

HOW DO THINGS CHANGE?

By Joanne Blum, Ph.D.

Crossing into the new year is similar to going through a turnstile, like the ones I used years ago to enter the New York subway system. You're ready to go someplace new, you enter the revolving gate. The turnstile spins, and clicks into place, and there you are-ready to board a train and go, go, go.

The analogy only goes so far, of course. This turnstile is required, for instance. Like it or not, we have to go through it every year about this time. No choice in the matter. But here's an even more profound difference: this new year's turnstile doesn't always lead us to someplace new. Sometimes our lives go on pretty much the same.

So right here-just this side of the turnstile-is an excellent place to pause and consider what it really takes to move into a new and better experience of life. We tend to think in outer things-get a better job, increase our income, lose some weight-but all of our great spiritual teachers have told us that's not the way it works. All real change begins inside, not outside-like the seed germinating beneath the ground, or the egg growing within the shell. All life in nature reveals this truth: first the conception, the germination within, then the appearance of the outer form.

So if we're talking about changes in the quality of our lives, what conception, what germination, are we talking about? The one that happens in our minds, when we begin to envision something new.

When Jesus said, "Whatever you ask for in prayer, believe that you have received it, and it will be yours" (Mark 11:24), I think this is the principle he was describing: from inside to out is how the energy flows. First you know it inside; then you see it outside. First you feel the new good you desire; then you start seeing it take shape. Without that inner shift in consciousness, nothing outside will ever really change. That's why Emmet Fox wrote: "Prayer is the only action that makes things different" (*Power Through Constructive Thinking*).

If Fox is correct, then the most radical and potent action we can take, heading into this new year of our lives, is to commit to a prayer practice. We're not talking just about uttering certain prayerful words, or spending a certain period of time in quiet contemplation, though both are excellent practices. Prayer extends far beyond the thinking we do in our designated prayer time.

Prayer is all our thinking, all the time-our visions, dreams, fixations, hopes, and plans. The more we can focus our attention on God the good expressing in our lives, and taking shape just beyond our sight, the more we will be following Jesus's counsel-believing that we have received what we desire-and the more confident we can be that it is only a matter of time before things start to shift.

We don't know how far we can go, or how much is possible, when we commit to prayer-Jesus said "all things are possible for the one who believes"-but we know change is a certainty. The turnstile will spin, and click, and we will walk through it into a whole new experience of life.