

Transformation to New Life, Now and Beyond

Do Not Conform - Be Transformed

The Wisdom from the Past:

While change is inevitable and an essential development throughout the universe, there is something more we can do with change to enable positive creativity in our partnership with living. As Humans we are gifted with a conscious awareness of the past, present, and future. We, unlike most other species, learn from our past history and are able to contemplate and influence change for ourselves and the world. Sometimes the music and poetry of earlier hymns and spiritual songs help us to contemplate and consider our own words and actions as partners in changing today.

Open My Eyes, That I May See

Text: Clara H. Scott, 1841-1897 - Music: Clara H. Scott, 1841-1897

1. Open my eyes, that I may see glimpses of truth thou hast for me;
place in my hands the wonderful key that shall unclasp and set me free.
Silently now I wait for thee, ready, my God, thy will to see.
Open my eyes, illumine me, Spirit divine!
2. Open my ears, that I may hear voices of truth thou sendest clear;
and while the wavenotes fall on my ear, everything false will disappear.
Silently now I wait for thee, ready, my God, thy will to see.
Open my ears, illumine me, Spirit divine!
3. Open my mouth, and let me bear gladly the warm truth everywhere;
open my heart and let me prepare love with thy children thus to share.
Silently now I wait for thee, ready, my God, thy will to see.
Open my heart, illumine me, Spirit divine!

We have eyes to see, ears to listen and learn, and mouths with the gift of language to communicate what we see and hear to take our part in changing our world for the better. From my younger days I still remember the little statues of the "three monkeys" covering their eyes, ears, and mouths - "see no evil, hear no evil, and speak no evil". As the saying goes, we need to "wake up and smell the coffee" and use "glimpses of truth around us", hear the voices that sound a clear message of global care, and share in conversations about what we need to do to create appropriate change. There are lots of things that we need to see and hear that deserve our discussion, and actions requiring us to cooperate with nature to keep our world healthy and alive.

The fact that evolution - [(biology) the sequence of events involved in the evolutionary development of a species or taxonomic group of organisms] causes much of these developmental changes, we are becoming more aware of how our human desires and habits may cause damage and harm. When our actions become detrimental to natural selection we cause injury to that healthy transformation and effect the spirit of life on our planet. Over many years we have heard the quiet yet persistent illuminating message of our Creator's call to open our eyes, our ears, and our mouths to bear the warm truth of eternal life from the depths of our heart and soul.

If we go back to our Judaic roots and rehearse one of the most popular Psalms in scripture, Psalm 23 (GW), we are reminded of how gifted we are by our planet and the Holy Presence of that creation of love.

The Lord is my shepherd. I am never in need.
He makes me lie down in green pastures. He leads me beside peaceful waters.
He renews my soul.
He guides me along the paths of righteousness for the sake of his name.
Even though I walk through the dark valley of death, because you are with me, I fear no harm.

Your rod and your staff give me courage.
You prepare a banquet for me while my enemies watch.
You anoint my head with oil.
My cup overflows.
Certainly, goodness and mercy will stay close to me all the days of my life,
and I will remain in the Lord's house for days without end.

In Christian scripture there are some clear and dramatic words that might be good for us to consider as well. In Romans 12:2 (GW): "Don't become like the people of this world. Instead, change the way you think. Then you will always be able to determine what God really wants—what is good, pleasing, and perfect." The dictionary defines conform and transformed as follows:

conform - be similar, be in line with

transformed - given a completely different form or appearance

There may be times, in fact, when conforming is not all that bad. Most people are more comfortable when they "fit in" or conform. When we are "fitting in" to something that is helpful to us and others it might be considered appropriate to "fit in". But, when it brings comfort to us and possible harm to others, I personally would become uncomfortable by conforming. When you put this passage of Romans into context you will see what "the people of this world" were saying and doing. Even within the verse itself we can begin to understand by noting that the "change" here was to promote "what is good, pleasing, and perfect". It is the way a loving and compassionate God would want us to speak and act toward each other and everyone around us.

It seems clear to me that we are encouraged by scripture to be people who are transformed and who take responsibility for transforming situations that degrade and hurt people by changing them for the betterment of all. Another passage in Christian writings that may make this clear is Philippians 2:1-5 (GW): "So then, as Christians, do you have any encouragement? Do you have any comfort from love? Do you have any spiritual relationships? Do you have any sympathy and compassion? Then fill me with joy by having the same attitude and the same love, living in harmony, and keeping one purpose in mind. Don't act out of selfish ambition or be conceited. Instead, humbly think of others as being better than yourselves. Don't be concerned only about your own interests, but also be concerned about the interests of others. Have the same attitude that Christ Jesus had."

Jesus was born into this world as a Jew and grew up in Jewish communities where people were oppressed by a powerful Roman government. Roman gods ruled from the heavens and their Caesars ruled the world as Lords with their godly powers and influence. Even the Temple in Jerusalem was under Roman control and the threat of destruction which finally happened in 70 CE. Those that cooperated with Roman authority, including Jews like King Herod (a "Judiazed" Edomite, who converted to Judaism), the Pharisees and Sadducees (leaders of the Temple), merchants and land owners, were treated well and allowed to flourish along with the Gentile ruling classes. The population of Galilee was quite varied from the very wealthy craftsmen land owners to tenant farmers, day farm laborers, shepherds caring for flocks, etc. Most of the working population were very poor, owing rent money for land they farmed and were additionally forced to pay taxes needed to support and build the extravagant cities. It was tax collectors, like Matthew and Zacchaeus, who worked for the ruling class to get taxes from those who were struggling. Jesus lived among these people and witnessed daily the unfairness and disparity between the rich and the poor, showing these injustices that gave impetus to his mission to establish "the Kingdom of God" - a community where compassionate, love, and grace would rule.

It was frustrating and disturbing to Jesus, a Rabbi, that Jews in leadership were conforming to the common customs of Roman injustices. The Jewish Prophets of the ages were faithful in speaking out against such practices and constantly admonished the people of God to be caring for one another as well as the strangers among them. Like the Prophets, Jesus constantly spoke out calling for transformation and change lest the evils of injustice would corrupt their communities and bring devastation. Matthew 23:27 (GW): "How horrible it will be for you, experts in Moses' Teachings and Pharisees! You hypocrites! You are like whitewashed graves that look beautiful on the outside but inside are full of dead people's bones and every kind of impurity."

The Reality Of The Present:

When we look all around us in our universe and on our planet we consistently witness transformation with very little, if any, conformity. Even as we witness the evolution of humanity we notice transforming change. As time moves forward, like the expansion of the universe, transformation on earth is expanding more rapidly as well. In the last century alone we have witnessed increasing change in every aspect of our existence. In comparison to previous centuries, especially in the last hundred years of the 20th century, there were an increasing number of major transformations by inventions and discoveries that have increased the speed of change among people on earth. Holding on to the "old" ways is less viable than it ever was previously.

As pointed out, conformity must pass away, and behold everything is being transformed; this is the reality of our present age and will probably continue for the future. One example of this truth may be seen in transportation. When humans began their great feat of walking upright, it brought about a mobility that enhanced their existence. For centuries people walked everywhere they went. It was the way they left Africa and began to move out to inhabit the earth. As time went on they made progress by making boats to span the waters and invented the wheel attached to carts to carry their loads. With the creation of tools, fire, domesticating animals, and other implements, they were able to settle on the land for a while and curtail a nomadic lifestyle. As people migrated further and further from Africa their creativity enabled them to find new ways to live together in a variety of geography and climates.

The ingenuity of our ancestors was remarkable in so many ways as they moved from their pasts to new places and new ways of expanding their lives. The further they moved outward they also formed different languages, customs, clothing, skin color and much more to cope with their new and changing circumstances. Humanity had to change, adapting to their changing environments by transforming their habits to survive and flourish. After many centuries there were human beings over almost every land mass on the earth. As people became more civilized they organized into new ways of thinking and acting according to the needs and understanding of who they were and how they could manage their new communities. For many centuries, because of distance and lack of communication, most communities had little, if any, awareness of one another nor how different they had become.

So what about these modern times that are suddenly very different because our world has become smaller through communications and travel? With the growth of the Internet and increasing speeds of the Web we are able to know what happens instantly in most countries world-wide. This makes virtually everyone our neighbor, in fact, we probably know more about people farther away than we do about those who actually live next door. We do more and more shopping online via virtual stores and receive what we have purchased delivered to our door within a few days. Depending on how much you purchase shipping is free and may be returned if we do not like it or if clothing does not fit, etc. The ease of travel makes more and more people mobile with little or no restrictions to their local communities. Even though our families no longer live near us in local towns we are hardly prevented from visiting. The hardships come when illness strikes older parents who may live too far away for their children to care for them and look after them on a daily basis. Nursing homes are not places they wish to be and assisted living, facilities which give total extended care, are costly. Hardships like these may not be changed as rapidly as so many other advantages have already changed.

Given the many transformations that have affected our traditional lifestyles of the past and with the continuing transformations to come, it is becoming more and more difficult for people to stay conformed to previous customs. As we said in the opening of a previous article on change, change is not a choice, it is the way our universe and all of life functions. The world we live in is a place of life because being alive is constant change. Anyone who is against change is against life. Resistance to change is a primary cause of most of the ills and anxieties of people.

The greatest reality of our present time is becoming accustomed to change and to learn how to make appropriate transitions to a better day and a brighter tomorrow for all people. It is time for everyone to become engaged as leaders and to engage in the essentials of what good leadership requires. Too many leaders today act like the leaders of Rome in Jesus' day who catered to the rich and oppressed the poor. Too many of our cities and communities resemble the great divide between the few who are very rich and the many who are extremely poor. Governments now reflect the same power of privilege that controlled Rome and burdened the majority with oppression and despair. We need a transformation today wherein leaders aspire to be like Jesus,

Mahatma Gandhi, Martin Luther King, Jr., and Nelson Mandela, persons of inspiration in their leadership struggles to achieve equal rights for all people. Here is an acronym that may help you understand what I mean by leadership: LEADERSHIP – [Learning Enthusiastically Appreciating Diversity Encouraging Relationship Sharing Hospitality Inspiring People]

To read a more complete article, visit: <http://janddhealth.homestead.com/LeadershipIntro.pdf>

The Hope Of The Future:

I like acronyms and this is another one of mine for HOPE: (Habitually Open to Progressive Exploration). What in fact does the future hold for life on this planet? Will we eventually move to other planets that are not yet discovered? There is no way that we can know our future, only hope for a better future. Here are three words that may give us the ability to HOPE, to form habits, be open, and progressive in exploring the future.

TIME:

Time is on your side, it is a gift to enable you but not to control you. I will begin by sharing a quote from "All About Science" (the full article may be found following the quote):

"Back in the late '60s and early '70s, when men first walked upon the moon, "three British astrophysicists, Steven Hawking, George Ellis, and Roger Penrose turned their attention to the Theory of Relativity and its implications regarding our notions of time. In 1968 and 1970, they published papers in which they extended Einstein's Theory of General Relativity to include measurements of time and space. According to their calculations, time and space had a finite beginning that corresponded to the origin of matter and energy." The singularity didn't appear in space; rather, space began inside of the singularity. Prior to the singularity, nothing existed, not space, time, matter, or energy - nothing. So where and in what did the singularity appear if not in space? We don't know. We don't know where it came from, why it's here, or even where it is. All we really know is that we are inside of it and at one time it didn't exist and neither did we." (<http://www.big-bang-theory.com>)

Keeping track of time is something that almost all humans do and that many very old societies have been creative in inventing systems to keep track of time. About six thousand years ago, when people began to settle into communities, they developed the need for something more than simply day or night. As life together advanced, a variety of interesting methods of timekeeping, from basic sundials to atomic clocks, have been invented. Very few people today are without clocks in their homes and a variety of portable personal devices to keep track of where they need to be and what must be done at certain times. For a more complete discussion of this evolution of timekeeping you might wish to go here:

<http://dsc.discovery.com/tv-shows/curiosity/topics/10-methods-measuring-time.htm>

Sayings about Time:

- "You may delay, but time will not" - Benjamin Franklin
- "Time is money" - Benjamin Franklin
- "Yesterday's the past, tomorrow's the future, but today is a gift. That's why it's called the present" - Bill Keane
- "Waste your money and you're only out of money, but waste your time and you've lost a part of your life" - Michael LeBoeuf
- "In all our deeds, the proper value and respect for time determines success or failure" - Malcolm X
- "It is strange that the years teach us patience; that the shorter our time, the greater our capacity for waiting" - Elizabeth Taylor
- "Time changes everything except something within us which is always surprised by change" - Thomas Hardy
- "Until you value yourself, you won't value your time. Until you value your time, you will not do anything with it" - M. Scott Peck

Time is one of the gifts we have that is equal and fair to everyone. No one has more time than twenty four hours each day. As the sayings suggest, time is something that we should treasure and use wisely because it is what we do with our time that counts. There is a particular and familiar statement about time in Hebrew Scripture, Ecclesiastes 3:1-3 (GW): "Everything has its own time, and there is a specific time for every activity under heaven: a time to be born and a time to die, a time to plant and a time to pull out what was planted, a time to kill and a time to heal, a time to tear down and a time to build up." In Christian Scripture we are told,

"Listen, now is God's acceptable time! Now is the day of salvation!". Whether we consider sayings from others that have been saved or we turn to Scripture and other volumes, the good use of our time is very important. 2 Corinthians 6:2 (GW)

Time always moves forward and never backward. If this is true shouldn't moving forward, transformation, be the best use of our time? Would there be any useful purpose in simply conforming, trying to remain the same? This is why I have written this paper, "Don't Conform - Be Transformed", to help everyone make the best use of their time.

EDUCATION:

Education is what we should be doing all our lives; it is not a stage in life but an on-going advantage. Too many people who have completed their formal education, Grade school, High school, College and more, forget the importance of "continuing education" - absolutely vital in keeping up with changes because change happens faster as time goes on. Since we know that the universe is expanding we will need to "expand" our knowledge and understanding if we wish to keep up with the world in which we live.

The Value of Education

"Investing in education is the single most effective means of reducing poverty. Girls and boys who learn to read, write, and count will provide a better future for their families and countries. With improved education, many other areas of life are positively affected. In short, education has the power to make the world a better place."

To understand how and to what extent education effects society please go to this article and click on the various links included: <http://www.globalpartnership.org/who-we-are/the-value-of-education/>

The Role of Education Quality in Economic Growth by Eric A. Hanushek and Ludger Wößmann:

"The importance of education is emphasized by society. However, the role of improved schooling, a central part of most development strategies, has become controversial because expansion of school attainment has not guaranteed improved economic conditions. This paper reviews the role of education in promoting economic well-being, with a particular focus on the role of educational quality. It concludes that there is strong evidence that the cognitive skills of the population – rather than mere school attainment – are powerfully related to individual earnings, to the distribution of income, and to economic growth. New empirical results show the importance of both minimal and high level skills, the complementarity of skills and the quality of economic institutions, and the robustness of the relationship between skills and growth. International comparisons incorporating expanded data on cognitive skills reveal much larger skill deficits in developing countries than generally derived from just school enrollment and attainment. The magnitude of change needed makes clear that closing the economic gap with developed countries will require major structural changes in schooling institutions." (<http://www.academicroom.com/topics/importance-of-education>)

As I stated in this paper earlier, HOPE (Habitually Open to Progressive Exploration) is essential for every person throughout their lives. Being open and continuing to learn and grow is one of the basic secrets to a good life. Education is accomplished by opening our Eyes, opening our Ears, and opening our Hearts and by using our intelligence to renew our minds constantly.

PRAYER (Perusing Reasonable Alternatives Yet Expecting Resolve)

Prayer is often equated with breathing because it is a primary essential to persons who wish to be spiritual. It is important to regularly take the time to "breath in" as many of the wholesome nuances that our universe has to offer - "the heavens declare the wonder of God". Prayer is often a mystical experience when it happens without the use of words by opening our eyes, ears, and hearts. As I suggest in my acronym, prayer is a reasonable perusing of all of the varieties of experience we can have to become all we are meant to be. It is this breathing of expectation that oxygenates our resolve toward the necessary changes we must adopt for health and well-being.

As I was growing up as a conservative Christian I often heard that "prayer changes things". My prayers were most often petitions that expressed what I thought were my needs and desires. Even though I heard that God would supply all my needs, I assumed that it was important to name them for God. As I grew in my spiritual understanding of that Holy Presence in my spirit, I began to realize that prayer was not meant to change things as much as it was to change me. Then, in prayer I might be empowered to change things - prayer changes people and people then change things. This perspective and understanding moved me to help bring appropriate changes in the world much like the Prayer of St. Francis - "Lord, make me an instrument of Thy peace". Prayer became important not just for me and my life but for the whole of my interdependence with others and the world. Another two of my acronyms may help elucidate my point: LAW - (Life Awareness Works) and LIFE - (Living Into Future Environments)

There is a broadening aspect of prayer that became the extension of a simple statement in scripture, "Where two or three are gathered I am in the midst". As I studied science, Quantum Physics in particular, I became aware of a much broader scope of influence to what may often be called prayer. The power of our thoughts are sometimes neglected until we become more aware and think more broadly. Here is an opportunity to witness for yourself what Science says about the "Power of Thought":

http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=P3sLIE_iBSs&feature=youtube_gdata_player

Prayer, while it is an active part of many Faiths, is not fully understood regarding its many and enormous possibilities. If this video is presenting a multitude of new ideas for you then perhaps you should view it several times to take it all in. Science offers more than platitudes and substantiates its presentation on experiments that can demonstrate and support its conclusions. Many people think that science and faith are in opposition to one another but this is not true. Prayer, in this case, is supported by science even though it may take away some of the erroneous notions that some have attributed to prayer. As you can see, our thoughts are a vital and important factor in our being transformed.

CONCLUDING THOUGHTS:

"Energy Flows Where Attention Goes" - (Unknown) This was noted in the science film above and it helps me summarize the theme of this paper - "Don't Conform - Be Transformed". Being transformed is so important for everyone to remain comfortable in life because all of life is being transformed and we need to flow with that current of change. Resistance is caused by the act of "conforming", trying to keep everything the way it was, or go back to the way we think it was, the way we might like it to have always been. Everything in our universe is constantly changing, moving and growing and continually being transformed and renewed.

I was born in a large Christian family with multiple ways of expressing faith, so I am familiar with more than one outlook on life as a Christian. To help me summarize what I observed and experienced in our family, as well as others around us, this verse from 2 Corinthians 5:17 (GW) might help: "Whoever is a believer in Christ is a new creation. The old way of living has disappeared. A new way of living has come into existence." My experience is similar; as a follower of Jesus I leave my past behind and focus on a new way of living as I move forward in life. With the wisdom of the past and the reality of the present I am able to follow this advice from Romans 12:2 (GW): "Don't become like the people of this world. Instead, change the way you think. Then you will always be able to determine what God really wants—what is good, pleasing, and perfect." I have the freedom to let go of the past, not conform, and be continually transformed by the gifts of the present and future. With hope in that future and the gifts of time, education, and prayer, I find life most fulfilling and exciting. My life is certainly not perfect but it can be described as perfectly wonderful.

Here is a modern translation of a very old Christian prayer for closing,

May the caring peace of God that goes beyond human comprehension, declare God's love for you in your heart and mind as we see it in Jesus the Christ; and may the blessing of God, loving Creator, gracious Liberator, and life giving Spirit keep you steadfast now and always. Amen.