of the desired transformation. 1.) At the base, the second-order transformation of individuals in congregations and UUA staff members is required. 2.) Above this is the third-order change of congregations themselves. 3.) At the top is the UUA as an institution undergoing third-order change while working to support third-order change in congregations and second-order change of congregational members. And like the hundredth monkey, a tipping point is required at all three levels to complete transformation, that is, for the hundredth butterfly to emerge.

This work remains difficult, as our history attests. It requires deep change within systems and culture. And roadmaps to guide the process are incomplete. What is needed is goodwill, holy discontent, and unwavering determination.

(Continued from page 4) **Faith & Theology**

A liberal theology of transformation is concerned with supporting many kinds of transformation, including conversion to Unitarian Universalism, which involves six stages.

1. For many people, the breath of fresh air, the compelling inspiration of Unitarian Universalism, is freedom of belief. As we embrace freedom in stage one, we must also decide what of our religious and secular past we will keep and what we will leave behind. In a sense, this stage is more retrospective. We use this newfound freedom of belief to contemplate where we have been and why some of our previous assumptions, beliefs, and commitments no longer serve us.
2. In the second stage, we seek to understand this religious path called Unitarian Universalism. As we learn more about the history of Unitarian Universalism, its principles, purposes, and values, and the commitments that shape it, we gain a fuller sense of its implicit and explicit expectations and the degree to which it is a good fit for us as a religious home. At this point, some discover that Unitarian Universalism is, for them, a way station on their journey rather than their destination.
3. In the third stage, we make a conscious decision to go deeper. Often, this unfolds like a course in comparative religion. By examining religious concepts and understandings in other world religions through the study of theology, myth, music, literature, ritual, and ceremony, we deepen our understanding of Unitarian Universalism and how it is similar to or quite distinct from other religious traditions.
4. The fourth stage involves the development of a personal theological or philosophical grounding, which will inform and find expression in all parts of our lives. This is a response to the compelling

questions of human existence. UU minister Robert Latham suggests that these questions include: “Who am I?” (a question about being), “How do I know what I know?” (a question about authority), “Who or what is in charge?” (a question about the ultimate), “What is my purpose?” (a question about worth), and “What does my death mean?” (a question about time).

5. The fifth stage involves the practice of a spiritual discipline. It may be prayer, meditation, journal writing, gardening, cooking, writing poetry, yoga, sacred reading, or any other practice that nurtures our life’s interior, creative, spiritual component. The intention of such everyday practice is to help us to continue to go deeper in life, that is, further transformation, on the one hand, and to nurture and renew us, on the other.
6. The sixth stage involves service to others and/or working for justice. Rabindranath Tagore noted the importance of service when he wrote, “I slept and dreamt that life was joy. I awoke and saw that life was service. I acted and behold, service was joy.” Service is an essential religious response to life because it helps us overcome the barriers that separate us from others. Through service, we find a common humanity where injustice and violence become unthinkable as we befriend the stranger. In service to the “other,” we experience their inherent worth and dignity. This, too, is where our own inherent worth and dignity are made concrete. Because of this double movement, true service is not charity that we bestow on another; it is a reciprocity in which the giver and receiver become indistinguishable.

Relative to the fundamental nature and purpose of conversion and other transformations, Gandhi said, “Be the change you wish to see in the world.”

Source: Touchstones

(Continued from page 5) **Caterpillar Dreams**

we sometimes need a container to undergo significant transformations, containers like a congregation, small group ministry, or spiritual practice. Occasionally, we require the support of multiple containers. To be held and known by others is amazing and encouraging.

Most of the time, we refuse the cocoon life, unwilling to die to our present self to be born again and again, reluctant to rely on faith and patience as tools of transformation, as well as our own efforts and the guidance and companionship of others. As the Japanese poet Matsuo Bashō 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 Richard Bach wrote, “What the caterpillar calls the end of the world, the master 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 the existential caterpillar



decision is: Will we choose to “soar immortal, outlasting the sun and moon, or lie forever unawakened in our blind cocoon?” As we 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.”

Perhaps a changing world within our soul — caterpillar possibility.

Source: Touchstones

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: “Awakening is not a thing not a goal, not a concept. It is not something to be attained. It is a metamorphosis. If the caterpillar thinks about the butterfly ..., saying ‘And then I shall have wings and antennae,’ there will never be a butterfly. The caterpillar must accept its own disappearance in its transformation. When the marvelous butterfly takes wing, nothing of the caterpillar remains.” *Alejandro Jodorowsky*

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: “This is the heart of transformation, that we die into ourselves, into life. But while the possibility of transformation is always present, ...there is no... conventional process... to attain it. Where there are no longer any simple answers, when we must stand in our own light and learn to have a relationship to ourselves, this is when our lives become true..., when our hearts open to embrace what had formerly been outside and separate from us.” *Richard Moss*

Living the Questions

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

1. In your opinion, what are the differences between regular change and transformation?
2. What does transformation mean to you? Has it played a role in your life? If yes, please share an example.
3. In what ways have your beliefs, values, or priorities shifted as a result of your participation in a Unitarian Universalist congregation?
4. Have you experienced conversion in the way Unitarian Universalism has understood it?
5. What events in your life have led to transformation? What challenges were involved? What helped? What hindered?
6. Have there been any unexpected or surprising outcomes from your experience of transformation that you didn't anticipate?
7. Can you give examples of in your life of caterpillar time, chrysalis time, and butterfly time?
8. Are there any role models or sources of inspiration that symbolize transformation for you?
9. What advice would you give to someone who is just starting their journey of transformation?
10. How can your congregation encourage and support transformation?

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 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.*

I

(Continued from page 2) **Wisdom Story**

hid and watched the moon—which did indeed look a little different every night. Homer became a bigger brown caterpillar. His white splotch turned into two little eye shapes, so he looked like a fearsome little snake, and no birds ate him. Day by day, the seasons moved towards Autumn. Finally, Homer found his own safe spot to hang upside down, and shifted into a chrysalis. This was scary, but Homer remembered his friend and was brave.

All winter the chrysalis hung there, safe and still. In the spring, Homer felt himself stir, felt his new body shift once again, and wiggled free to find himself with a new mouth and different shape and WINGS – wings that were yellow and black and blue and orange and glorious.



“Oh my!” said Homer the Appalachian Tiger Swallowtail, gazing at himself in wonder and delight. And then he took off into the sky, up towards the bright moon, bold as a bird, up the broad sweep of Spruce Knob.

Source: <https://www.uua.org/worship/words/story/homers-wings>

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