



The Mystic Messenger

March • April • May

Reflecting on Risk, Transformation, and Embodiment

Transformation

Rev. Heather Janules

When I think of “transformation,” I cannot help but remember a conversation I once had with a hospital nurse. It was a Tuesday night and I was making my rounds as the on-call chaplain resident as part of my training for ministry.

Visiting the hospice floor, I found the ward quiet as there were few patients receiving care that night. As both the on-call nurse and I had some spare time, we shared in small talk. She told me about where she grew up and how long she had worked at the hospital. “I just started on this unit,” she said. When I asked her where she had worked before, her answer surprised me: “labor and delivery.” With this new assignment, the nurse transitioned from providing care at the very beginning of life to providing care at the end. I said, in response, “This must be a very different experience.”



The nurse paused for a moment and replied, with clarity, “Actually, it is quite similar. In labor and delivery, whenever we help a baby enter the world, this means the death of the fetus.” While my spiritual beliefs recognize life and death as closely entwined, I hadn’t before thought of the arrival of a newborn child in this way.

I have come to see this paradox as that which dwells at the heart of transformation, the intimacy of endings and beginnings. As the seasons transform from winter to spring, one chapter of the year dies and another is born. For those of us who have been blessed to live through many seasons, each spring

we know that winter remains with us as another transformation in the future.

But some transformations are not as familiar and predictable. I think of this when I meet with couples planning to

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Transformation, continued

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marry. There is always conversation about the ceremony and their relationship but also about their broader circles of relationship - with parents, extended family and close friends. Sometimes these connections are harmonious and sometimes they are painful. An engagement can create great anxiety, with the possibility of "happily ever after" cloaked in uncertainty as a result.

One might think that the eventual wedding ceremony is the beginning of the transformation - partners becoming spouses - but wise colleagues have taught me that the true transformation takes place before the ceremony, as each person in the couple's web of connection prepares for the new reality that will be reflected in the couple's union.

Perhaps, though, our future transformations are already known; perhaps there is no other path to follow. Last year, as we prepared for our Service of Installation, we chose butterflies as a theme, a symbol of

growth and change. I remember learning in one of our conversations before the ceremony that as a butterfly transforms from egg to caterpillar to pupa to butterfly, the organism contains the structures of each stage at all times. It is as if the butterfly is born with its complete roadmap, the course of its transformations already laid out.

I don't know if I believe enough in fate to say that this is true for us as well, that our future is already known as soon as we enter the world. But I do believe that part of our spiritual work is to make peace with the reality of transformation as change is our only given.

I remember a dear friend, observing that she doesn't know what happens after death but she has learned to trust life so much she trusts



The Question Mark Butterfly by Bob Janules

death as well. If birth is the death of a fetus then death must be some kind of birth. Perhaps just the beginning of the deceased's legacy but existing in a new form of existence all the same.

How have you transformed? How are you now transforming? Where do you see the miracle of transformation around you? I look forward to the birth of spring and the death of winter, just as I anticipated the light coming after the winter solstice. May our next season be one of beauty as it will be, we know, also a time of change.



Seasonal changes at WUS. Fall and Winter photos by Emily Soule. Spring photo unknown.



Embodiment

Deborah Morgan Bennett

As you read this, take a moment to notice your body. Does it feel warm or cool? Are you sitting or standing? Are your feet engaged or relaxed – can you wiggle your toes or are your shoes too tight? Are your legs in a comfortable position or feeling cramped? Does your backside feel sore from sitting? How is your back feeling? Are the muscles in your abdomen engaged causing you to sit up straight or are they slacked creating a curve to your lower back? When you take your next breath in, does your chest expand? Does your entire rib cage expand? What about your shoulders? If you took a deep breath right now and pulled them up toward your ears and then released them would they feel more relaxed? If you look from side to side turning your head is one side more comfortable than the other? What are your hands doing? How does it feel to take a moment to stretch them out and then allow them to rest? Are you smiling or frowning? If you wiggled your jaw would you notice any tension that you had been holding there? Are you straining to read the page or are your eyes comfortable? When was the last time you noticed the top of your head?

If you followed along with the preceding paragraph connecting with various parts of your body, notice how different you feel right now from when you started reading. If it felt good to bring

awareness to your body, you may want to extend that feeling by standing up and shaking out your arms, moving your legs, and taking a deep breath.

Welcome to your body.

On the other hand, it may not have felt good to bring awareness to your body. Gone are the days when the majority of people in this country have jobs or spend most of their day aware of having a body. Instead, many of us spend many hours a day focused on a screen or somehow otherwise engaged with our brains but not necessarily with the lower 90% of our physical selves. When we do bring awareness to our legs or back we may notice soreness or pain



or a few extra pounds that quite frankly are uncomfortable!

And yet our bodies are not givers of pleasure and pain, they play the role of magnificent mirror to all that lays inside and a magnificent book for all outside of us to read.

In her book, “Presence: Bringing your Boldest Self to Your Biggest Challenges,” Amy Cuddy, professor at Harvard Business School speaks about how our body’s posture not only influences how others perceive us but how it also influences our attitude about ourselves and the life situations we face. It’s a two-way street. If we feel good about ourselves, we tend to stand taller and straighter AND if we stand taller and straighter we tend to feel more confident she theorizes. Cuddy set out to do experiments to test how our nonverbal stances govern how we think and feel about ourselves and to see whether, by changing our posture, we can influence our emotions. If you’d like to watch her Ted Talk about her research here is a link <https://youtu.be/Ks-Mh1QhMc>

Luckily, since you have a body, you can do your own experiment right now: first, notice how you are feeling. Now, notice the position of your body. Are there any connections? What happens if you adjust your posture? In her book Cuddy recommends standing in front of a mirror in the “Wonder Woman” pose – remember her? Legs planted firmly in the ground, arms and hands up

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Embodiment, Continued

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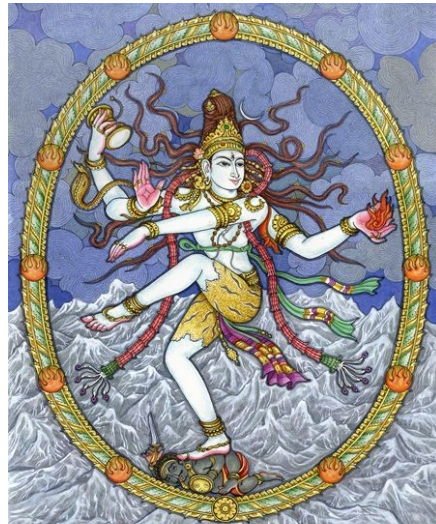
in a star fish kind of position. She says her studies show that if you stand like that for a few minutes that your self-confidence significantly increases. What do you find?

While Cuddy's social science studies in this area are relatively new, it is nothing new to think of how the posture of the body speaks worlds about what lies within. Think of all the iconic statues you may know. Whether a proud military officer sitting tall upon a horse both with head raised high or an image of the Virgin Mary with arms compassionately held open and eyes humbly gazing down, we identify not only specific people with a body posture, but personality and values-based traits.

The Hindu tradition is one that is filled with statuary and images of Gods and Goddess. These Gods and Goddesses are said to be the embodiment of specific energies. Ganesh, the elephant headed deity who holds, among other things, an axe for removing obstacles is known as the deity of new beginnings. Shiva Nataraja dances inside a ring of fire symbolizing the courage of transformation. The goddess Lakshmi which is the embodiment of abundance is shown manifested with a body and four arms and hands, each one open to offer one of the four goals of life: moral actions, pleasure, security and liberation. If this icon was represented as a person huddled in a corner, arms crossed and an angry countenance I



Ganesh



Shiva Nataraja



Lakshmi

doubt that anyone would think of abundance when they viewed her.

So here is an interesting question: If your body were to turn to stone in its current position, what message would it represent? Are you an icon of the open hearted, the warrior, the compassionate mother or the moral crusader? What emotions would be evoked as others stared at your form? What are you the embodiment of? What would you like to be the embodiment of?

By becoming aware of how our bodies are an expression of our souls we can begin to have a dialogue between the two. As we notice how our external posture both expresses and influences our internal selves we can begin to learn how to harness our body's power to change the world we live in.

I'll leave you with words from the great dancer and world music musician Gabriella Roth:

"The first creative task is to free the body to experience the power of being...Your body is the ground metaphor of your life, the expression of your existence. It is your Bible, your encyclopedia, your life story. Everything that happens to you is stored and reflected in your body. Your body knows; your body tells. The relationship of yourself to your body is indivisible, inescapable, unavoidable."



Dispatches From Washington D.C. and Boston: The Women's March ... And Beyond

Rebecca Kelley Morgan

We had a solid cohort of Winchester representatives at the March in Washington DC, as well as many more who remained local and took to the streets in Boston along with 180,000 others. Both marches were characterized by their size – beyond all projections and expectations of the organizers – and the many, many shades of pink hats, some of which were knit here in Winchester for marchers who wore their own hat or in absentia gave them to another marcher. Hundreds of thousands engaged in the peaceful expression of our first amendment rights and as a result there were no confrontations with counter protestors, or interference with or by policing forces.

I was present in Washington and, like everyone else, was lifted up by the numbers of people who showed up. Getting connected with other New Englanders was next to impossible in the mobs of people, but the celebratory mood of the day and the good will



Small Hats of Resistance: Sheila Rudolph-Correia, Sue Kiewra and friends in a knitting circle for the Women's March, January 2017.

of the women, men and transfolk who marched, made a very large group feel like a family. I made friends with women from Kentucky, Colorado, Georgia, California and Mexico as we stood and chatted, marched and paused during the 10 hour day. Unlike many others I spoke with later, I was close enough to hear all the speakers, and although they went on for a very, very, very long time (almost five hours)

the day was mild and dry and the energy was high. I knit during the day, and as I completed a hat, handed it off to a fellow marcher. One of our members, Sheila Rudolph-Correia did likewise in Boston.

At the end of the Washington March, the signs used in the demonstration were left lined up along the fence surrounding the White House. In Boston, a similar offering was left at the Statehouse and environs. The Boston signs were collected by students and professors from Northeastern University who are curating them electronically, so that the sentiments and energy of the day may live long past the cardboard slogans. My pick for the most Bostonian sign is "Lobstah rolls, not gendah roles" and the one that most captured the mood of the day all over the country, "When everything else

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Fritzie Nace and friends in front of the Capitol building in Washington, D.C.

We Are A Rainbow People

By Naomi King

Somos una gente del arco iris. We are a rainbow people. The rainbow is an arc of light brilliantly displaying all the colors of the visible spectrum, all the colors that combine to make the astounding beauty of our world, all the colors that combine to reflect the astounding diversity of human expression.

Nous sommes de peuples des d'arc-en-ciel. We are Red people who Respect others. We are Orange people who offer faith and kind treatment. We are Yellow people yearning for learning.

Somos una gente del arco iris. We are Green people who grow in our search for truth and meaning. We are Blue people who believe in what we are achieving. We are Indigo people insisting on freedom, love, and peace. We are Violet people, valuing the web that does not cease and we did not create.

Nous sommes de peuples des d'arc-en-ciel. Unitarian Universalism shows up refracted through thousands of different human expressions and experiences, through individuals living our promises, through covenanted communities, through our associations and our actions.

We are a rainbow people. Together, what we give heals and transforms our world. This is our covenant, our bridge of heaven, our dream and our reality. The flame of the chalice, lit around our world, is the source of light and the pot of gold at the end of that rainbow. The flame of that chalice is filled with the light we bring, and nurtured by our hopes and dreams. We know the rainbow begins with you and with me.

For, somos una gente del arco iris. Nous sommes de peuples des d'arc-en-ciel. We are a rainbow people. Let us grow the rainbow again today.



Lauri, Aidan and Rhea Clark got very creative with items from the costume trunk.



Elise Boudreau and Claire Fadness fanning themselves, fabulously.



Maggie and John Russell imagine a world where we listen to each other, Imagination Ball January 20, 2017



Sheila and Ivan Correia imagine airships!

Risk

Rebecca Kelley Morgan

In no particular order, I have been a sky-diver, a technical rock climber, a thru-hiker, a religious seeker, a world traveler and a jail bound activist.

When I tell stories of past adventures, many of the listeners shudder and offer some iteration of "I would never dare..." Oddly enough I did not consider any of these acts of daring, because I didn't perceive them that way. I knew what I was getting into, and sometimes it was harder and scarier than I expected, and sometimes it was easier, but I never felt that I had gone past any point of no return. The parachute canopy opened, I managed to hike out, and time in jail was finite.

Many years ago at an adventure educators training, our instructor talked about risk. We were able to opt out of any activity that felt too risky emotionally or physically, and several did at various points during the week. In our final debrief our instructor offered this fact, most accidents happen not on the high or low

ropes courses, but on the lawn, playing running games, the one place where no one opted out.

In that case, as with others, the perception of risk doesn't align with the reality of risk. We can decrease the likelihood of harm with safe practices, but there are documented risks in any number of activities. We can reduce our risk of dying in an automobile accident by exercising care and wearing seatbelts, although that doesn't eliminate the significant risks we are exposed to when we drive/ride in an automobile. Most of us don't break out into a cold sweat when we slide behind the wheel, thinking of everything that could go wrong, but a lot of people pale at the prospect of flying in a pressurized cabin thirty thousand feet above the earth, where the documented risk is lower.

Risk is what we perceive it to be. My tolerance for uncertainty and discomfort might be lower



Maggie and John Russell get the dance floor started at the Imagination Ball

or greater than yours, so my perceived risk will be lower or greater than yours, when we encounter the same opportunities or challenges. If you like air travel, then your risk is a statistic. If you fear flying, then your risk is much greater, because you perceive it to be so. If you fear being out of work due to an injury, or going to jail as a person of color, then your risk is greater than those of us who don't worry about losing a job after a skiing accident or being

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Local Band, Up, performing at the Imagination Ball

Dispatches from Washington D.C., continued

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fails, read the instructions: "We the People . . ."

Marches and rallies can be compared to religious revivals or music festivals. They are gatherings of like-minded souls, an opportunity to break out of the loneliness and isolation that many of us find in front of our screens, and to inspire and energize us for future work.

On the Thursday after the marches, we returned to Winchester Unitarian to reflect on our experiences, consider the ongoing changes in our political climate and share resources and ideas for "next steps" in our activist voices. Our activism does not and cannot begin and end with a single march or even a series of marches. While it is important to show up and make our

presence known with our bodies, it is equally important to apply economic, social and political pressure to officials and entities which would violate our constitution and co-opt our democracy. This is a time, when we are again regarding the potential discard of those things we value most. We cannot afford to stand by and watch, give in to despair or cynicism, or refuse to participate in this system because we demand perfection from it.

It is a bewildering and depressing time for those of us who reject exclusion and injustices of all kinds. But if we are constantly battling "against", riled up and outraged, we will exhaust ourselves in the effort of launching yet another anti- (fill in the blank) campaign that may not end in a "win". I take inspiration

and counsel from the members of the Standing Rock nation, only 300 strong, who galvanized an extraordinary measure of nationwide support in their protection of the waters of the Missouri River Watershed. They did not just stand in defiance of the DAPL construction and the militarized civilian police forces, but as protectors of the waters which give life to so many. Let us move forward as they do, with humor, passion and faith to protect all those things which we hold dear. Words matter and how we characterize ourselves shapes our actions. Let us call ourselves not "protestors", but rather, "protectors", standing firm for the rights and obligations which sustain us all, for justice, inclusion and equity, no exceptions.



Risk, continued

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treated badly by police because of our ethnicity. We may not perceive the level of risk others may face, but we should never make the mistake of assuming everyone else's risk is the same as our own in any given circumstance.

There are other risks not limited to the physical or active ones. It takes courage to disagree with someone whose opinion matters to you. Or to open up a soft vulnerable heart to someone whose censorship you fear, or expose your pain to a world that may be indiffer-

ent to it. I'm always surprised at the deeply personal disclosures that are posted to a thousand intimates on social media, or the secrets out of the past that are shared with mere acquaintances. Those remote relationships are perceived as less risky, because, I suspect, there is almost no relationship to risk.

Risk is a question of recognizing how much we have to lose. And for those of us who have enough privilege to choose to take risks, the most dangerous risk is that of being changed irrevocably when we allow ourselves to be touched by the world. Whether we take on a risk,

deliberately, or place ourselves in an environment where we are more likely to encounter difference and challenges, we risk being changed by those encounters. The bell cannot be un-rung, the seen cannot be unseen, and we either harden ourselves and turn away or open to the unknown and lean in. It's a tumultuous time and we are risking more than irrelevance by not attending to the world. Turn away? Or lean in? Only you know what that looks like. Only you know what you have to lose. But not one of us knows what we have to gain.



Invitation to A Congregational Conversation

Barbara Savage

On Saturday, April 1st, the Standing Committee invites you to an all-church discussion about our ministries, connections, and collaborations.

We have many ministries at the Winchester Unitarian Society: parish ministry, social action and outreach, lifespan religious education/growth and learning (including children, youth, adults),

music, fellowship, stewardship, pastoral care, membership, building and grounds, and teaching.

How do we, as a congregation, engage with those ministries? How can we work together to be more integrated, breaking down barriers to make our work more meaningful and effective? It is our hope that taking the time for a facilitated discussion will allow us to feel more inspired, connected and collaborative.

The discussion will run from 10 am - 2:30 pm, with a break for lunch. Hilary Allen, from the New England Region of the UUA, will facilitate, and the WUS program staff will be joining in the discussion as well. We hope many of you can attend.

Stay tuned for information about attending this important event.



Concert Series

Friday, March 17th, 2017 St. Patrick's Day Celebration

A special St. Patty's Day celebration with the legendary performer Robbie O'Connell. A native of Waterford, Ireland, he started performing at the age of thirteen. After touring with the Clancy Brothers, he released his first solo album in 1982, and he hasn't stopped since! Also featuring fiddler Rose Clancy.

Suggested Donation:

\$20 adults \$15 seniors \$5 students
Tickets at the door, open at 7:30.

These concerts are made possible by your generous contributions. Please consider becoming a concert series sponsor: Sponsors \$125—Forte Sponsors \$200—Fortissimo Sponsors \$300.

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Music Sunday: April 9

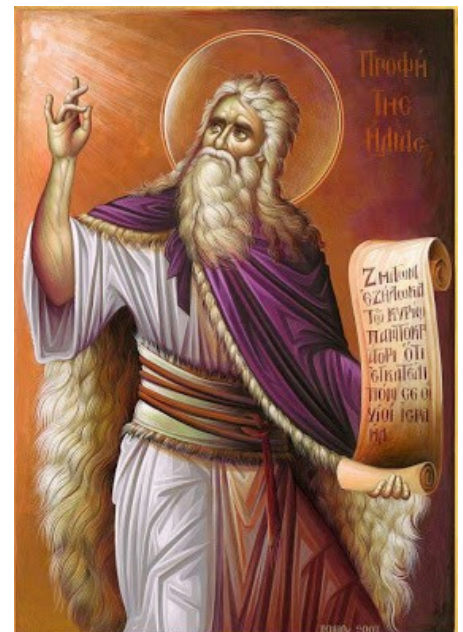
John Kramer

The choir and I are happily preparing for Music Sunday on April 9th. We will be joined by our soloists and a small orchestra, to perform excerpts from Felix Mendelssohn's masterpiece *Elijah*, an oratorio that narrates the story of the biblical prophet. Mendelssohn wrote this piece in the years 1845-46 and modeled it after the choral works of Bach and Handel. The music is glorious, full of drama, wonderful melodies, and enthralling harmonies.

The story of *Elijah* intersects with many of the themes we have been exploring this year. He heard the call to prophecy, took on that identity and the many risks associated with his call. Much of his work involves bringing the Israelites back to Yahweh, whom they have fallen away from. For this work he is persecuted and must take refuge in

the desert. In his final transformation he was taken up to heaven in a whirlwind.

The central drama of the story is the tension between the Israelites who have lost their way and the prophet, Elijah, who is called by God to lead them back to the right way.





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Calendar

March

- 4—Class Conversation
- 5—Budget Discussion
- 7—Hymn Sing
- 8—Soup and Conversation
- 12—Daylight Savings Time begins
- 12—Exploring Our Spiritual Journeys
- 15—Standing Committee Meeting
- 17—Music in the Sanctuary with Robbie O'Connell
- 17—19 UU BAYS Youth Retreat
- 19—Pledge Drive Thank-You Celebration
- 29—MHASI Book Read

April

- 1—Congregational Conversation
- 4—Hymn Sing
- 9—Music Sunday
- 10—Passover begins
- 12—Soup and Conversation
- 16—Easter Sunday
- 17—Public School Vacation Week
- 19—Standing Committee Meeting
- 23—Budget Forum
- 26—Budget Forum
- 30—Becoming (a UU) - Exploring Our Faith

May

- 2—Hymn Sing
- 10—Soup and Conversation
- 14—Mother's Day and Youth Sunday
- 16—MHASI Book Read
- 17—Standing Committee Meeting
- 21—Annual Meeting
- 29—Memorial Day