

Preparation for Becoming (Theme for April)

Becoming, coming into existence, coming to be, undergoing a change. The smallest act of becoming always implies undergoing a change. Change can sometimes be resisted or forestalled, but change is inevitable, for with every breath we take, we become something more or less than we were the instant before – a moment older, a moment closer to the very last breath.

In realizing that the act of becoming implies a finite length of time in which to become, a motivation is born, a motivation to guide our changes, to direct the course of our becoming, to write the end of our story. We become self-aware; we become self-directed.

How much of who we become is truly within our control and how much is based on nature and how much is a result of nurture, family influence, society, peers, and environment? According to Swiss psychologist Jean Piaget, each of us goes through a predictable pattern of becoming individuated, with full self-awareness occurring around school age. This pattern of development is the same for every healthy child, and until we become self-aware we are limited in our ability to determine our existence. Once we reach the stage of self-awareness, we can resist change or embrace change. Effectively, we have a larger say in our process of becoming.

Often the choices we make are influenced by experiences that leave an indelible imprint on the psyche, either through trauma or joy. But each adult ultimately has the ability to become something more than a childhood legacy. We choose the goals that matter, and we work to fulfill those goals by becoming the appropriate model. If we seek wealth, we become hard working, focused and sometimes unscrupulous. If we seek friendship, we become outgoing, generous, and forgiving. If we seek love, we become kind and compassionate. If we seek wisdom, we become studious, curious, and open-minded. What we become most often reflects the goals we set ourselves at an early age. Or perhaps the goals we set ourselves reflect what we were on the road to becoming.

The Anasazi Foundation, in *The Seven Paths: Changing One's Way of Walking in the World*, tells us “Life is a walking, a journey. So, if life upon Mother Earth is a journey, there are two ways to walk. We can choose to walk forward or we can choose to walk backward. Forward Walking choices are rewarded with consequences that light the way to peace, happiness, joy, comfort, knowledge, and wisdom. Backward Walking choices bring ... consequences of misery, despair, and darkness.”

As individuals we have some control over the process of becoming, though it is limited by circumstances such as societal expectations, opportunity, and chance. Can societies also take control of the process of becoming? The current situation in the United States suggests that what we become is more heavily influenced by outside forces than by a collective will to become something better. What can we, as compassionate individuals, do to assist our society to become more equitable? Can we prioritize the “becoming” of society, while we have only a finite time to become our best selves?

As you reflect on becoming, consider these quotes.

Only in childhood are we afforded the luxury of inhabiting our becoming, but once forced to figure out who we want to be in life, most of us are so anxious about planting that stake of being that we bury the alive, active process of our becoming. *Maria Popova*

We do not grow absolutely, chronologically. We grow sometimes in one dimension, and not in another, unevenly ... The past, present, and future mingle and pull us backward, forward, or fix us in the present. *Anais Nin*

You never change things by fighting the existing reality. To change something, build a new model that makes the existing model obsolete. *R. Buckminster Fuller*

They both listened silently to the water, which to them was not just water, but the voice of life, the voice of Being, the voice of perpetual Becoming. *Hermann Hesse, Siddhartha*

I will never know, neither will you, the life we didn't live
Filled with beauty and love and joyous perfection but not ours
We embrace our being when we accept the path to our becoming
Nalini Priyadarshni

You keep plugging away – that's the way social change takes place. That's the way every social change in history has taken place: by a lot of people, who nobody ever heard of, doing work.
Noam Chomsky

At fifteen I set my heart upon learning.
At thirty, I had planted my feet firm upon the ground.
At forty, I no longer suffered from perplexities.
At fifty, I knew what were the biddings of Heaven.
At sixty, I heard them with docile ear.
At seventy, I could follow the dictates of my own heart; for what I desired no longer overstepped the boundaries of right.
Confucius, trans. Arthur Waley

People are rivers, always ready to move from one state of being into another. It is not fair, to treat people as if they are finished beings. Everyone is always becoming and unbecoming. *Kathleen Winter*

Questions to Ponder

1. How did your family's expectations shape your process of becoming? How have you retained those expectations and how have you moved away from them?
2. Think about how external factors – society, geography, family, friends, education, career, among others – have influenced who you are. How have personal choices helped you to respond independently in the face of external pressures?
3. Reflect on a significant experience that changed the direction of your life. How did that happen?
4. What personal changes have you intentionally made in response to the pandemic and political upheaval of the past several months? What do you hope to become moving forward into the future?
5. The disruptions of the last few years have affected us both individually and in our society. What are your biggest hopes and fears about how society will develop in the next few years? In what ways might individuals influence the outcome?

Words of the Day

Before coming to the Gathering, reflect on choices you have made in your life that have affected who you have become. The Words of the Day sentence is “a choice I have made that has influenced who I have become is ...”