

# Soul Matters

A kaleidoscope of thoughts, images, stories, poetry, and ideas to engage hearts and minds.



## ***Transformation***

*January 2015*

We begin in the middle of things. While we might think of January and the turning of the calendar year as a time of new beginnings, it also happens that this beginning of the calendar year is right in the middle of our church year, and so we begin - as we always do - in the middle of things. There is no other place to begin.

Sometimes the middle is messy and uncertain. Sometimes it is exciting, even frightening when everything changes all at once. Or the middle can seem dull when it appears that nothing has changed for a long time and never will. But inside the stillness of its cocoon, a caterpillar dissolves and reorganizes itself into a butterfly, growing wings that will unfold in their own time. Warmth and moisture trigger changes in a seed, and a young plant sends its first roots into the soil. Yeast transforms flour and water into soft bubbling dough in a bowl on a kitchen table, and then in the heat of an oven that sticky dough becomes hot fresh bread. One person refuses to cooperate with violence or oppression and others follow, until systemic injustice yields to the power of countless voices raised together. A pebble that falls in the right place, at the right time, can start a landslide that changes the course of river or the shape of a mountain.

Last month, Mystery invited us to sit and rest awhile with unanswered questions. Transformation invites us to consider new possibilities - for ourselves as individuals, for our families and communities, for the wider world and the web of connections to which we each and all belong.

What is beginning for you now, in the middle of things? What transformations are waiting?

-- *Claire Curole*

***She changes everything She touches, and...***

***Everything She touches - changes!***

~ Goddess chant, published in  
*The Spiral Dance*, Starhawk



This Soul Matters packet was created by Claire Curole at Unitarian Universalist Community Church of Augusta, ME.

Thoughts within were gleaned from the Soul Matters Network, the UCC Resource Circle, and other sources.

If you would like to share your experience and wisdom for future packets, please email [minister@augustauu.org](mailto:minister@augustauu.org). To receive an electronic copy please email [info@augustauu.org](mailto:info@augustauu.org). To learn more about Unitarian Universalist Community Church, please visit our website [www.augustauu.org](http://www.augustauu.org).

# 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 everyday ordinary 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 questions percolate. Listen curiously to what surfaces. Live into the answers. Be surprised by what is discovered. Share what you learn with someone you meet along the way.



*Freedom begets vision. Vision leads to change. To embrace change means welcoming someone with an open mind and responding with interest to different behavior or beliefs rather than with a raised eyebrow, frozen smile, and silence. See that reaction for what it is—a sophisticated way of masking fear. Hold that fear at bay and let your heart lead the way. Change means discomfort, and because of that discomfort, some people will leave. They have in the past and will again. Let them go. For those who remain and commit, the discomfort becomes bearable when we recognize that it is for our benefit, that transformation is its result.*

*Mark Morrison-Reed, from "Reaching Beyond"  
QUEST, April 2012*

Our world is in constant motion. Sometimes gradual change comes like a stream slowly carving a mountain gorge, or the trees that are a little taller every season. Other times a sudden storm rips trees from their roots and floods valleys, leaving a transformed landscape in its wake.

Storms rise up in the human world as well as the natural world. Although the headlines might seem remote to us, the demonstrations against systemic racism and police brutality that began last summer in Ferguson, Missouri, after the shooting of an unarmed young black man, continue in communities across the country and beyond. This is a moment when social change is fast moving, a messy middle with uncertain outcome, and we who have the luxury of time and the privilege of distance have also the responsibility to give some considered thought to the transformation of our beloved human community.

When we speak of beloved community, what do we envision? Equality? Justice? Right relationship? What does it mean to be in right relationship at all levels - within ourselves; between individuals, within family or congregation; within the wider human community in the broadest ways?

Real communities are made of real people, and what is real is also messy and imperfect. That's not a bad thing: the gap between who we already are and who we would like to become is where we have room to grow. What are the differences between who we are now - as individuals, as a community, as people living our faith in this world - and who we would like to be? What does it mean to have growing edges?

Growth is not always easy or smooth or comfortable; the way forward through unfamiliar territory is not always obvious. What challenges or obstacles - external or internal, material or psychological - restrict our ability to grow toward our vision of our best selves? What unexamined assumptions get in our way? When we are stuck for answers, can we ask different questions?

Listen - reflect - adapt - change. Now is the beginning of whatever happens next.

*("Reaching Beyond," by Mark Morrison-Reed can be found at <http://www.questformeaning.org/quest-article/reaching-beyond/> - QUEST is an online publication by the Church of the Larger Fellowship, UU)*

# *Spiritual Practice*

## *A new way of being for all ages*



### **The Art of Transformation**

The creation of art is always a kind of transformation - a potter shapes clay into a vessel, a painter makes an image out of paint on canvas, a sculptor carves away at stone or wood, a dancer reimagines music into motion. Sometimes the starting place for art is art itself, as with Karen Allen's mandala and photograph shown here.

Transformation can mean taking the pieces of what we already have and putting them together in a new and beautiful way. Improvisation, assemblage, bricolage - there are many words for this idea of doing something new with the materials at hand. Very rarely are we called to build something entirely new out of nothing at all; usually we have to start with what we've already got.

Thinking of transformation reminds me of the Lego toys I use to share with my brother when we were small. Sure, you can follow the directions and build whatever is pictured on the box, and we would usually do that first. But then after that, we always took the space ship or gas station or whatever it was apart, and repurposed the pieces for something different, combining them with the blocks we already had in the pile. We'd end up with something that had the wheels of a bus and the wings of a spaceship and the doors of a house, and it was a good way to pass a wet afternoon.

In the coming month I invite you to experiment with putting things together in unexpected ways, making something new out of something else:

- Be open to the unexpected, to new things in familiar places. Look for colors that stand out next to each other, new sounds, rearranged spaces. How does your world change a little at a time?
- Make a new food - something with an unfamiliar ingredient or a new combination of flavors.
- Let your inner artist come out to play. Make a collage with bits of paper, fabric scraps, string, glitter, etc. Or build a small sculpture out of found objects.
- Share your experience with family or friends, or record it in a journal.



*Mandala and source image © Karen Jordan Allen*

*Used by permission - Thank you Karen!*

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# Wise Words

How should we be able to forget those ancient myths that are at the beginning of all peoples, the myths about dragons that at the last moment turn into princesses; perhaps all the dragons of our lives are princesses who are only waiting to see us once beautiful and brave. Perhaps everything terrible is in its deepest being something helpless that wants help from us.

So you must not be frightened if a sadness rises up before you larger than any you have ever seen; if a restiveness, like light and cloud shadows, passes over your hands and over all you do. You must think that something is happening with you, that life has not forgotten you, that it holds you in its hand; it will not let you fall. Why do you want to shut out of your life any uneasiness, any miseries, or any depressions? For after all, you do not know what work these conditions are doing inside you.

— Rainer Maria Rilke,  
*Letters to a Young Poet*

The salamanders,  
like tiny birds, locked into formation,  
fly down into the endless mysteries

of the transforming water,  
and how could anyone believe  
that anything in this world  
is only what it appears to be—

that anything is ever final—  
that anything, in spite of its absence,  
ever dies  
a perfect death?

(from the poem 'What Is It?')  
— Mary Oliver, *House of Light*



“Scared and sacred are spelled with the same letters. Awful proceeds from the same root word as awesome. Terrify and terrific. Every negative experience holds the seed of transformation.”

— author Alan Cohen



*Amazing transformations happen in the kitchen when we cook. Starting from basic ingredients and transforming them into a delicious meal is a little bit like magic. I don't bake from scratch as often as I used to, but I love the smell of homemade bread in the oven.*

## **Old Fashioned Raisin Bread**

1 packet instant dry yeast  
1 and 1/3 cup warm water  
1 and 2/3 cup flour (white, whole wheat, or a mix)\*

Mix yeast into warm water in large bowl. When it begins to bubble, stir in flour. Cover and allow to rise in warm place until doubled in volume. Doubling can take anywhere from half an hour to half a day depending on the temperature of the room and the freshness of the yeast.) Then add

1/2 tsp salt  
3 Tbsp sugar or honey  
3 Tbsp butter or vegetable shortening

Mix thoroughly but gently. Slowly sift in

1 and 1/3 cup flour

mixing well, until dough begins to firm up, and

1/3 cup raisins (or other dried fruit)

Knead the dough on a cool floured surface until it is smooth and not too sticky. Return to bowl and allow to rise until doubled in volume again, usually at least an hour. Shape as desired (in large loaf pan or on baking sheet) and allow to rise for 10-15 minutes before baking.

Bake at 325°F for about one hour for a large loaf (until loaf sounds hollow when tapped) or slightly less for smaller loaves. Allow to cool before cutting or breaking.

This is not a sweet dessert bread, but it is great toasted or just warmed up with a touch of your favorite jam.

Try a little transformation in your kitchen!

\* I have unfortunately not had success using entirely gluten-free flour in this recipe. - Claire