

The Path of Change

A Reflection from Rev. Steven

We have so little faith in the ebb and flow of life, of love, of relationships. We leap at the flow of the tide and resist in terror its ebb. We are afraid that it will never return. We insist on permanency, on duration, on continuity; when the only continuity possible, in life as in love, is in growth, in fluidity... Intermittency—an impossible lesson for human beings to learn. How can one learn to live through the ebb-tides of one's existence? How can one learn to take the trough of the wave?... Perhaps this is the most important thing: simply the memory that each cycle of the tide is valid; each cycle of the wave is valid.... One must accept the security of ebb and flow, of intermittency.

—Anne Morrow Lindbergh

The Soul Matters theme for November is “The Path of Change”. Have you ever gotten out of bed one morning and said: “Gee, my life is too static and boring. I think I'll make a bunch of changes just for the fun of it.” Probably not, because while change is both inevitable and necessary for our growth, it is also usually uncomfortable. Human beings are creatures of habit. We create routines and seek feelings of familiarity because predictability creates safety and security. When we know what to expect, we can move through our lives without the adrenaline pumping and ourselves on high alert, looking for danger around every corner.

But paradoxically, routines came about because of change, of the need to adapt to a situation. William Bridges writes: “The very things that we now wish we could hold onto and keep safe from change were themselves originally produced by changes. And many of these changes, in their day, looked just as daunting as any in the present do. No matter how solid and comfortable and necessary the status quo feels today, it was once new, untried and uncomfortable.” It's not only the “negative” changes we fear, such as being laid off or facing a health crisis. Even the most exciting changes, the ones we seek out and initiate ourselves, are sometimes hard to lean into. The typical reaction to change is to resist it, even when it's a good change. Any kind of change is hard because it involves the unknown. Even with as much information as possible, we can't predict everything in a new situation and that's scary.

But without change, there would be no discoveries or progress. Humankind would grow stagnant. In "The Little Book on Meaning", author Laura Fortgang refers to life as a mystery and says that life's ambiguity is a gift- and necessary for us to thrive. As she says, "although it's understandable that we want order, predictability and answers to our questions, but we would come to a halt if everything were linear and predictable". She goes on to describe life as a continuous weaving between known and unknown and invites us to embrace living in the gap between the two because it is where creativity, growth and evolution occur.

There is another aspect of change that I've only recently begun to understand. Change also means loss. Author Melinda Seley, a counselor, writes that: "Even when change is due to the best of circumstances, it requires us to lose something – whether it be a routine, a relationship, familiarity, a place that holds memories, convenience, a reputation, a known experience." Seley goes on to say that any loss we experience is a reason to grieve and then she offers a process for grieving that includes naming the loss, honoring the feelings, including pain, and making space for them, and recognizing that grief will not be a linear or predictable process. She concludes her article by saying: "If change is loss and loss requires grief...it logically follows that change requires grief. Even changes that are bringing about something good have some element of loss intertwined with them when we stop to fully consider it. How might it be helpful for you to name change as loss and grieve that loss today?"

As Unitarian Universalists, we are heirs to a tradition that has always embraced change. When asked where Universalists stand, Lewis Beals Fisher responded: "We do not stand at all; we move." We believe that revelation is not sealed but ever unfolding and that discovering new Truth is always possible. Our fourth principle, a free and responsible search for truth and meaning, affirms the truth of growth and change in our spiritual lives as we discover new ideas and new wisdom. Even our denominational by-laws recognize the reality that our faith needs to change to respond to a changing world and ever unfolding truth. In a recent article in the weekly e-news, Kathy Kerns wrote: "The Article II Study Commission has been meeting to discuss whether to edit the principles, and they have in fact proposed a very large change that would remove the current sources and principles and replace it with completely new language. You can find the proposed wording, as well as links to zoom feedback sessions, at this link: <https://www.uua.org/uuagovernance/committees/article-ii-study-commission/blog/draft-feedback>"

Here are some questions for reflection:

How do you know when you need to make a change in your life?

How do you find your way in times of change? How do you embrace or resist living in the space between known and unknown, that gap where creativity, growth and evolution can occur?

How do you make time and space for the grief that comes with the losses that change brings?

How does your spiritual life help you find your way through change?

Journeying with you in our covenant of belonging, mutual love, and respect,

Rev. Steven