



Touchstones Project

Small Group Discussion Guide

Transformation

Preparation: (Read *Touchstones* 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 following wisdom story.

Homer’s Wings by 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 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. “WHO?”

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 now 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 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>

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.

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

“...and then the day came when the risk to remain tight in a bud was more painful than the risk it took to blossom.” Anais Nin

“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

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

“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

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

“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.

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

“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

“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

“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

“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.

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

“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

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

“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

“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

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

“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

“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

“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

“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

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

“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

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

“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

“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

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

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

“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

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

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 of these questions as time
allows. Fully explore one question 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 for 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 the experience of 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.*