

—Metamorphosis— *Embracing Transitions and Change*

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Metamorphosis is a word that describes *changes in form*. In the insect world, this term is used to define the developmental stages of a butterfly. As most of us learned in grade school, an egg first develops into a caterpillar, and then the caterpillar spins a silk cocoon, or chrysalis around itself. When the chrysalis matures, a beautiful butterfly bursts forth from the cocoon.

In humans, *changes in form* are not always as consistent, predictable, or “as pretty” as they are in the insect world. They do, however, often make great stories—after we are on the other side of the change. Sometimes, to our chagrin, circumstances propel us into changes kicking and screaming. In these tough transitional times, our resistance is high because it feels like we are losing control.

Note three important words in the last sentence: *resistance* and *losing control*. Isn’t a fear of losing control at the *core* of resisting change? “Will I be okay?” “What will happen next?” and “Will I survive?” can be common questions swirling in our minds when we are in the midst of change.

In my private practice as a certified clinical hypnotherapist with a specialty of stress management, talking about change is a common occurrence. Although individual circumstances vary, there are similar threads. Seeing a client in the throes of change often prompts me to clarify that uncertainty, confusion, chaos, and disorientation are natural feelings during transitional times.

“Change is a metamorphic process,” I explain. “We may outgrow a job, an unhealthy behavior, a relationship, or a negative core belief about ourselves. In the *interim stage* of transformation—the period between two events—it is natural to feel vulnerable and anxious. The truth is, this stage can be the hardest part of change. We have left the known and familiar—but we haven’t reached our destination yet.”

No matter how we frame it, change is challenging for many of us. And since dealing with change is an ongoing issue for all of us, let’s see what inspiring lessons we can learn from Madame Butterfly.

Four Stages of the Metamorphosis Process

1. The Egg Stage

This stage represents a time of dormancy. We are in the dark without awareness or skills to know how to deal with something life has brought forth. We are probably whispering, “Who

turned out the light?” Underdeveloped resources may be inside of us, but unfortunately, they are not within our reach yet. In the darkness of the Egg Stage, we often feel alone and scared.

We may retreat into an Egg Stage due to a loss or a traumatic event. As a result, we are thrown into a place of uncertainty. Hopefully, after incubating for a while, we will gather the resources needed to move forward. Sometimes this movement forward is the result of compassionate, loving help we will receive from others—or we courageously find a way to propel *ourselves* into the next stage.

By contrast, we may *invite* an Egg Stage into our lives, like when we decide to try something new. If we are starting from scratch, and we are not a child prodigy, then we will begin at the Egg Stage. Remember when we tried Salsa Dancing for the first time—and stepped on our partner’s toes a lot? Yep, we were smack-dab in the middle of the Egg Stage again, wondering, “Who turned out the light?”

2. The Caterpillar Stage

In this stage, we are belly down and are continually taking in sustenance in order to survive. The fact is, caterpillars are known to eat voraciously and grow until they get too big for their *britches*—I mean skins. One type of moth caterpillar eats 86,000 times its birth weight during the first 56 days of its life. (Uh oh, maybe this is why some of us overeat when we’re stressed! It’s our *caterpillar survival instincts*). Meanwhile, when the caterpillar’s skin becomes too tight, he sheds it and discovers the skin underneath. This shedding happens several times in preparation for the final transformation.

I have shed enough skins in my life to fill Cher’s closet. Undoubtedly, some *shedding sessions* have been more graceful than others. When I have resisted change it has made the process especially tough. This *white-knuckling habit* has been riddled with rebellion and often resulted in backaches!

“But, hey,” I would grumble, “Why let go of an identity without a fight?”

Yes, the deteriorated skin *was* uncomfortable, clearly outgrown, and had numerous splitting seams. Still, I held on for dear life—terrified of “the unknown” lurking beneath the worn-out, yet, familiar skin. Finally, after letting go, wriggling out, and moving forward, I discovered that the underlying new skin fit who I was in that moment. What a pleasant surprise!

A personal example of the Caterpillar Stage occurred when I outgrew my job as an Art Director designing “cutesy” products. I resisted change for years because I simply did not know where to go next. I only knew that the skin I was in *did not fit anymore*. I was quietly clinging to my outgrown identity, while avoiding moving forward into the unknown. During this stage, I

voraciously devoured personal growth/psychology books. In addition, I attended many inspiring workshops and trainings—I was definitely *a woman on a mission!*

Finally, after repeatedly filling my belly with this soul food, I let the tattered skin *fall away* and nervously entered the next stage.

3. The Cocoon Stage

This stage happens when the caterpillar spins a chrysalis to rest in. During the cocoon period, unlike the previous stage of the voraciously hungry caterpillar, outside resources are not sought. This transformation is strictly an *internal process*.

My Cocoon Stages have used meditation as a vehicle to go within. When I am integrating challenging life lessons, my time in the cocoon allows me to be alone with my thoughts and feelings. This undistracted focus helps me *get to the heart* of what I need to learn. These treks inward have been incredibly rich, although sometimes painful. As a result, I often discover the *gifts* of my lessons.

When I had outgrown my Art Director identity, my Cocoon Stage allowed me to delve into the “Four W’s.” These important questions wanted to know—*who, what, when, and where?*

- *Who* am I today?
- *What* is my Life’s purpose?
- *When* should I begin fulfilling it?
- *Where* do I go next to gather resources and appropriate mentors?

I explored these questions by repeatedly connecting to my inner wisdom. After careful consideration, I created a practical map for myself. This map contained small steps that I could take to find resources and start moving toward creating personal growth products. It was a step-by-step model that I could follow to begin fulfilling my life’s purpose of helping others. After receiving the gifts of this Cocoon Stage, with map in hand, I was ready to move forward again.

4. The Butterfly Stage

This stage only happens after substantial inner shifts and changes have taken place. The once earthbound caterpillar has become elongated and has magically sprouted wings. Ready for its final transformation, the fully-formed butterfly bursts from the safety of its cocoon, eager to fly. After spreading its wings and gliding around the garden, the butterfly begins to sip delicious nectar from the flowers. The period of isolation has ended. The butterfly reconnects to the outer world with expanded vision. It now has the ability to explore new horizons and experience a *higher vision*.

How many times in our lives have we experienced the beauty, grace, and *higher vision* of a butterfly's perspective? Some of us have had opportunities to spread and enjoy our beautiful wings, while others blocked their ability to do this. Maybe there was an unwillingness to let go, surrender, and trust that a greater force could move them through the various stages. Or perhaps a protective part of themselves knew that more inner strength and outer resources were needed before letting go and safely moving forward.

It is helpful to remember that each soul has its own divine timing for transformation. Metamorphosis can neither be *forced nor rushed*.

I often refer to my hypnotherapy office in Danville as The Healing Cocoon. A drawing of a butterfly that I created 20 years ago hangs on the wall. Each time a client experiences a personal transformation, I imagine that a beautiful butterfly is formed and symbolically set free through my office window which overlooks Front Street and the creek. For this reason, I have a beautiful, stained-glass butterfly hanging in the window. It is an honor to hold the sacred space for the numerous transformations that have occurred in The Healing Cocoon.

And, transformation is not a “one-shot-deal.” We are all required to repeatedly embrace the metamorphosis process throughout our life spans. One example of metamorphosis is the aging process. Aging not only affects our bodies, if we live long enough, it will also affect our careers. While we are still breathing, no part of our lives is standing completely still. We are all ever-changing *works in progress!*

For this reason, we may experience different metamorphic stages simultaneously in various areas of our lives. For instance, my client Joan was going through a challenging Egg Stage in her career. She felt alone, powerless, and in the dark about her work challenges. Yet, in her relationship with her husband she was experiencing great fulfillment and was therefore in a Butterfly Stage.

Accepting who we are, where we are, *and continually* seeking new tools and resources are signs that we are courageously living our lives. Humbly learning how to *fall in love with ourselves*, no matter which metamorphic stage of life we are in—is the sign of a seasoned and enlightened traveler.

This article is a partial excerpt from *Stress Reduction Journal: Meditate and Journal Your Way to Better Health*, by Danville author, certified clinical hypnotherapist, and artist, Trina Swerdlow, BFA, CCHT. *Stress Reduction Journal* is available from www.amazon.com. You can reach her at info@TrinaSwerdlow.com or call (925) 285-5759. www.TrinaSwerdlow.com

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