April 2017
What Does It Mean To Be A Community Of Transformation?

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 about which Henri-Frederic speaks

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.
QUESTIONS TO WALK WITH

Below is a list of questions to open the mind’s gateway to reveal the wisdom that is right below the surface of our ordinary, everyday lives. Pick one question, any, the one that grabs you and won’t let go, then walk with it. Let your mind wander and wonder. Let the question percolate. Listen curiously to what surfaces.

1. Do you know what Life is inviting you to become? What has 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 has already been rolled away and you have 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.
Spiritual Practice - Deepening Experiences
A new way of being for all ages

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 “added color” to your world.

For some inspiration, watch this:
Auggie's Photo Album, from Smoke
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JGV_h36uZ5E

OPENING WORDS

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

CLOSING WORDS

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
Other Wise Words...

For a New Beginning
By John Donohue

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.

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

Blessing When the World is Ending
By Jan Richardson

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.

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