



EXPLORATION

Transformation

Readings



1. *Steps to Personal*

Transformation by Amara Rose

The quest to discover and live our truth is the Hero's Journey, a sacred pilgrimage home to ourselves. It's the high road—and a rigorous one. We may try to camouflage our fear of the unknown with bravado, workaholism, or apathy. There's another way: following the path of the heart.

...Our resistance is the Refusal of the Call. Change whispers in our ear, and we attempt a high-tech tune-out: call waiting, call forwarding, on hold, voicemail. ...How do we answer this call to reclaim our connection to what's true for us? We start by giving ourselves permission to be passionate, to dream beyond our self-imposed boundaries.

...The poet Rilke encourages us to "live awhile in the question." You're entering a corridor between the worlds; it's okay to not know what happens next.

...Marcel Proust said, "The real voyage of discovery consists not in seeking new landscapes, but in having new eyes." Look with the eyes of wonder, like a child. ...Breathe deeply into the mystery.

...Goethe said, "Whatever you can do, or dream you can, begin it / Boldness has genius, power, and magic in it." Once you commit to change, a confluence of forces moves to assist you.

... The key to integrating change in our lives is, have big dreams, take baby steps. ...It's a lifelong process of self-

actualization. And it's our reason for being here.

Source: <http://liveyourlight.com/mind/TenSteps.html>

2. *Change becomes you*

by Kevin Tobia

"Six years have passed since I discovered that my son was using drugs," wrote Vincenzina Urzia in *Anthony and Me* (2014), a memoir of her son's drug addiction. "I was really sad all the time and devastated, not to mention how worried I was about his wellbeing. *My son was not the same person anymore.*"

This is a puzzling idea, for someone to become 'not the same person anymore'. ...Yet it is simultaneously apt, capturing the emotive sense of no longer recognizing someone whom we once knew.

...[Yet,] some profound changes actually seem to make us become *really* or *truly* ourselves. Consider finding one's true self through romantic love; discovering a hidden life passion; committing to radically improving one's health; or experiencing a religious or spiritual conversion. ...All of these result in tremendous transformations, but they don't threaten identity. Instead, these changes seem to unearth our core selves, making us become who we really are. This allows for a seemingly paradoxical statement: *paradigm cases of continuing to be the same person involve becoming radically different.*

...As Nietzsche notes, one's purpose is often hidden. Often, we do not have the slightest idea what we are—until we become it.

...This ... motivates ...questions about 'transformative experiences.' These are experiences [as noted above] that transform a person in deep and unpredictable ways....

...Every worldly example of continued personal identity involves tremendous transformations.... Such dynamism does not throw our identities into

question; instead, these changes represent some of the most significant aspects of our selves.

Source: <https://aeon.co/essays/to-be-true-to-oneself-means-changing-to-become-that-self>

3. *The Wanderer Stilled*

by Martine Batchelor

...A month into my ...retreat, I was ...asking 'What is this?' when I ... became very aware of what was going on in my mind. It was all about me being at the center of the universe — what I wanted, what I hoped for, what I did not like, and so on. ...Self-interest ...the basis of ...identity. This clear awareness did not make me sad or upset. Instead, I found it funny. It exposed my fundamental misperception of myself as an incredibly compassionate and selfless person. This experiential awareness led to a deep self-acceptance. I saw clearly for the first time the obstacle at the center of my suffering and what was needed to transform it. This made me feel lighter. I wasn't in the dark any more about the conditions that had caused me to keep making the same mistakes again and again.

...I would see the aim of meditation as helping us to embrace and understand suffering, its causes and conditions, in order to enable us to develop our potential for stability, balance, joy, appreciation, love — and compassion for all those whose lives we depend upon and with whom we share the world. It is not just about an internal transformation. It also needs to affect the way we relate to and behave in the world. As the Japanese Zen Master Dogen said...: "To study the Buddha's way is to study oneself, / To study oneself is to forget oneself, / To forget oneself is to be enlightened by all things."

Source: <https://aeon.co/essays/from-french-anarchist-to-zen-teacher-a-journey-of-meditation>



4. *The power of story*

by Elizabeth Svoboda

...New research is lending texture and credence to what generations of storytellers have known in their bones — that books, poems, movies, and real-life stories can affect the way we think and even, by extension, the way we act. As the late US poet laureate Stanley Kunitz put it in *The Layers*, “I have walked through many lives, some of them my own, and I am not who I was.”

Our storytelling ability, a uniquely human trait, has been with us nearly as long as we’ve been able to speak. Whether it evolved for a particular purpose or was simply an outgrowth of our explosion in cognitive development, story is an inextricable part of our DNA. Across time and across cultures, stories have proved their worth not just as works of art or entertaining asides, but as agents of personal transformation.

...For thousands of years, we’ve known intuitively that stories alter our thinking and, in turn, the way we engage with the world. ...What kind of effect do powerful narratives really have on our brains? And how might a story-inspired perspective translate into behavioral change?

...We respond to *The Diary of Anne Frank* differently at age 42 than we do at 12, in part because of all the *other* stories that have changed our perception in the interim. We argue with stories, internally or out loud. We talk back. We praise. We denounce. Every story is the beginning of a conversation, with ourselves as well as with others.

Source: <https://aeon.co/essays/once-upon-a-time-how-stories-change-hearts-and-brains>

5. *How Creativity Can Transform and Change Us*

by Addie Johnson

The spark of creativity is life’s first and greatest gift to us: we’re con-

ceived in that spark. And we have the chance to create every day, even in how we look at the world around us. We also get to bear witness to that spark in others through literature, scientific discoveries, music, and painting. If we pay attention, we can notice it in nature all around us: a perfect spider web, the formation of ice crystals on the windowpane, even a close examination of our own animal natures. Creation brings us joy, awe, and often a much-needed new perspective.

An act of creativity changes everything. Change can be a source of anxiety in our lives; we wonder how we will manage each new task or difficulty we face. But if we can embrace change as constant growth through creation of new things, we can be comforted and inspired by the unexpected. The masters of artistic expression show us this better than anyone. They turn words into worlds, musical notes into stories, brushstrokes into feelings, and they change our lives in the process. I can’t think of a better definition of magic.

We’re surrounded by beauty of all kinds. It can perk us up, calm us down, and even heal our bodies and souls. ... It’s time to shine up your sense of wonder and see the world in a new light. Make some new discoveries, and don’t forget to pass them on through the magic of your own creativity.

Source: <http://www.spiritualityandpractice.com/book-reviews/excerpts/view/18129>

6. *Into the Wilderness*

by Rev. Sara York

When Jesus was baptized the spirit descended upon him like a dove and God said, “This is my son, in whom I am well pleased.” It must have been a great feeling, but it didn’t last long. The next thing Jesus knew, the nice spirit that had descended like a dove became aggressive and *drove* him into the wilderness. There he spent forty days of deprivation, self-examination, and confrontation with the devil. He suffered; he struggled; he was tested. Jesus’ solitary struggles to remain true to his covenant and calling echo those of his ancestors, who spent forty years in the wilderness establishing a religious community.

Wilderness is a part of every person’s soul-journey, and part of our journey together as human beings who seek to live in community. Time in the wilderness is always a time of struggle. It is also a time of transformation and renewal. In traditional terms, it is a time of purification. The journey into wilderness reminds us that we are alone and not alone. We are neither where we have been nor where we are going. There is danger and possibility, risk and promise. In the wilderness, the spirit may descend like a dove and lift us on its wings of hope, then drive us into the depths of despair; it may affirm us with a gift of grace, then challenge us to change. In the stories and rituals of Eastern as well as Western religions, a journey into the wilderness represents a time when we both pursue and resist the Holy.

We may choose to enter the wilderness like the people of Yahweh, to escape bondage, or, like Henry David Thoreau, to “live deliberately.” Or we may, like Jesus, be driven there without much choice. Once there, even our markers of time and space collapse, for this wilderness is not in space or time, but is the boundless territory of the soul.

Source: <https://www.uua.org/worship/words/meditation/22277.shtml>

7. *In Between*

by Rev. Kate Walker

In between, liminal, that space where we wait. Between moments; events, results, action, no action. To stand on the threshold, waiting for something to end, and something new to arrive, a pause in the rumble of time. Awareness claims us, alert, a shadow of something different.

In between invitation and acceptance. In between symptom and diagnosis. In between send and receipt of inquiry and question. In between love given and love received.

Liminality, a letting go, entering into confusion, ambiguity and disorientation. A ritual begun, pause ... look back at what once was, look forward into what becomes. Identity sheds a layer, reaches into something uncomfortable to wear.

In between lighting of the match and



the kindling of oil. In between choosing of text and the reading of words. In between voices and notes carried through the air into ears to hear. In between creation thrusts ever forward.

Social hierarchies may disassemble and structures may fall. Communities may revolt or tempt trust. Tradition may falter or creativity crashes forward. Leaders may step down or take charge. The people may choose or refuse.

In between, storm predicted, the horizon beacons. In between, theology of process reminds us to step back. In between, where minutia and galaxies intermingle with microbes and mysteries. In between, liminal, that space where we wait: Look, listen, feel, breathe.

Source: <https://www.uua.org/worship/words/meditation/between>

Wisdom Story

The Antique Mirror

Evelyn was a creature of habit, trapped by routine and the monotony of her daily life. Every morning, she woke at the same time, donned corporate attire, and navigated the crowded streets to arrive at her office cubicle.

But underneath her dull exterior was a dogged yearning, a desire for something more interesting and profound than the humdrum of city life. She longed for a glimpse of the extraordinary amidst the ordinary, for a meaningful change, even transformation.

One evening, while walking home in the growing darkness, she noticed an antique shop between two small ethnic restaurants. Somehow, she had not seen it before. Intrigued by the items displayed in the front window and the flickering light inside, Evelyn entered the shop.

It was a treasure trove of oddities, each item whispering tales of mystery and wonder. But an old mirror in

the back corner caught Evelyn's attention. Its wooden frame, adorned with intricate carvings, beckoned her.

As she looked into the mirror, Evelyn's reflection shimmered and distorted, morphing into different shapes and forms. Suddenly, she saw herself not as she was but as she longed to be—freed from her mundane existence.

Evelyn emerged from the antique shop with a new sense of purpose, her heart brimming with anticipation. From that day forward, she embraced change with open arms, seeking adventure in the unlikely places.

No longer bound by the confines of her old life, Evelyn embarked on a remarkable journey of self-discovery, embracing the beauty of transformation in all its forms. She discovered that true fulfillment lay not in the destination but in the journey of becoming which she pursued through meditation, travel, making pottery, and other activities that deepened life for her in many ways.

Source: Touchstones

Snippets

“Awakening is not a thing. It is not a goal, not a concept. It is not something to be attained. It is a metamorphosis. If the caterpillar thinks about the butterfly it is to become, 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*

“If the point of life is the same as the point of a story, the point of life is character transformation. If I got any comfort as I set out on my first story, it was that in nearly every story, the protagonist is transformed. He's a jerk at the beginning and nice at the end, or a coward at the beginning and brave at the end. If the character doesn't change, the story hasn't happened yet. And if story is derived from real life, if story is just condensed version of life, then life itself may be designed to change us so that we evolve from one kind of person to another.” *Donald Miller*

“Grief, despair, and fear are really nei-

ther positive nor negative but simply human emotions; it is our attitude toward them that's negative. The dark emotions can be our best, albeit most demanding, spiritual teachers, when we can get beyond the compulsion to control them. By learning how to attend to, befriend, and surrender to the energies of grief, despair, and fear, we create conditions for something new to arise in ourselves and in the world. We discover an unexpected gateway to healing and transformation. We release ourselves from the strangled grip of pain into an amazing alchemy by which grief, despair, and fear are transmuted to gratitude, faith and joy.” *Miriam Greenspan*

“Fundamental to Scrooge's transformation is a reorientation of his attention. For all his adult life he has been trapped within his frightened self, held hostage to its demand that the world bend to its wishes. But the world bends to no one's wishes — death awaits us all — and those who would bend the world risk breaking their souls in the effort. Scrooge's soul broke and shriveled long before the Ghosts appeared to him, when his beloved sister died. This cannot be, he thought of her death; and yet it was. Anger poured into his heart and curdled into bitterness. In Scrooge, as in everyone, there remained a spark of the divine and a desire to open to it, but in his bitterness he took that spark for the glint of gold.”

Tracy Cochran and Jeff Zaleski

“Pablo Casals, the world-renowned cellist, still practiced three hours a day when he was ninety-three. When asked why he still practiced at that age, he said, ‘I'm beginning to see some improvement.’ The training in meditation will only happen through your own effort. No one can do it for you. There are many techniques and traditions, and you can find the one most suitable for you. But regularity of practice is what effects a transformation. If we do it, it begins to happen; if we don't do it, we continue acting out the various patterns of our conditioning.” *Joseph Goldstein*

“If we embrace the promise of diversity, of creative conflict, and of ‘losing’ in order to ‘win,’ we still face one final fear



— the fear that a live encounter with otherness will challenge or even compel us to change our lives. This is not paranoia: the world is really out to get us! Otherness, taken seriously, always invites transformation, calling us not only to new facts and theories and values but also to new ways of living our lives — and that is the most daunting threat of all.” *Parker J. Palmer*

“One alternative point of view is to see illness and emotional conflict as opportunities for deepening our humanity: not merely as learning experiences, but as occasions for substantive personal transformation. Ancient authors claimed that it is the soul that makes us human. I’d want to extend that notion and suggest that it is the soul-wrenching trials that evoke our humanity. If there is anything crucial lacking in the modern world, it is a profound appreciation for the common effort of making a beautiful life out of daily struggles.”

Thomas Moore

“Life has taught me three things: The first is that I cannot escape my own death or the deaths of the people I love. The second is that no human being can be reduced to what we see, or think we see. Any person is infinitely larger, and deeper, than our narrow judgments can discern. And third: He or she can never be considered to have uttered the final word on anything, is always developing, always has the power of self-fulfillment, and a capacity for self-transformation through all the crises and trials of life.”

Marie de Hennezel

“*Joe Versus the Volcano* is one of my favorite quirky movies. The title alone wins style points. Tom Hanks plays Joe, a young man stuck in his life, stuck in a job he detests, stuck in a windowless cubicle of fluorescent lights. Is this all there is? ...As the movie goes on,

Joe wakes up. At one point, watching the moon rise above the ocean horizon, Joe sums up his transformation: ‘Most people go through life asleep. But the ones who awake live in constant total amazement.’” *Terry Hershey*

“Forgiveness is one of the least understood of all spiritual practices. It has nothing to do with condoning poor behavior in ourselves and others. Rather, it calls us to responsibility. In forgiving ourselves, we make the journey from guilt for what we have done (or not done) to celebration of what we have become. This transformation of heart comes about through reflecting on the results of our mistakes, understanding how ignorance or woundedness created those actions, and doing the necessary healing so that we will do better next time. Error calls us to repentance, which means literally to think again. It is the crucible in which the soul is forged and the psyche healed. Mistakes, in fact, are sacred because of the powerful potential for growth that they contain.”

Joan Borysenko

Questions

1. In reading #1, Amara Rose begins with the Call to transformation. She asks, “How do we answer this call to reclaim our connection to what’s true for us?” How would you answer her question? Do you have examples of people answering the Call, such as yourself or others? Of refusing the Call? Rose writes that the Hero’s Journey is “the path of the heart.” Have you followed your heart? With what results? She refers to transformation as “a lifelong process of self-actualization.” Do you agree? Why or why not?

2. In reading #2, Kevin Tobia recounts a negative example where someone was “not the same person anymore” because of drug use. Do you know of examples of this? Then, he suggests that significant changes can help people really or truly become themselves by unearthing their core selves. Do you know of examples of this? For To-

bia, this represents the paradigm and paradox of continuing to be the same person while becoming radically different. How could this be true? Does it mean peeling away layers to reveal our true selves? Why or why not?

3. In reading #3, Martine Batchelor, who became a Buddhist nun, recounts a retreat in which she discovered her self-interest. It was all about her being at the center of the universe. Instead of being upset or sad, she found it funny. She writes, “It exposed my fundamental misperception of myself as an incredibly compassionate and selfless person.” Have you ever had this kind of insight into yourself where the insight did not match your self-perception? If yes, how did you react? If not, how might you respond in such a situation? She views meditation as going beyond internal transformation to how one relates to and behaves in the world. Do you agree? Why or why not? Do you have a spiritual practice? Has it changed you? How? If not, how do you want it to change you?

4. In reading #4, Elizabeth Svoboda writes that stories have the power to change the way we think and act. Do you agree? Why or why not? Has there been a story, book, movie, etc., that has profoundly affected you? What was it? She asks, “How might a story-inspired perspective translate into behavioral change?” How would you answer her question? Consider your childhood. What stories had a profound effect on you? How? Why? Svoboda concludes, “Every story is the beginning of a conversation, with ourselves as well as with others.” Do you agree? Why or why not? Finally, what stories, especially through movies, have been most transformative for people, generally, or for a group of people? One example is the movie *Roots*. Do you have others? Why were they so impactful?

5. In reading #5, Addie Johnson writes about the ability of creativity to transform us. How have you been affected by creativity? By the



creativity of others? By yours? Considering nature, she writes, “Creation brings us joy, awe, and often a much-needed new perspective.” How can this be true? Johnson writes, “Change can be a source of anxiety in our lives; we wonder how we will manage each new task or difficulty we face. But if we can embrace change as constant growth through creation of new things, we can be comforted and inspired by the unexpected.” How can both things be true? How do you respond to change in your life? Has this response changed over time? In what ways?

6. In reading #6, Sara York recounts the ordeal Jesus faced during his 40 days in the wilderness, where the devil continuously tempted him. Do you see his experience as being similar to that of the Buddha, who spent 49 days meditating under the bodhi tree, where the demon Mara and his minions tempted him before he achieved enlightenment? Why or why not? York writes, “Wilderness is a part of every person’s soul-journey.” How might this be true? With the understanding that wilderness is a metaphor, what wilderness experiences have you experienced? What influence or impact did they have? York writes, “Time in the wilderness is always a time of struggle. It is also a time of transformation and renewal.” What would cause you to choose the wilderness? For Thoreau, it was the decision “to live deliberately.” What would you need to do to “live deliberately?”
7. In reading #7, Kate Walker writes about liminal space. It is the space, the threshold, before a transition or transformation. Sometimes, it is a calm place; other times, it is quite turbulent. Have you experienced

this kind of space? If yes, what was the experience, and what was it like? A prototype of this is the Native American vision quest that young males entering adulthood undergo. What are the benefits of such an ordeal? Would it be helpful to have contemporary rituals for young men and women transitioning to adulthood? Why or why not? What elements might such a ritual include?

The following questions are related to the Snippets

8. Alejandro Jodorowsky writes, “Awakening is not a thing. ...It is a metamorphosis.” Do you agree? Why or why not? Have you experienced an awakening? If yes, what was the experience like? Using the butterfly as an example, he concludes when the butterfly flies, “nothing of the caterpillar remains.” From the human perspective, it doesn’t seem we can lose the memory of our caterpillar self. How can our old self coexist with our new self? What might this look like?
9. Donald Miller writes that in a story, the protagonist is transformed. What examples of books or movies would you share where this happened? What transformation occurred? Was it meaningful in terms of your enjoyment of the book or movie? If you were writing about a character, what transformation could you imagine for them? Why?
10. Miriam Greenspan writes about grief, despair, and fear. She suggests these dark emotions could “be our best, albeit most demanding, spiritual teachers....” How could this be true? Though unwelcome and quite demanding, people who have gone through the arduous journey of grief often see it as a spiritual teacher. What is your take on the grieving process? How might despair be a spiritual teacher? In talking about fear, a question worth considering is, “What would I do in this situation if I wasn’t afraid?” Greenspan seems to say, “Allow fear to be your teacher.” How could we do this? She concludes by noting “an
11. Tracy Cochran and Jeff Zaleski write about Scrooge’s transformation. We all know Dickens’ A Christmas Carol, well. Cochran and Zaleski remind us of the dramatic effect the death of his sister had on Scrooge. What aided in his transformation? What challenges did he have to overcome? Ironically, one barrier was his failure to grieve his sister’s death. This was compounded by greed and the closing of his heart. What are some of the things that get in the way of transformation?
12. Joseph Goldstein reminds us that renowned cellist Pablo Casals continued to practice three hours a day at the age of 93. Goldstein extends this to a spiritual practice, writing “regularity of practice is what effects a transformation.” Do you agree? Why or why not? From your perspective, how can a spiritual practice support transformation?
13. Parker Palmer focuses on diversity and the fear and power of otherness. How have you engaged with diversity? Otherness? What helped? What hindered? He concludes. “Otherness, taken seriously, always invites transformation, calling us not only to new facts and theories and values but also to new ways of living our lives — and that is the most daunting threat of all.” Do you agree? How do new facts, theories, and values change us, transform us? What is threatening about all of this? How can we overcome the feeling of being threatened?
14. For Thomas Moore, the transformative power of illness, emotional conflict, and daily struggles are essential, writing, “It is the soul-wrenching trials that evoke our humanity.” Do you agree? Why or why not? He suggests we must have a “profound appreciation for the common effort of making a beautiful life out of daily struggles.” Why is this important? Why do people



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

Photo by RomanBekasov on Pixabay

minimize the power of daily struggles to be transformative? Why do we emphasize fireworks and ignore sparklers in their ability to affect us? Finally, is one purpose of transformation “making a beautiful life?” Why or why not?

15. Marie de Hennezel writes about the inevitability of death, that humans are more than we see, and that the possibility of self-transformation continues through “all the crises and trials of life.” What role might the inevitability of death and the reality of grief play in transformation? She writes, “Any person is infinitely larger and deeper than our narrow judgments can discern.” How might this reality relate to the capacity of any individual to undergo self-transformation, even when they least expect it? Finally, how might “all the crises and trials of life” trigger transformation?
16. Terry Hershey recounts the plot of the movie *Joe Versus the Volcano*. Tom Hanks plays Joe, a character trapped in a dead end, who a millionaire lures to throw himself into a volcano since Joe believes he is dying. But, on an absurdist journey, Joe wakes up to the beauty and meaning of life. Have you ever been asleep in life? What were the circumstances? Have you known others who were asleep? Again, the circumstances? Joe concludes, “Most people go through life asleep. But the ones who awake live in constant total amazement.” Have you had experiences of total amaze-

ment? What were they like? What meanings did you take from them?

17. Joan Borysenko praises forgiveness as an important transformation of the heart. What role has forgiveness played in your life? Forgiveness of others? Forgiveness of self? Where within the process of forgiveness might we witness transformation? Borysenko concludes, “Mistakes, in fact, are sacred because of the powerful potential for growth that they contain.” How could this be true?