

May 2021

Trusting in Transformation



What does it mean to be called together spiritually to trust in transformation?

Definitions (from merriam-webster.com)

Trust // Verb

- 1: to rely on the truthfulness or accuracy of; e.g., believe/*trust* a rumor.
- 2: to place confidence in/rely on; e.g., a friend you can *trust*.
- 3: to hope or expect confidently; e.g., *trusts* that the problem will be resolved soon.

Trust // Noun

- 1a: firm belief in the character, strength, or truth of someone or something; e.g., He placed his *trust* in me.
- 2a: a person or thing in which confidence is placed.
- 3a: confident hope I waited in *trust* of their return.

Transformation // Noun (Oxford Languages Dictionary)

- 1: a thorough or dramatic change in form or appearance; e.g., "Its landscape has undergone a radical transformation."

This packet was written & assembled by Mary Hammele, with input and editorial help from Anne Perry, as well as the Soul Matters Packet Writing Team.

Happy May, Transformers!

After spending a month at the water's edge, wondering whether to wade or jump in, we now turn to the work of trusting and opening ourselves to the various transformative experiences we will encounter in that water!

If you are familiar with restorative justice practices, you may have had an opportunity to learn about community-building and restorative circles - simple structured communication processes that provide a safe space to build (or rebuild) connections while encouraging participants to share of themselves and to listen deeply. Sounds a lot like Parker Palmer's idea of creating space for the timid soul to emerge, doesn't it? The circle borrows from Native American traditions, and seats participants at equal eye level and able to see everyone, with nobody at the head or foot of the group. The conversation follows a predictable order, offering the floor to each participant in turn.

Often, circle participants construct a circle center where they add meaningful objects and create a neutral space where speakers or listeners can focus, removing distractions and allowing quiet introspection. The circle center pictured on this packet cover features representations of the four seasons, the four directions, and the four elements of earth, air, fire, and water - symbols of transformation, yet predictability and stability. We've also added a lit chalice and compass in the circle center to add to the feeling of balance and serenity.

That leads us to Trust in Transformation. Change is one of the constants in our lives, sometimes a slow evolution and sometimes in rapid leaps, seemingly into the void. How can we embrace transformation and trust that there's a safety net when we take the leap? Isn't that what Beloved Community is all about?

Transformation can be as simple as taking a cornucopia of fresh vegetables and a box of cans and packaged goods and turning them into a feast. A seemingly simple example that can be seen as a metaphor for the Beloved Community.

Part of our Mission statement is "Open to Wonder and Transformation." This congregation is committed at its core to being open to transformation. That's a deep and meaningful commitment. Every new person who walks through our doors (real or virtual) changes us if we are open to that change. If we are not living up to our best selves, those new spirits bringing us exciting new possibilities will turn right around and leave. Change can be hard. But just like in improvisational theater, let's lead with "yes, and" and remind ourselves to avoid "no, we don't do it that way here."

Creating intentional space for this deep listening and sharing allows us to build the trust and connection needed for transformative moments - if we are open to them and willing to go deep. Hopefully, you will discover an exercise, question, or resource in this packet that inspires and challenges you. As we start to get our vaccinations and re-enter the larger community, we may find trusting to be more difficult than before the isolation of the pandemic, and especially opening to transformation we may be witnessing in ourselves, others, and our community and nation.

Mary Hammele and Anne J. Perry
Soul Matters Facilitators
First Unitarian Church of Rochester, NY

SPIRITUAL EXERCISES

Select one of the exercises below to practice and come prepared to discuss the experience and your thoughts & feelings about it with your group.

Option 1: Mapping Your Transformation

The First Unitarian Church of Rochester has a mission statement that brings UUA Principle #4, “A free and responsible search for truth and meaning,” into our mission of Listen, Open, Serve. In particular, “Open to wonder and transformation” means *trusting* that transformation is necessary and healthy!

Consider how transforming yourself spiritually or emotionally can benefit others or the community. How do work, art, and/or other activities connect you with others and, in turn, bring fulfillment? Can your transformation nourish others?

Delve into how this transformation embodies the three parts of our First Unitarian mission statement: Listen, Open, and Serve. How are these themes interconnected for you? When you are deeply listening to yourself and others, how does it open you to wonder, transformation, or serving? How does trusting in transformation rely on humility and the need for connection with others?

Take a look at the diagram to the right and map out some transformation strategies you can follow. For example, consider how love of self can lead to opening up to transformation *and* opening yourself to others.

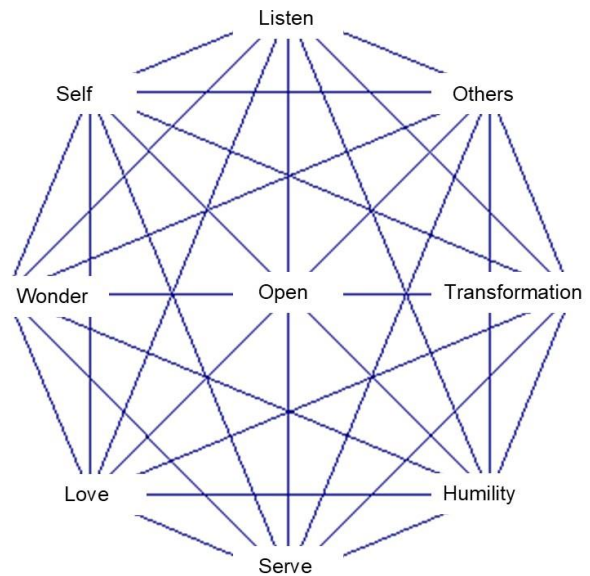
You can do this with every facet of our congregational mission to determine meaningful ways you can transform yourself, influence others, and act in the greater congregation and community.

Share with your group how you see possible ways of transformation and what that might mean for you in the short and long term.

Option 2: Trusting Team Transformations

Research has shown that many traditional “team-building” activities designed to build trust among co-workers fall dismally short of that goal. Particularly “trust falls” and other high-risk activities, like rock climbing and whitewater rafting, can have little impact at best and erode trust and morale at worst. (See [Resources](#) for an article on this.)

Have you experienced forced camaraderie at work or in other settings? How did that go for you and for your team? What aspects were positive and helped transform your team into a tighter unit? What aspects did not seem to work as well? What would you implement or adjust in team-building activities to truly allow members to establish trust and connection?



Through spiritual connection in community, we
Listen deeply to others and ourselves
Open to wonder and transformation
Serve together with love and humility

Option 3: Learning to Trust in Transformation from The Ugly Duckling

FirstLight Players will present **The Ugly Duckling** online via Zoom **May 7th, 7:30 PM & May 8th (encore recording)**. The Ugly Duckling embraces trusting in transformation by exploring how our expression of both inner and outer beauty can transform the way we are perceived by others and, most importantly, by ourselves. Attend the performance, perhaps with members of your group, and report back about how you saw the trusting in transformation theme enacted. Were there similarities in your own experience at different times in your life?

- **Tickets are free**, but pre-registration is required. Click this link to register for access to the live or recorded show: <https://forms.gle/fcuoGJNVw1xgYYRq7>
- FirstLight Players will gratefully accept **donations to benefit Point of Pride**. Point of Pride works to assist transgender people through gender-affirming support programs that help empower them to live with more freedom and with greater authenticity. <http://pointofpride.org>

Option 4: Our Journey is to Transform ...

“As Unitarian Universalists, our journey is to transform the big and the small, to transform ourselves, and to transform the world. Universalism means no one is outside of the circle of love and no one is disposable...”

Take a look at this responsive reading by Rev Elizabeth Nguyen on the [UUA WorshipWeb](#) site. Think about the ways that our interdependence keeps us working together for freedom and justice. What are some of the “big and small” ways we transform ourselves and transform as groups, congregations, and communities? How do we work to “honor love and justice above all else?” How does this commitment to love and justice act in concert with other UU values?

At First Unitarian, we’ve committed to the following Ends:

3. We engage in spiritual growth and development:
 - 3.1 Providing inspiration, support and courage to explore our whole selves;
 - 3.2 Recognizing our racial bias and confronting its impact on our relationships and behaviors;
 - 3.3 Developing our ability to communicate openly and with loving kindness;
 - 3.4 Strengthening our spiritual connections within our own faith community and beyond
4. We act in partnership with others to end racial, social, environmental and economic injustice within our own community, in greater Rochester, and in the world.

How does doing the transformative spiritual development work and strengthening our faith community in End #3 prepare us for the wider commitment to work outside of the walls of our own congregations?

This responsive reading was adapted from Rev. Nguyen's chapter, "Our Work for Social Justice," in [The Unitarian Universalist Pocket Guide](#).

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

These questions aren't "homework" that need to be covered entirely. Instead, simply pick the one question that speaks to you most and let it lead you where you need to go. The questions often lead not to answers, but more questions...

1. What major transformations in your life have made the most profound difference in your ability to trust in life, the universe, and everything?
2. Certain transformations in life are easy, while others are difficult - what have been some of your experiences with the relative ease or difficulty in life's transitions for you or others in your life? Is there any correlation between the relative ease of the transformation and its permanence in your life?
3. As you think about some of the major events of the last year – which have made lasting changes in your life, your attitude, or your way of thinking?
4. What did you learn about change and transformation when you were growing up? Did you have major influences in your life who shaped your attitude toward accepting or looking forward to change?
5. As you consider the changes you've observed in your environment - home, hometown, the nation, and the world - which have influenced your ability/desire to go with the flow or, instead, to oppose these changes?
6. Literature, poetry, and songwriting often explore the complexities of transformation - be it in nature, in oneself, or in relationships. Are there certain songs, stories, movies, or poems that particularly inspire or appeal to you when you think about changes you've experienced in life?

GROWING OUR SOULS

These questions are the same each month and invite us to connect this work of spiritual deepening ...

1. How will our discussion today cause you to be different in the world?
2. Within our church community, where can you help to make changes related to this topic?
3. How does this discussion relate to other activities in which you are engaged at church (e.g., parenting, religious education, social justice, worship, music)?



ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

QUOTATIONS

“What’s the world for if you can’t make it up the way you want it?” - Toni Morrison

“If you don’t like something, change it. If you can’t change it, change your attitude.”
- Maya Angelou

“Yes, your transformation will be hard. Yes, you will feel frightened, messed up and knocked down. Yes, you’ll want to stop. Yes, it’s the best work you’ll ever do.”
- Robin Sharma

“You and I possess within ourselves at every moment of our lives, under all circumstances, the power to transform the quality of our lives.” - Werner Erhard

“We need, in every community, a group of angelic troublemakers.” - Bayard Rustin

“Nothing happens until the pain of remaining the same outweighs the pain of change.”
- Arthur Burt

“Always remember, you have within you the strength, the patience, and the passion to reach for the stars to change the world.”
- Harriet Tubman

I have learned over the years that when one's mind is made up, this diminishes fear; knowing what must be done does away with fear.” - Rosa Parks

In order to save myself, I must destroy first the me I was told to be.” - Anonymous

“Real transformation requires real honesty. If you want to move forward – get real with yourself.” - Bryant McGill

“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

“There is never time in the future in which we will work out our salvation. The challenge is in the moment; the time is always now.” - James Baldwin

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

“Change will not come if we wait for some other person, or if we wait for some other time. We are the ones we’ve been waiting for. We are the change that we seek.”
- Barack Obama



FROM UNITARIAN UNIVERSALISM

CHALICE LIGHTING

May This Flame

- Bets Wienecke

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

Hymn in *Singing the Living Tradition*

www.youtube.com/watch?v=ErDfS0fJi-Y

A promise through the ages rings,
that always, always, something sings.
Not just in May, in finch-filled bower,
but in December's coldest hour,
a note of hope sustains us all.

A life is made of many things:
bright stars, bleak years and broken rings.
Can it be true that through all things,
there always, always something sings?

The universal song of life.
Entombed within our deep despair,
our pain seems more than we can bear;
but days shall pass, and nature knows
that deep between the winter snow
a rose lies curled and hums its song.

For something always, always sings.
This is the message Easter brings:
from deep despair and perished things
a green shoot always, always springs,
and something always, always sings.



Hymn in *Singing the Journey*

Turn the World Around (with Harry Belafonte)

[Click this Link](#)

“We come from the fire, living in the fire,
go back to the fire, turn the world around...”

Closing Words

“If we have any hope of transforming the world
and changing ourselves,
we must be
bold enough to step into our discomfort,
brave enough to be clumsy there,
loving enough to forgive ourselves and others.
May we, as a people of faith, be granted the
strength to be
so bold,
so brave,
and so loving.”

- Joseph M. Cherry
Prayer for Living in Tension

FROM SACRED TEXTS

Buddhist Tradition

"One moment can change a day, one day can change a life, and one life can change the world."

Tao Te Ching by Lao Tzu

"New beginnings are often disguised as painful endings."

"Know that transformation sometimes begins with a fall. So, never curse the fall. The ground is where humility lives." - Yasmin Moghahed, **Muslim Spiritual Instructor**

Bhagavad Gita

"We are kept from our goal, not by obstacles, but by a clear path to a lesser goal."

Bible - Old Testament - Moses Accepts God's Call

[Exodus 2:11-3:22](#)

Moses had a lot of [reasons](#) why *he* shouldn't be the one to lead the Israelites, but eventually decided he would have to transform from farmer to orator/leader/prophet to fulfill his destiny. Like changemakers throughout history, he had to step away from his own comfort to take up leadership. Think about Civil Rights leaders, past and present, who have done just that.

Bible - New Testament - Wedding Feast at Cana

[John 2:1-10](#)

¹ On the third day there was a marriage at Cana in Galilee, and the mother of Jesus was there;

² Jesus also was invited to the marriage, with his disciples. ³ When the wine failed, the mother of Jesus said to him, "They have no wine." ⁴ And Jesus said to her, "O woman, what have you to do with me? My hour has not yet come." ⁵ His mother said to the servants, "Do whatever he tells you."

⁶ Now six stone jars were standing there, for the Jewish rites of purification, each holding twenty or thirty gallons. ⁷ Jesus said to them, "Fill the jars with water." And they filled them up to the brim.

⁸ He said to them, "Now draw some out, and take it to the steward of the feast." So, they took it. ⁹ When the steward of the feast tasted the water, now become wine, and did not know where it came from (though the servants who had drawn the water knew), the steward of the feast called the bridegroom ¹⁰ and said to him, "Every man serves the good wine first; and when men have drunk freely, then the poor wine; but you have kept the good wine until now."



"...A Jewish wedding was a week-long celebration; however, the festivities at Cana were in peril when the wine ran out. Wine was an extremely common drink, with few alternatives, in first-century Israel. And in a culture that regarded hospitality almost as a sacred duty, running out of wine would have been a shameful social disaster and an insult to the guests. As the eldest son of the family, Jesus would have assumed a role of responsibility. Mary trusts him and instructs the servants to do whatever Jesus tells them to do. She obviously had great faith in Jesus' abilities even though, up to that point, Jesus had not done any miracles..."

- Marg Mowczko, [Exploring the Biblical Theology of Christianity](#)

POETRY EXCERPTS

To respect copyright laws and support artists, we provide links to the full work from which an excerpt is taken.

“No, Time, thou shalt not boast that I do change:
Thy pyramids built up with newer might
To me are nothing novel, nothing strange;
They are but dressings of a former sight ...”
- William Shakespeare, [Sonnet 123](#)

“The week after you died, Mom,
you were in my checkout line,
little old lady who met my stare
with the fear, the yearning
of a mortal chosen by a god,
feeling herself change
painfully cell by cell
into a shadow, a laurel, you, a constellation.”
- James Richardson, [Metamorphosis](#)
Copyright © 2013 by James Richardson. Used with
permission of the author.



“Change
Said the sun to the moon,
You cannot stay.

Change
Says the moon to the waters,
All is flowing.

Change
Says the fields to the grass,
Seed-time and harvest,
Chaff and grain.

You must change said,
Said the worm to the bud,
Though not to a rose,

Petals fade
That wings may rise
Borne on the wind...”
- Kathleen Raine, [Change](#)

“One day you finally knew
what you had to do, and began,
though the voices around you
kept shouting
their bad advice—
though the whole house
began to tremble
and you felt the old tug
at your ankles.
“Mend my life!”
each voice cried.
But you didn’t stop.
You knew what you had to do ...
- Mary Oliver, [Journey](#)

“Remember that the caterpillar
Has to dissolve completely
To become a butterfly

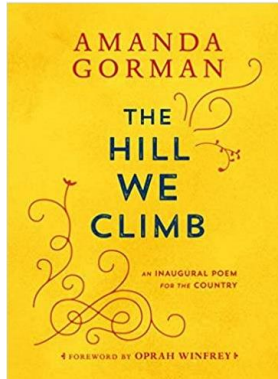
If you’re falling apart
It might be for the best”
- [k. tolnoe](#)

PODCASTS, BLOGS, SONGS, ARTICLES, FILMS, & BOOKS

Trust Falls Don't Work, by Chris Cotteta, Nov 25, 2019

High-risk team-building and trust falls can backfire when attempting to engender trust and connection in teams.

<https://aiirconsulting.com/trust-falls-dont-work-heres-what-does/>



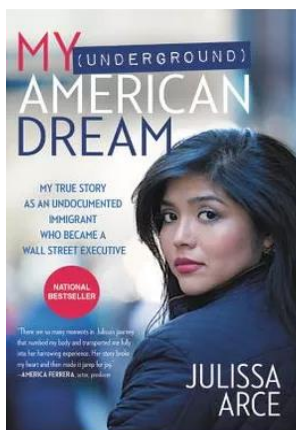
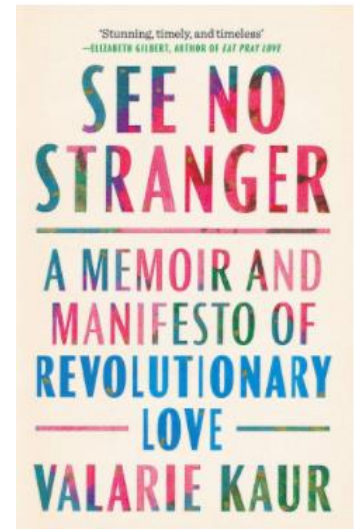
National Poet Laureate, Amanda Gorman's powerful inaugural speech reminds us so intuitively where we have been, and where we can go.

“When day comes, we ask ourselves:
Where can we find light
In this never-ending shade?
The loss we carry, a sea we must wade...”

This transformative vision is worth revisiting!

“The founders crafted the U.S. Constitution to consolidate power for white Christian men of an elite class. The rest of us were not counted in “we the people.” The law was designed to colonize and control the rest of us, not set us free. And yet the founders had invoked words whose power even they could not constrain—justice, freedom, equality, the guarantee of life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness. These were magical words that had a power of their own and seized the imagination of the people for whom they were never meant. In every generation, people had risen up in movements to unleash the magic of these words, to bleed for these words and expand the “we” in “we the people” to include more and more of us.”

- Valarie Kaur, **See No Stranger: A Memoir and Manifesto of Revolutionary Love**



My Underground American Dream, by Julissa Arce

The autobiographical account of an immigrant's transformation from an impoverished child to Wall Street executive – and then, leaving that career to found a not-for-profit scholarship and mentoring program for immigrant students. How she navigated a “successful” career without a green card is a riveting story, ultimately raising the question, “What is the true definition of success?”

Songs

The Times They Are A-Changin', Bob Dylan, 1964
Bob Dylan's classic serves as a mission statement for social change in the 1960s and is still relevant today.

A Change Is Gonna Come, Sam Cooke, 1964
This song was written by Sam Cooke after a “whites only” motel refused to let him, his wife, and his band stay there.

[Self Transformation Through Mindfulness](#), Dr. David Vago TEDx Talks, April 2017

Cognitive Neuroscientist David Vago demonstrates that a systematic form of mental training involving meditation and mindful awareness has the potential to transform our self and our mental habits in a positive way. Learn how every moment is an opportunity to change our brain and strongly influence our health at both conscious and nonconscious levels.

[Beyond Personal Growth: Trusting the Mystery of Transformation](#), Susan Christerson Brown, *Mildly Mystical* blog, April, 2010

From John Donahue's Anam Cara, "Spirituality is the art of transfiguration. We should not force ourselves to change by hammering our lives into any predetermined shape... Rather, we need to practice a new art of attention to the inner rhythm of our days and lives. This attention brings a new awareness of our own human and divine presence." The author continues, "I want to grow, but without all the messy uncertainty and annoying unpredictability of not knowing the way ... Will power is hard work, and doesn't make for a very joyful life. Maybe it's trust power I need to work on ..."

Movies About Personal Transformation

[Shawshank Redemption](#), 1994 (R-rating)
Two imprisoned men bond over a number of years, finding solace & eventual redemption through acts of common decency.

[Malcolm X](#), 1992 (PG-13) Screen version of the life of Malcolm X, who, through his religious conversion to Islam, found the strength to rise above past criminal activity to become one of the most influential civil rights leaders in history.

[Schindler's List](#), 1993 (R) Historical fiction - Industrialist Oskar Schindler's gradual personal transformation from greedy to compassionate, helping to protect his Jewish workers from being sent to the Holocaust death camps.



[The Key to Transforming Yourself](#), Robert Greene, TEDx Talks, Oct 2013

Why do we fixate on the things we can see immediately when we crave change? In this passionate talk, Robert Greene shares the key to transforming ourselves and also talks about his own personal transformation and his path to becoming a bestselling author.

[Now, We Transform](#), Black Lives Matter, June 22, 2020 (video)

"Our fight for liberty, justice, and freedom continues. Together, we can — and will — transform.

This is the revolution. Change is coming."
Text Transform to 24365

Molly Hahn, from [Buddha Doodles](#)

