

# teenie yogini

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## From Egg to Butterfly: Embracing Transformation

### *What would we become if we allowed ourselves to fly?*

This past weekend I watched Black Swallowtail caterpillar become a chrysalis. In order to do this, it climbs onto a branch and hangs there. If you watch closely, you see the skin lose its brilliant color and notice that something seems to be happening inside. Eventually, the skin splits and the chrysalis begins to emerge, writhing and twisting until the dead skin completely falls off. Then it twists some more, and eventually settles in, hanging by a threadlike harness.



As I watched I recognized this process as familiar – shedding our old skin to become something new and more amazing, something that we had been becoming inside now finally able to be presented to the world. I wondered as I watched the caterpillar – does it hurt? Or was I just projecting my own human perspective on transformation? Why do we assume that change and transformation have to be difficult, or even painful?

The chrysalis stage is the sixth time that this little being transforms. Caterpillars are about 1/8 “ long when they hatch out of tiny eggs. They eat and eat and eat, pausing four times to shed their skins, each time emerging bigger and more colorful than the last. The new caterpillar sticks the feet of the old skin to the surface and then steps out of the old skin, as if it were just hiding inside, waiting for the opportunity to come out. The old skin is often left behind – forgotten.

The caterpillar, from the second it leaves its egg, is on a mission to become a butterfly. Change is pursued with single-minded purpose. Every transformation takes it closer to its goal and each transformation is more dramatic than the last. The changes are incremental but definite.

In preparation for the final change from caterpillar to chrysalis, the Black Swallowtail caterpillar becomes a frantic, searching machine. It crawls everywhere looking for a place to stop. It is as if it knows that something big is coming and is really, really excited

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– almost frantic. (In nature I suppose it would be traveling far away from its host plant, but in my kitchen, that much distance means another chrysalis under my kitchen table – not again this year!) Really, this little caterpillar is moving at break-neck speed toward the next stage of its life. When was the last time you were that excited about evolving?

Of all the transformations, the chrysalis stage seems to be the slowest and least dramatic, but amazing things are happening inside that tiny shell. At some point you can actually see the butterfly through the chrysalis – and then you know it's time. All the time when it seemed that nothing was happening, everything behind the façade was changing. I think of times in my life when I still kept up the same routine, but each day I knew that something was different – it was me, and my relationship to my life. The façade was the same, but inside, I was changing.

The emergence of the butterfly is still the most amazing part of the whole process for me. It's like a seven-foot-tall person emerging from Smart Car. The wings are all wrinkled as they emerge, and the butterfly just hangs there, waiting for the wings to fully expand so it can fly. This is such a vulnerable time because it is so close to being free to soar, but still not able to fly away. How many butterflies, I wonder, get caught by predators at this stage? How many of us get too scared of potential predators at this point to ever spread our wings and fly?

We released a newly emerged Monarch butterfly last week. When they are ready to go, they fly straight up into the nearest tree. (Black Swallowtails, I've found, just leave the vicinity as soon as they can - kinda like teenagers!) The next day I watched it as it flew gleefully around the garden, stopping to drink its fill of flower nectar and then take off again in flight. I was pretty sure it was the same one we had released, because as with previous releases, this one kept flying close to me, as if to say hello. As I watched it, the only word I could think of was joy - the sheer joy of being alive and being free to fly. I thought: How amazing to be so free, so seemingly enamored of one's existence. And then I wondered: If we stepped so purposefully into our own transformations, without resistance or doubt or fear, what would we become?

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