

Navigating Transition



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The months of May and June often bring transitions related to academic promotions, graduations, and other milestones related to the culmination of years of dedication and hard work. At this time of year, we often celebrate loved ones as they move from one phase of life into another. We wrap up another year in the school or church calendar, and move into the different pace of life that summer often brings.

Beyond these expected changes, transitions occur in all parts of our lives and often at unpredictable times. How we navigate a wide variety of transitions can reflect our capacity for change.

Transitions that are rooted in celebration are welcomed, and joy is usually inherent in the acknowledgment of weddings, births, and birthdays. The transitions that are more challenging are those that we didn't anticipate and didn't ask for. The reality of change may hit us harder when we unexpectedly lose a job, end a marriage or other relation, or when we or someone we love goes through the ultimate transition: that from life to death.

The world around us is in constant transition. Particularly now, in this time of pandemic, climate change,

and worsening inequality, change is never-ending. Before the pandemic, more people felt able to have some degree of disconnection from the impacts of modern day life on the planet and how systems of oppression impact the vast majority of beings on the planet. The pandemic has been a flashpoint and a transition for humanity that we are still grappling to understand fully.

We know that the world will never be the same after the past few years. The impacts of oppression and the devastating results of extractive capitalism are harder than ever to ignore. The realities of our changing climate and the stresses of continued inequality are sure to mean more widespread, global transitions are ahead of us. Though many people have always been aware of these realities, some people with privilege still often plead ignorance through their own mental gymnastics and the mistaken belief that we live within a meritocracy. In the short term, privilege may afford some people a better chance at surviving climate chaos and other large global transitions, but the impacts will eventually be felt by everyone.

Amidst the uncertainty of the future and where major global transitions will take us, there are ways we can prepare to weather the coming (literal

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Quest

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“Look on
every exit as
being an
entrance
somewhere
else.”

TOM STOPPARD

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CLF FALL CORRESPONDENCE COURSES

TRANSITION

How do you relate to transition? What role has transition played in your life?

MICHAEL

CLF member, incarcerated in WI

I relate to transition as a beneficial force of life, a change to the inner attitudes of your mind to change the outer aspects of your life. Embracing transition has saved me through many hardships. Dying is easy — it's living that's hard. ■

RUSSELL

CLF Member, incarcerated WI

I'm a man who welcomes transitions. I embrace transitory moments like a breathe of fresh air. I've learned that stagnation causes sickness, boredom, complacency, and above all: a lack of growth.

Imagine if a caterpillar never entered a cocoon? Transitions in my life have been my cocoons. Each time, good or bad, I have learned the hidden meanings of every stage I was forcing myself to develop through.

Poverty, heartbreak, loss, and worse have all given me the resilience to meet my transitions head on without running away. Running away would only temporarily delay the transition



PHOTO BY ERIK KARITS ON UNSPLASH

instead of get rid of it. I embrace it all like the rough medicine it is because I know it will empower my greatest self.

The role of transition in my life will always serve as an instant reminder

that I'm not done changing into the best version of myself despite what this world may think. I will always make an effort to keep myself in transition. After all, that's what lets me know that I'm still alive! ■

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and figurative) storms as best we can. The tools, practices, and structures of spiritual community have a lot to offer us as we seek to become more resilient within the changes we are already experiencing, and any larger changes to come.

Ultimately, transitions that bring unwelcome change can cause fear and anxiety. This is a completely appropriate response to events that sometimes shake us to the core. Being

part of a community and strengthening our connections to one another is part of what grounds us during times of transition. We connect to celebrate, to lament, to find comfort and to know we are loved and not alone. This makes a difference, no matter what type of transition we find ourselves in.

As a faith community without geographical boundaries, the Church of the Larger Fellowship finds ways to invite people into connection and care with each other. We want you to know that you are not alone. While

our community does not meet in person in the way that brick and mortar churches do, we offer connection in every way available to us. Being imaginative with how we build community and strengthen relationships is one antidote to the uncertainty of unwelcome transitions and change.

As you navigate transitions in your current life, or anticipate changes to come, always remember: your community is with you. We will always hold your sacredness and belonging, through the many transitions ahead. ■



PHOTO BY IRINA IRISER ON UNSPLASH

Rethinking the Transition Out of Prison

GARY

CLF member, incarcerated in NC

"Transition" has become a byword in the corrections field over recent years. It has come to encompass classes bearing such fanciful titles as "Thinking For A Change," "Crossroads," "Men In Transition" and "Ethical Choices."

Yet, despite these, recidivism rates in the U.S. run from 41-79%. How is this possible?

As a prisoner now in his 32nd year of incarceration, I have taken part in the above named courses and many others and I have come to a conclusion.

Well-intentioned as they may be, transition services for the incarcerated contain wide gaps in content and scope of inmates addressed. Practical knowledge on such everyday mundane activities as navigating the internet, use of a cell phone, Facebook, Google, Twitter or any number of other such taken for granted resources which are totally foreign to most prison inmates.

America's prison population is aging as well. I, myself, entered prison in 1991 at 31 years of age. Today I am 64. With this aging comes chronic health conditions and the need for transition services beyond job search skills, resume writing, and interview tips. Senior citizen prisoners will not likely be released to pound the pavement



PHOTO BY JAVIER ALLEGUE BARROS ON UNSPLASH

looking for a job. I dare say, employers would be reluctant to hire such for the insurance and health liability alone. Factor in the "scarlet letter" of being a convicted felon, and the elderly prisoner being released following a prison term of any length is left virtually with few or no resources.

Classes on applying for Medicare and Medicaid, senior citizen services, health care, opportunities for socialization and even such practical aid as transit services, Uber use, physician and dental appointments, obtaining copies of DOC medical files, housing options, and mental health — all are neglected.

In a recent transition class, a full 50% were above the age of 50, 20% were older than 60, five were over 65 and two were 70 or above. This is a typical demographic in American prisons. Inmates are locked away for lengthy terms to satisfy U.S. injustice and once their care becomes too costly, many are suddenly found "suitable for pa-

role," quite literally tossing seniors out on the street with a "gate check" and, if lucky, a 30 day supply of any current prescriptions and nothing more.

Who can forget the infamous scene in the film *Shawshank Redemption* when the elderly prisoner librarian Brooks was suddenly paroled. Having been in prison since before the automobile he was totally lost. He completed suicide.

Keeping prisoners for lengthy terms and providing no transition services to aid in a successful reintegration into society is a moral crime in which everyone is a victim.

Transition by its very definition means to evolve, adapt, and change. With our world's largest percentage of the incarcerated (20%, while the U.S. is only 4% of the earth's population), it is paramount, even critical, that the scope of transition be broadened to address the needs of an aging, growing prison population. ■

The Gift of a Sensitized Soul

DONNA

CLF member, incarcerated in CA

My experience has taught me that many adults who seek a new spiritual connection have, like myself, been particularly sensitized to the suffering of the world. Maybe some people have been taught to be sensitive in this way. Either way, I would like to see us broaden our empathy for each other in beloved community by celebrating the gift of “a sensitized soul.” Whether we were taught it or given it as a result of grief and loss, whether we were given it as neglected or abused children or from social oppression, we have it.

I have spent most of my life begrudging and resenting my experience of a discontented soul and longing for the ease and comfort that privileged conformists appear to have. I realize now, at age 70, what needless suffering I went through by holding onto

these resentments. I kept myself in soul-slavery, even though intellectually I was successful and creative. In my late 40s, the rage and terror of my wounded inner child (affected by childhood trauma and my repression of my true feelings) exploded in a violent crime. I went to prison.

After 20 years of recovery from my criminal and addictive survival personality, mental illness, and criminal acting out, I realize that I spent my first 45 years trying to change the world without validating and healing my wounded soul. Looking back I see how my wound was a gift — the gift of motivating me to take my own path in life and not settle for mindless conformity. What I’m trying to say is that celebrating our woundedness as sensitive souls can be a way of deepening beloved community and preventing younger sensitive souls from exploding, like I did. I feel validation of my worth and integrity as a sensitive

soul trying to learn to live my ideals and validation of the inner and outer work required to accomplish them that could have gone a long way toward preventing me from living totally “in my head,” as I used to do.

The spiritual journey is counter-cultural in today’s world, yet, I believe, it is our only solution to maintaining our health and sanity in spite of today’s world. Wounded souls and sensitive souls need a community where we can experience unconditional acceptance. This doesn’t mean I agree with everything everyone else in the community does, but it does mean that I don’t judge others, and rather seek to understand and accept that their ways of thinking, feeling, and behaving are meeting their needs at this time. I feel only at the level of unconditional acceptance can we

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motivate others by an example to grow. Self-righteousness and judgment only stop growth.

To me, unconditional acceptance is a relationship skill as well as a spiritual attitude. I have learned it in prison. In a communication class, I learned how to reflect others' emotions as well as the content of what they were saying. We were taught: reflect the emotion first, as in, "it appears that you are sad." The other person will agree or correct you right away. Once you have emotional rapport, then it is possible to discuss the content openly and creatively. Self-acceptance is also key. If I don't unconditionally accept myself as imperfect yet growing, I can't do this with others. Finally, loving boundaries are essential. My unconditionally accepting others is an attitude of validation toward them, not an invitation to hurt or walk all over me. The most loving way I have learned to set boundaries is with "I" statements, as in, "I feel uncomfortable when you talk down to me, please don't do that anymore." If it continues, it is essential to walk away when it happens again, to let the other person know you are serious. This, of course, presumes that the other person is mentally healthy and able to understand.

Introducing the "gift of a sensitized soul" into Unitarian Universalist worship and group thinking would, I feel, encourage deeper empathy and unconditional acceptance of each other within our communities. ■

Beyond the "End"

RICHARD

CLF member, incarcerated in NY

Do you believe in heaven?

Then there is no end.

Do you believe in hell?

Then there is no end.

Do you believe in spirit?

Then there is no end.

Will man destroy

what God has wrought?

Maybe.

You'd think we'd learn

That we don't really count

in the grand scheme of things.

The scheme put in place

millions of years ago,

the scheme that will end

millions of years from now.

Our place here and now is but an eye-blink,

but we are here.

We are all part of the scheme.

After all —

We helped create it

and what we do

between beginning and end

is entirely up to us.

Register for Fall Correspondence Courses

NAME _____

MAILING ADDRESS _____

Our Fall Correspondence Courses are open to all members. We will mail each lesson to you about a week apart. There are questions at the end of each lesson for your own reflection, and a final set of questions that you will mail back for review by CLF staff.

If you are an incarcerated member who has already registered for a course via the Worthy Now Newsletter, you don't need to register again. This form is primarily for free-world members.

Please select only one of the classes below, and mail this page back to us (CLF UU, 24 Farnsworth Street, Boston, MA 02210) to register. Deadline for registration is July 31, 2023 and course material will be mailed Fall 2023.

World Religions II: It is not necessary to have taken World Religions I. This class explores how different religions around the world answer the basic questions like: Who am I? What is the best way to live?

sign me up

☐

UU Bible Study: Studying the Christian scriptures can often feel confusing and overwhelming. This class takes a look at three major stories from the Hebrew and Christian texts and re-imagines them through the lens of Unitarian Universalism, deepening your understanding of the Christian text through your UU faith.

sign me up

☐

Justice on Earth: This course is based around the book Justice on Earth, which calls for a deeper understanding of our seventh UU Principle and invites and challenges us to think in a new way about congregational and personal commitment to the natural world.

sign me up

☐

FOR YOUR REFLECTION

In this section, we offer questions for reflection based on ideas explored in this issue. You may wish to explore it individually or as part of a group discussion. To submit your reflection for possible inclusion in a future issue of Quest, tear off your answer and mail it back to us using the envelope included in the middle of this issue, or mail a longer reflection separately.

How have you been held (or not held) through big transitions in your life, or in the wider world? What role has community played in those transitions?

If you would like us to be able to publish or share your writing in the future, remember to include "You have permission to edit and publish my words" somewhere on your submission.



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