



Soul Matters

The Gift of Transformation



Smal Group
March 2024

Welcome to the Gift 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 about transformation because much of it takes us in exactly the wrong direction." Our challenge as communities of transformation is to remind each other to take those different tacks. Such as:

It's about breathing rather than becoming better.
It's about patience not perfection
It's about depth not dominance.
It's about 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 perfect ourselves is the surest way to stay stuck. The pursuit of purity and perfection focuses us on our inadequacy and inferiority, causing us to overlook those unexpected guests that Henri-Frederic speaks of.

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

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

Our Spiritual Exercises

It's one thing to analyze a theme; it's quite another to experience it. By pulling us out of the space of *thinking* and into the space of *doing*, these exercises invite us to figure out not just what we have to say about life, but also what life has to say *to us*!

Pick the exercise that speaks to you the most. Come to your group ready to share why you picked the exercise you did and what gift it gave you.

Option A

The Gift of Your Many Homes

Moving to a new home is not just a transformation of place but also a transformation of our personhood. A new surrounding shapes one into a new you. So this exercise invites you to explore how exactly your many homes shaped and created the "many yous." Here are your instructions:

- **Identify an object** that represents each of your homes. It's fine to focus on the actual physical home/house in which you lived, but -if helpful- expand your reflection to also focus on the town and land surrounding your house.
- **Identify a story** that captures the most meaningful gift each home gave you. Focus yourself on who each home helped you become and how each home shaped a new you.

Come to your group ready to share 1-2 of these objects and gift stories.

Option B

What in Their Bucket List is Yours?

Bucket lists transform us. By purposely placing what we dream of *doing* on the horizon, we are better able to hold on to the person we dream of *becoming*. Bucket lists keep our transformation on track.

But typical bucket lists fall short for many of us. They are focused on the adventures outside us, whereas we seek more guidance about what kind of adventures might lie inside us.

This is where Colorado's Poet Laureate, [Andrea Gibson](#), comes to the rescue. [Their bucket list](#) is all about how they long to heal and transform their *inner* world.

So with this in mind, this exercise invites you to treat Gibson as your guide and **figure out what in their bucket list is yours too**. You can read and listen to it here: https://andreagibson.substack.com/p/a-new-kind-of-bucket-list?utm_source=profile&utm_medium=reader2.

Mindfully read through their list multiple times until you identify which one or two of the items on Gibson's list most resonate with you and capture the inner transformation you long for as well.

Some questions to reflect on, if helpful:

- What one thing is most in the way of you achieving your chosen bucket list item?
- What personal story arises for you as you think about your chosen bucket list item?
- Who do you want to tell about your pick the most and why?
- Did you pick the one you did because it will help you reclaim something you lost in the past or birth something new?

Come to your group ready to share one or two of the insights/gifts you received from this exercise.

p.s. If you are looking for an extra mile challenge, consider writing your own "inner world bucket list."

Option C

Ask Them About Aging

Aging is arguably the most common and complex transformation we face. Regardless of what age we are. It simply never gets easier to move through the stages of our lives. But... we also know that two things in particular help: Stepping back to notice/name what is happening inside us and drawing wisdom from others who have already navigated the stage we are facing.

Providing these two sources of support is exactly what author Sari Botton offers through her online magazine, [Oldster](#). Using a set of carefully thought out and compelling questions, she interviews 30 100-year-old adults and explores “what it means to travel through time in a human body, at every phase of life.”

So, your assignment this month is to work through that set of questions yourself! Well, actually not just by yourself, but **with a trusted friend or family member**.

Here’s what we suggest: First, go through the questions yourself and write out the answers (or jot notes & talking points). Then meet up with a friend or family member and go through each of your answers to the questions, pausing along the way to share reactions and notice where your answers echo and differ.

Below is the list of questions **and a handful of the Oldster interviews to get you thinking as you get ready to answer for yourself**.

The Oldster Questions

- *Is there another age you associate with yourself in your mind? If so, what is it? And why, do you think?*
- *Do you feel old for your age? Young for your age? Just right? Are you in step with your peers?*
- *What do you like about being your age?*
- *What is difficult about being your age?*
- *What is surprising about being your age, or different from what you expected, based on what you were told?*
- *What has aging given you? Taken away from you?*
- *How has getting older affected your sense of yourself, or your identity?*
- *What are some age-related milestones you are looking forward to? Or ones you “missed,” and might try to reach later, off-schedule, according to our culture and its expectations?*
- *What has been your favorite age so far, and why? Would you go back to this age if you could?*
- *Is there someone who is older than you, who makes growing older inspiring to you? Who is your aging idol and why?*
- *What aging-related adjustments have you recently made, style-wise, beauty-wise, health-wise?*
- *What’s an aging-related adjustment you refuse to make, and why?*
- *What’s your philosophy on celebrating birthdays as an adult? How do you celebrate yours?*

Some Oldster Interviews

This is 76: Dami Roelse: <https://oldster.substack.com/p/this-is-76-dami-roelse-responds-to>

This is 38: Minda Honey: <https://oldster.substack.com/p/this-is-3875-minda-honey-responds>

This is 67: Lucy Sante: <https://oldster.substack.com/p/this-is-67-lucy-sante-responds-to>

This is 54: Author Elizabeth Gilbert: <https://oldster.substack.com/p/this-is-54-author-elizabeth-gilbert>

This is 72: Breena Clarke: <https://oldster.substack.com/p/this-is-72-author-breena-clarke-responds>

This is 90: Paul Zolbrod: <https://oldster.substack.com/p/this-is-90-paul-zolbrod-responds>

This is 40: Sherisa de Groot: <https://oldster.substack.com/p/this-is-40-sherisa-de-groot-responds>

Option D

Learning Your Way into the Always Becoming You

We are regularly told that transformation is about birthing something new. That can sound hopeful and encouraging, but too much emphasis on becoming new can make us feel that our current self is just old and not-so-hot. Or worse, that we are failing, or need to be thrown out!

Remembering the deep connection between transformation and learning helps with this. Learning can begin with a blank slate and work toward something new, but more often than not it builds on what is. And in doing so, it signals that who we are in the present is not an impediment to our becoming but a beautiful part of it. We are able to celebrate ourselves *now*, not just when the new us arrives. And there is a huge gift in that!

Amy Lloyd understands how important this gift is. Her poem, [I am Learning](#), is all about embracing and celebrating who she is right now and how that is a gift to who she is becoming. It provides a roadmap for how we can do the same. So here's your assignment:

***Make time to meditate on Lloyd's poem (found [HERE](#))
&
then write a version of your own.***

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

After you've written your own version, spend some time reading it aloud and notice how you feel. Did identifying what you are in the midst of learning leave you proud? Surprised? Did it help you perceive yourself anew? Did it make you even more committed to continuing the transformation of yourself that is underway?

Option E

Which Transformation Resource Calls to You?

Sometimes we read a quote, and it perfectly captures what's going on for us right now. Or allows us to view our current circumstances in a new light. With this in mind, spend some time this month reading through all of the *Companion Pieces* listed in section three of this packet to ***find the one that best illuminates your journey with transformation.***

We encourage you to use the same discernment practice with these quotes as you do with the packet's list of questions:

- **Read through all or many of the "companion pieces"** a few times, noting which ones "shimmer" (i.e. call to you or have an emotional gravitational pull). It often helps to circle or star these shimmering items.
- Then go through all your starred items and **settle on the one** that pulls at or interests you the most.
- Finally make space to **reflect** on the gift, word of comfort, challenge or insight your chosen resource is offering you.
- Some of us may want to **go further** and capture your reflections with journaling or creative expression.

Come to your group ready to share which companion piece you chose and the gift it gave you (and/or the journey it took you on).

Your Question

This list of questions is an aid for deep reflection. They are not meant to be answered as much as to take you on a journey.

Read through the list of questions 2-3 times until one question sticks out for you and captures your attention, or as some faith traditions say, until one of the questions “shimmers.”

Then reflect on that question using one or all of these questions:

- *What is going on in my life right now that makes this question so pronounced for me?*
- *How might my inner voice be trying to speak to me through it?*
- *How might Life or my inner voice be trying to offer me a word of comfort or challenge through this question?*

Writing out your thoughts often enables you to go deeper. It also sometimes helps to read the list of questions to a friend or loved one and ask them which question they think is the question you need to wrestle with.

A note about self-care: *Often these questions take us to a vulnerable space. It is OKAY to ignore the questions that may be triggering – or lean in if that feels safe.*

1. What were you told as a child when you resisted change or expressed fear of it?
2. What have you learned about the relationship between transformation and pain?
3. What have you learned about the relationship between transformation and joy?
4. What have you learned about the relationship between transformation and rest?
5. What is your next challenge in daring to be human?
6. Is your armor in the way of your growth?
7. Is delayed gratification delaying your transformation?
8. Is believing “I don’t deserve it” standing in your way?
9. Is it time to thank your armor for the way it protected & saved you back when things were tough?
10. Who or what do you need to learn to love next?
11. Of all the ways your life partner has transformed you, which is your favorite?
12. If you could go back and change something you said or did this year, what would it be?
13. How do you think your future self might transform its relationship with doubt and distrust?
14. What if the way forward is to soften?
15. What if your transformation lies in asking for what you need?
16. What is the new creation that wants to be born in and through you?
17. What do you know of a brokenness out of which comes the unbroken?
18. **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 find it.

Companion Pieces

Recommended Resources for Personal Exploration & Reflection

The following resources are not required reading. We will not analyze these pieces in our group. Instead they are here to companion you on your journey this month, get you thinking and open you up to new ways of imagining The Gift of Transformation

Wise Words

Human beings are works in progress that mistakenly think they're finished

[Daniel Gilbert](#)

Living involves tearing up one rough draft after another.

[author unknown](#)

And the day came when the risk to remain tight in a bud was more painful than the risk it took to blossom.

Anais Nin

Let difficulty transform you. And it will. In my experience, we just need help learning how not to run away.

Pema Chodron

The trouble with steeling yourself against the harshness of reality is that the same steel that secures your life against being destroyed secures your life also against being opened up and transformed by the holy power that life itself comes from.

[Frederick Buechner](#)

I need a rainstorm...
that drowns out any voices
that would offer easy answers.
I need a cloudburst to flood
everything I think I know...
Give me a gulley washer,
the kind that scours
and remakes its path as it flows.
I want it, and yet
when I feel the first drops
I scramble for the umbrella...

[Rosemerry Wahtola Trommer](#)

No transmutation without fire... the self must lose to find and die to live.

[Evelyn Underhill](#)

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

[Jeff Brown](#)

Personal growth is not about amassing knowledge, it's about becoming more conscious,... more mindful of inner knowing.

Peter Shepherd

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

Carl Jung

The curious paradox is that when I accept myself just as I am, then I can change.

[Carl Rogers](#)

I believe in waking up in the middle of the night and packing our bags and leaving our worst selves for our better ones.

Leslie Jamison

This I now know for certain: I do all of growing during the times in my life when I am offering compassion to the parts of myself that have not yet grown. I never once managed to shame myself into a version of me I loved more

[Andrea Gibson](#)

What is defeat? Nothing but education. Nothing but the first step to something better.

Wendell Phillips

You did not come here to pay bills and die
nor did you come to build the fortunes
of those destroying the Earth
Imagine instead
that you came to gather precious things
fallen from the pockets of Ancient Ones...
So fill your pockets as this world dies
knowing some of it will guide you to the next
and some will fall to the ground
in time to be found
by those who'll bring the world back to life.

[*Chris Taylor*](#)

Change happens at the speed of trust.

[*author unknown*](#)

Watch yourself about complaining. What you're supposed to do when you don't like a thing is change it. If you can't change it, change the way you think about it.

Maya Angelou

Ours is not the task of fixing the entire world all at once, but of stretching out to mend the part of the world that is within our reach. Any small, calm thing that one soul can do to help another soul, to assist some portion of this poor suffering world, will help immensely. It is not given to us to know which acts or by whom, will cause the critical mass to tip toward an enduring good. What is needed for dramatic change is an accumulation of acts, adding, adding to, adding more, continuing. We know that it does not take everyone on Earth to bring justice and peace, but only a small, determined group who will not give up during the first, second, or hundredth gale...

[*Clarissa Pinkola Estes*](#)

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

Rabbi Menachem Mendel Schneersohn

If you want to change the world, first, be sure you are changing yourself.

[*Rev. Sean Parker Dennison*](#)

Every moment we have a choice. Every moment we can be a plus, minus or zero
author unknown

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*](#)

There is something dying in our society, in our culture, and there's something dying in us individually. And what is dying, I think, is the willingness to be in denial. And that is extraordinary. It's always been happening, and when it happens in enough of us, in a short enough period of time at the same time, then you have a tipping point, and the culture begins to shift...

[*Rev. angel Kyodo williams*](#)

In times of rapid change it is the *learners* who inherit the earth; while the *learned* find themselves beautifully equipped to deal with a world that no longer exists.

[*Eric Hoffer*](#)

All that you touch you change.
All that you change changes you.
The only lasting truth is change...
God is change.

[*Octavia Butler*](#)

God is Change. Beware:
God exists to shape
And to be shaped.

[*Octavia Butler*](#)

Music

Two different playlists for each of our monthly themes: one in Spotify and another in YouTube. Use them as musical meditations.

- Click [here](#) for the Spotify playlist on [Transformation](#)
- Click [here](#) for the YouTube playlist on [Transformation](#)
- Click [here](#) for all [Spotify playlists](#).
- Click [here](#) for all the playlists. Videos & Podcasts

Videos & Podcasts

What is Transformative Justice?

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=U-BOFz5TXo&t=3s>

We are In a Time of New Suns

On Being Interview with adrienne maree brown

<https://onbeing.org/programs/adrienne-maree-brown-we-are-in-a-time-of-new-suns/>

The Neoliberal Order Is Over. What Next?

<https://rooseveltinstitute.org/2023/05/04/podcast-the-neoliberal-order-is-over-what-comes-next-with-gary-gerstle/>

David Brooks thinks Americans are getting meaner

<https://www.vox.com/future-perfect/23890762/david-brooks-america-capitalism-democracy-the-gray-area>

Today I Rise - Short Film

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=977HAgU-9-M>

The Unbroken by Rashani Rea

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=U-cr6KXy2Kc>

The Transformation that Pottery Made Possible

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=537ezn9HKoM>

A must see poem and visual meditation on aging

<https://davesikkema.wordpress.com/2013/09/14/no-going-back/>

The Coming AI Friends

Overview [here](#)

Interview with developers [here](#)

Related article [here](#)

Artists on How AI is Transforming Art & Us

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=G2XdZIC3AM8>

How AI will Augment & Transform Our Brains!

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bLCS8O9V9eY>

More [here](#)

The Next Global Superpower Isn't Who You Think

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=uiUPD-z9DTg>

The World Ahead 2024: 5 stories to watch out for

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

Articles

How Your Personality Changes As You Age

<https://www.bbc.com/future/article/20200313-how-your-personality-changes-as-you-age>

“Our traits are ever shifting, and by the time we’re in our 70s and 80s, we’ve undergone a significant transformation... We become more conscientious and agreeable, and less neurotic... Our willpower increases and we develop a better sense of humor. Finally, the elderly have more control over their emotions. It’s arguably a winning combination...”

How to Thrive in an Uncertain World

<https://www.nytimes.com/2024/01/13/opinion/uncertainty-anxiety-psychology.html>

On how meeting transitions with uncertainty is the key to successfully navigating our ever-transforming world.

Books

[Emergent Strategy: Shaping Change, Changing Worlds](#)

adrienne maree brown

Parable of the Sower

Octavia Butler

[Trusting Change: Finding Our Way Through Personal and Global Transformation](#)

Karen Hering

[The Battle for Your Brain: Defending the Right to Think Freely in the Age of Neurotechnology](#)

Nita Farahany

Movies & TV

[The UP Series](#)

[Nomadland](#)

[The Boy Who Harnessed The Wind](#)

[Rectify](#)

[American Symphony](#)

[The Holdovers](#)

[Blackberry](#)

More Monthly Inspiration from Soul Matters!

Our Facebook Inspiration Page:

<https://www.facebook.com/soulmatterssharingcircle/>

Our Instagram Page:

Find us as “soul_matters_circle”

Music Playlists:

Click [here](#) for links to the [Spotify playlists](#) for each month.

Click [here](#) to check out the [YouTube playlists](#).

Packet Introduction Credit Note: Unless explicitly noted otherwise, the introductions of these packets are written by our Team Lead, Rev. Scott Tayler. Rev. Scott gives permission for his pieces to be used in any way that is helpful, including in newsletters, worship and in online service/recordings.



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