

Change: A Noun, A Verb, A Fear

Last month when we did the ABC's of Spiritual Practice I chuckled as some people apprehensively guessed that Change was the C. No one seemed much happier to find it was Commitment, yet it is amusing how reluctantly we examine our relationship with change.

From grammar, waaaaaay back in school, you may recall that a noun is a thing or a person or a place. When I think of change as a noun, honestly, the first thing I think of is the weight of coins in my purse. I know many people find this change annoying. And the idea that you give a clerk a \$20 bill and get two quarters back seems disheartening. We forget that we got something in the exchange and so we tend to look at getting change back as a loss or diminishment of what we had. And somehow, that disappointment can carry over when change as a noun is naming the activity that is change.

A verb is an action or state of being. When I describe the concept of God as the Allness of the Isness—Allness is the noun and Isness is the verb. Change as a verb is *to make or become different*. Oh dear! **Different**. That is a word like “interesting”, it can move in a lot of directions. One of the ironies for me about change is its constant movement. Even when we think nothing is changing, change is happening. Under the surface in winter—beyond our conscious awareness in the Universe. We are steady as she goes, not preparing for any change and then Wilma dies and the Chiefs win the Super Bowl. No one wants someone we care about to leave; and certainly the 49'ers didn't want the Chiefs to win the Super Bowl. And yet, change continues. In the story we often tell at memorial services, we speak about a vessel sailing from one shore until it is out of sight and then it breaks into view at the other shore. If we believe our Unity principle we know that there is a shining energy we used to call Wilma dancing in the ethers. I personally appreciate that there were many people ecstatic at the Chiefs win for the first time in 50 years. ***The story we tell about change really depends on our perspective.***

And here is one of the coolest things about perspective—we can **change** it! Standing in a shadow it feels cold and looks dark. Moving a few feet might put us in the warmth of sunshine and light. Which brings us to the final word in our title today, Fear. When someone says “Things will change,” we wait for the other shoe to drop. Change how? What is going to happen? Last Monday on All Rise I learned that “Catastrophizing” is a word! Imagining a catastrophe is waiting to unfold in the next moment is often where our minds go when we hear the word change.

Change is really a neutral word. To become different means different, not better and not worse, different. Change throws us into our duality thinking. Ego springs into defense mode to protect us. The lizard brain is on high alert for danger. How do we shift back into a neutral zone?

Remember when I said the story we tell about change depends on our perspective and we have the power to change our perspective? I said that a few minutes ago. Did you forget already? When you hear the word change or enter into a discussion that means change, stop and take a breath. Before your thoughts drag you into the pit of catastrophizing, follow your breath into the center of your being. Move your conscious awareness into the realm of possibilities. Connect with the mystery of pure potential in our spiritual awareness. If **fear** is our human response, **curiosity** is our *spiritual response*.

Many of us labor under the illusion that change we initiate is under our control, so we are ok with change as long as we get to control it. How many of us think that—for a minute or two? How many of us have initiated a change and discovered it unfolded in a totally different way than we anticipated? AND, how many of us have had change thrust upon us, which we resisted, only to discover that change also unfolded in a totally different way than we anticipated? What do you think might happen if we responded to change with a sense of curiosity? What if we heard, “Things will change” and moved to the place of the mystery of pure potential?

In 2001, when I embarked on my spiritual path full time, “Who Moved My Cheese” was a popular organizational culture book. Our hospital handed out books trying to help people move beyond the smaller, close-knit organization we had always been. The people who worked in the Legal office were not amused. One person said, “I know who moved my cheese and I want her to put it back!” A frequently quoted scripture in Unity is Romans 12:2, “*Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your minds, so that you may discern what is the will of God—what is good and acceptable and perfect.*” “Renewing” means change. We long for transformation that does not involve change but it doesn’t work that way, does it?

Nature has various ways to renew an area. Floods, fires, hurricanes, and tornadoes. Our general response is, “No thank you Mother Nature.” We find this system of renewal devastating. Which may be why the Chinese character for Crisis is a combination of Danger and Opportunity.

Most of us have some history with changes. Many of us may feel that real changes in our lives have been precipitated by events like floods and fires—in other words, some sort of disaster. We joke in Unity about the cosmic 2 by 4 but in the midst of that sort of change it hardly seems like a joke. When we quietly ponder if we would have moved out of our comfort zone without that kind of painful prompt, we might rationalize that maybe we would have but our track record of leaving the comfort zone voluntarily isn't that great. We explored the idea of intentionally moving beyond our comfort zone when we studied Dare to Lead. Even in that situation we theorize we would have some control; we could choose how far out of our comfort zone we'd go. In fact, it doesn't always work that way. One of the biggest changes in my life I chose. I became a parent. I longed for it. I could not have imagined the **intense** vulnerability that comes with having a part of your heart and soul walking around outside your body, exposed to all the dangers and snares of life, and it is all beyond your control. Even knowing the sometimes, painful vulnerability today, I would choose the change of parenthood again. Change always has more than one facet. It always has more than one view. It always has more than one perspective.

So I am inviting you to join me in writing a story about renewal and change. On April 30th I am choosing a new path. I'm going to step away from active church ministry and choose retirement. I honestly have no idea what that will look like. Although my mobility is an annoying challenge, there is no one big thing driving this change. I'm not fired. There is no scandal. I'm not even leaving you for another church. It is just change. It feels like time for me and for ULV. I know some of you think the right time for me to leave was maybe five years ago and for some of you, it will never be the right time. So here we are together, facing change.

You are my only ministry as senior minister so I don't know have a history with that. But I invite you to join me in exploring this process together. In the Methodist church they require ministers to change churches every 7 years so everyone gets the hang of leavings. Some of you who are longtime members of ULV may not have had the **best** experience with departing ministers so I really hope we can go into this with **curiosity** and keep re-centering in the mystery of infinite potential in **this** experience. I hope we can continue to honor our love and respect for one another, desiring the best for each other even as we set off in new, different directions. I commit to honoring the feelings of fear and sadness and even anger that may arise in all of us.

Healthy boundaries indicate that a minister should be completely separate from the ministry for at least a year. When I became ordained, I continued to serve in my home church as YFM Director, guest speaker and liaison with the prayer chaplains. I left my home church in Kansas City after 21 years with a new associate coming and knowing people would still look to me as their leader. I did not maintain contact with church people as they worked out their new relationships. I will probably return to friends and family in Kansas City in retirement and won't be a part of communications here. It is healthy and the separation doesn't have to be forever.

Relationships will have changed in KC when I try to return because I've spent 11 years here missing weddings and funerals and births in KC. Instead I have committed to being a part of the weddings and funerals and births here in Unity of Lehigh Valley. To leave Kansas City is still a change and a choice I would make. How that unfolds is just a part of the sacrifice and blessing that is ministry outside the area of your home base. It is not something we talk about in seminary—it is something you learn in practice. Ministry with healthy boundaries is this mysterious balance of being a part of community with your whole heart and yet knowing, at some point, you will go and the community will stay. It is a level of intimacy without dependency. It is a web of subtle things you don't really think too much about until you begin to untangle the web.

We will have a couple months to work through taking our leave. Next week, while I am serving on the board of Unity World Headquarter, Charles Lee will be here and talk about Co-Creating! That last Sunday in February I want to talk a little about Authentic and Brave and people who inspire us to be our best selves. Then in March I'll be using Robert Brumet's book, *Finding Yourself In Transition*. It is still one of the best books on the subject. I will be gone one Sunday in March because months ago I committed to co-facilitate a retreat at Kirkridge. Then in April we begin with Palm Sunday, then Easter Sunday, maybe Earth Day and then we'll see how we want to bring this chapter to closure. Our Sundays will be interactive. As we have forged new ways of being together, I pray we will write a truly wonderful story about change over the next couple months. I expect us to each feel different feelings about sadness, expectancy and pain. Old wounds we might each have about painful good-byes may resurface. I invite us to keep breathing. I invite us to stay in the process. It might be easy at this point to simply say to yourself, "Well, I'll just stop coming until we see who shows up next."

While that may **seem easy**, you lose the opportunity to experience the process of change which might just be useful in other areas of your life. Remember, spiritual community is our relationship laboratory. We keep using the lessons we learn and the skills we develop in our everyday life, not just on Sunday. The other aspect that is **not easy** is how it impacts the community as a whole to lose those who participate and contribute to the prayerful energy that **is** our light shining in the world.

Take a breath. We're writing a change story and we choose our perspective. We are creating our experience. In our humanity, change is constant. As we expand the expression of our divinity, change is constant. Let us choose a perspective that allows us to transition into an amazing new chapter in the ministry of ULV. Namaste.