



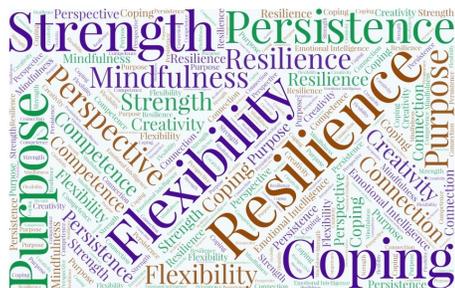
# Touchstones Project

a monthly journal of Unitarian Universalism

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## Resilience

## Wisdom Story



adversity, trauma, stress, significant change, and other challenging life experiences, including illness, job loss, heartbreak, family problems, financial worries, the death of a loved one, natural disasters, etc. Resilience is not innate. Numerous factors cultivate it (see *Cultivating Resilience* on page 5).

### Circus School

Imagine leaving your home forever because there is a war in your country.

We lived in Aleppo. It was the largest city in Syria. I loved it. I played soccer with my friends. Spring was my favorite season. The city garden smelled of lemon and orange blossoms. I especially liked going to the covered souks (/soōks/). That's what we called the covered marketplace. There were so many stalls, and one souk was connected to the next. You could walk for miles among the stalls. I loved the colors and smells, as well as the noise of the crowds. There were fruits and vegetables, spices, candy, clothes, Aleppo's famous soap, and more. I loved the smell of freshly baked bread.

### Introduction to the Theme

*Nana Korobi Ya Okicome*, a Japanese proverb captures resilience: "Fall down seven times, stand up eight." Nelson Mandela said, "Do not judge me by my successes; judge me by how many times I fell down and got back up again."

"The interdependent web of existence of which we are a part" depends on resilience. Without it, nothing survives; human beings, monarch butterflies, grey wolves, forests,

or nations. Nothing. Ponder the extraordinary resilience of the Ukrainian



people: *Sláva Ukrayini, Glory to Ukraine.*

Resilience is the capacity to deal with

For an individual, there are different domains of resilience, which suggests that our approach to resilience should be holistic.

**Physical Resilience** is the ability of the body to deal with stress, exertion, illness, and injury. Sara Dolan writes, "Getting sleep, eating healthfully, taking care of medical issues..., and getting ... exercise all provide ...the physical well-being necessary to face stressors."

**Mental Resilience** is the ability to engage adversity and adapt to uncertainty and change. It involves courage, flexibility, problem-solving, and creativity when dealing with setbacks.

**Emotional Resilience** is the ability to manage emotions in response to stress. People can enhance this through skills involving emotional intelligence, like

*(Continued on page 6)*

### Resilience & Regeneration

Regeneration is often a process of decline followed by a process of renewal. The process is up-down-up, and resilience is important throughout. Life is often like a wild roller coaster ride. Sometimes we can barely hang on. Fortunately, resilience helps us keep our balance, and maintain some measure of composure, despite the butterflies. At other times, resilience allows us to lean into the experience, and learn all that it has to teach us. Resilience is not innate, but it can be learned, and each cycle of regeneration can make us more resilient. We are wise to listen to the stories of resilience that others share, as well as sharing our stories since we are in this together.

But then the war came to us. It started with the *Arab Spring*, where people in some countries in the Middle East began demonstrating against their governments. Demonstrations started in Syria in March 2011. I remember because my birthday is March 9<sup>th</sup>. In July, rebels began fighting in our city. By the end of the year, they captured a lot of the city. That's when the government started dropping bombs on Aleppo. We were so afraid. My father decided that we must leave. He found a man who agreed to drive us to Damascus in his *servis*, a small white van. We went with another family, and it was so crowded. It took all night, and I couldn't sleep. He dropped us off in the desert south of Damascus. Then we had to walk. It took a week, and it was hard, especially for my little brother and sister. We finally reached the city of Mafraq in Jordan. From there, we

*(Continued on page 2)*

### A Theme-Based Ministry Project

This project is supported by subscriptions from Unitarian Universalist congregations.

## Regeneration

(Continued from page 1) **Wisdom Story**

were taken to the Za'atari refugee camp. That's where we live. My father said that 80,000 people live here. It's crowded.

When we first arrived, we lived in a tent, but then we moved to a small metal house where we still live. They call it a caravan, but it doesn't move. We go to school, and they have activities at a nearby community center, but I was bored most of the time until they started the



Circus School. I joined right away, and I loved it. It is after school, which means I have something to look forward to.

We begin Circus School with warmup exercises. Then we learn about circus "laws," like respecting others, practicing safety, and obeying the rules. We then practice skills like acrobatics, juggling, and lots more. We only have one unicycle, so we have to share. Sometimes, we get special visitors like *Clowns Without Borders* who teach us about clowning, and people from *Circus Magenta*, who come all the way from Finland.

Once a woman came to write an article about our Circus School. We put on a show, and I did my tumbling routine. I showed off a little and ended with five backflips in a row. After the show, the woman asked if she could talk with me. She asked me a lot of questions, about my life in Syria, our escape, and my life as a refugee. Then she asked about the Circus School. When she closed her notebook, she said, "You are very resilient." I didn't know what she meant. Maybe she really liked my backflips. Anyway, I asked, "What does resilient mean?" She said, "It means that you are strong. It means that you are able to recover quickly from difficult experiences. And here, at the Circus School, it means that you don't let failure stop you when learning new skills." What she said made me smile.

Source: Touchstones

### Option B

Sheryl Sandberg's book, *Option B: Facing Adversity, Building Resilience, and Finding Joy*, was written with Adam Grant. Option A is the way life is supposed to go, but too often, our life is disrupted in a major way through failure, loss, illness, and more. In such situations, we must invent Option B, which lacks clarity, involves facing and overcoming adversity, requires healing, involves becoming more resilient, demands improvisation, and takes as long as it takes.

For Sandberg, Option A ended when her husband, Dave Goldberg, died unexpectedly in 2015 when they were vacationing in Mexico. He was just 47 years old. She had no choice but to invent Option B for her and her two children. Her experience made clear the importance of building resilience for herself and her children. While the major focus of the book is grief, resilience is essential for her.

Sandberg writes, "Resilience comes from deep within us and from support outside us. It comes from gratitude for what's good in our lives and from leaning in to the suck. ...Sometimes we have less control than we think. Other times we have more. I learned that when life pulls you under, you can kick against the bottom, break the surface, and breathe again."

Sandberg shares, "Resilience is the strength and speed of our response to adversity—and we can build it. It isn't about having a backbone. It's about strengthening the muscles around our backbone."

But there is more as Sandberg knows: "Resilience is not just built in individuals. It is built among individuals—in our neighborhoods, schools, towns, and governments. When we build resilience together, we become stronger ourselves and form communities that can overcome obstacles and prevent adversity. Collective resilience requires more than just shared hope—it is also fueled by shared experiences, shared narratives, and shared power."

Source: *Option B: Facing Adversity, Building Resilience, and Finding Joy* by Sheryl Sandberg

### Learning to Fall

Philip Simmons, an English professor and Unitarian Universalist, knew that he couldn't control the outcome when he was diagnosed with ALS in 1993 at the age of 35, but he could cultivate intention. He died in 2002. His book, *Learning to Fall: The Blessings of An Imperfect Life*, a blend of memoir and wisdom, reminds us that we all fall from time to time. He wrote, "We have all suffered, and will suffer, our own falls. The fall from youthful ideas, the waning of physical strength, the failure of cherished hope, the loss of our near and dear, the fall into injury or sickness, and late or soon, the fall to our certain ends. We have no choice but to fall, and little say as to the time or the means." Learning how to fall is essential, for reality will trip us again and again. Simmons wrote, "When we learn to fall, we learn that only by letting go our grip on all that we ordinarily find most precious—our achievements, our plans, our loved ones, our very selves—can we find, ultimately, the most profound freedom. In the act of letting go of our lives, we return more fully to them."

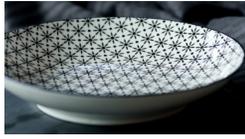


How strange that letting go and learning to fall are signs of resilience. As Simmons reminded us, "We fall from ego, we fall from our carefully constructed identities, our reputations, our precious selves. We fall from ambition, we fall from grasping, we fall, at least temporarily, from reason. And what do we fall into? We fall into passion, into terror, into unreasoning joy. We fall into humility, into compassion, into emptiness, into oneness with forces larger than ourselves, into oneness with others whom we realize are likewise falling. We fall, at last into the presence of the sacred, into godliness, into mystery...."

Source: Touchstones

# Readings from the Common Bowl

**Day 1:** "There's no such thing as ruining your life. Life's a pretty resilient thing, it turns out." Sophie Kinsella



**Day 2:** "...All I see is resilience. You are allowed to feel messed up.... It doesn't mean you're defective—it just means you're human." David Mitchell

**Day 3:** "A good half of the art of living is resilience." Alain de Botton

**Day 4:** "It demands great spiritual resilience not to hate the hater whose foot is on your neck, and an even greater miracle of perception and charity not to teach your child to hate." James Baldwin

**Day 5:** "To be rendered powerless does not destroy your humanity. Your resilience is your humanity. ...To yield and not break, that is incredible strength." Hannah Gadsby

**Day 6:** "I've come to hold the human spirit in the highest regard. Like the body, it struggles to repair itself. As cells fight off infection and conquer illness, the spirit, too, has remarkable resilience." Karen Marie Moning

**Day 7:** "Resilience is not a commodity you are born with, waiting silently on tap. It is self-manufactured painstakingly over time by working through your problems and never giving up, even in the face of difficulty or failure." Lorii Myers

**Day 8:** "I need a love that is troubled by injustice. ...A love that has no tolerance for hate, no excuses for racist decisions, no contentment in the status quo. I need a love that is fierce in its resilience and sacrifice. I need a love that chooses justice." Austin Channing Brown

**Day 9:** "So, what is it in a human life that creates bravery, kindness, wisdom, and resilience? ...What if it's the struggle?... The bravest people I know are those who've walked through the fire and come out on the other side." Glennon Doyle Melton

**Day 10:** "The energy expended in pushing down despair is diverted from more creative uses, depleting the resilience and imagination needed for fresh visions and strategies." Joanna Macy

**Day 11:** "Chances are no matter how bad your troubles seem to be, someone somewhere, with less resilience, has successfully conquered a more severe version of your problems." Gary Hopkins

**Day 12:** "Resiliency is not gender-, age-, or intellectually-specific...." Asa Don Brown

**Day 13:** "But hope has an astonishing resilience and strength. Its very persistence in our hearts indicates that it is not a tonic for wishful thinkers, but the ground on which realists stand." Kathleen Norris

**Day 14:** "When we learn how to become resilient, we learn how to embrace the beautifully broad spectrum of the human experience." Jaeda DeWalt

**Day 15:** "Resilient people do not bounce back from hard experiences; they find healthy ways to integrate them into their lives." Eric Greitens

**Day 16:** You cannot learn resilience by reading a book or listening to a lecture." Yuval Noah Harari

**Day 17:** "Resilient trees can weather a violent storm because their roots are deep and firm." Thích Nhất Hạnh

**Day 18:** "Failure is a part of life. Success teaches you nothing, but failure teaches you resilience. It teaches you to pick yourself up and try again." Sarah Morgan

**Day 19:** "There are two kinds of strength. Power and the ability to wield it is obvious, but resilience, the ability to resist power, is the other." Raymond E. Feist

**Day 20:** "Wildflowers are the loveliest of all because they grow in uncultivated soil, in those hard, rugged places where no one expects them to flourish. They are resilient in ways a garden bloom could never be." Micheline Ryckman

**Day 21:** "Prize the natural spaces and shorelines most of all.... We need the natural curves of hills, the scent of chapparal, the whisper of pines, the possibility of wildness. We require these patches of nature for our mental health and our spiritual resilience." Richard Louv

**Day 22:** "You can't just wish strength for yourself. Or wisdom. Or resilience. Those

things have to be earned." Katherine Center

**Day 23:** "Life wears us down around the edges. The stress of life and its necessities cracks things. We learn to protect ourselves. We learn not to let so much of the world in, because sometimes it's all too much, and we don't have the resilience we need to survive it." Michelle Sagara

**Day 24:** "One of life's contradictions: how human beings were at once entirely resilient and impossibly fragile. One decision could stay with you forever, and yet you could live through almost anything." J. Courtney Sullivan

**Day 25:** "Live close to nature, and your spirit will not be easily broken, for you learn something of patience and resilience." Ruskin Bond

**Day 26:** "As I faced each tragedy in my life, I learned to reach into the depth of my soul for strength and determination. Through this healing process, I discovered perseverance and resilience. I could not go into the past and use White-Out to erase any events; instead, I had to find a way to use my pain to help me heal and grow. I



had to stare darkness in the face and accept that I could not change the past, but I could build a better future." Erin Merryn

**Day 27:** "When kids feel that they are deeply loved even when they're struggling, it builds resilience." William Stixrud

**Day 28:** "How fast is your alive? How smooth is your alive? How hard, how resilient? We're alive because we can be hurt; we're alive because we can heal. I think it's beautiful." Akwaeke Emezi

**Day 29:** "It's not their bullying that 'made me the person I am today,' but my own resilience that enabled me to adapt." Florence Given

**Day 30:** Most of our strength, capacity and resilience gets nullified when we harbor ... doubts over our own adequacies. The more the sense of insecurity, the closer we move towards defeat." Nihar Satpathy

**Day 31:** "That's Ma for you. Granny say she came in the world ready for whatever. When things fall apart, she quick to grab the pieces and make something new outta them." Angie Thomas



# Faith and Theology

## A Theology of Resilience

A theology of resilience is grounded in our first principle, "The inherent worth and dignity of every person," because human beings are "worth" it. People can protect their sense of worth by dealing well with adversity. That ability involves resilience. While circumstances cannot erase a person's worth, they can severely damage a sense of worth. People face adversity that can be challenging, but they can survive and thrive because their resilience is adequate for the challenge. And more often than not, the experience increases resilience. In *Farewell to Arms*, Hemingway wrote, "The world breaks every one and afterward many are strong at the broken places." That strength results from resilience, but Hemingway, a realist, was aware that not all are stronger at the broken places. Some are just broken.

To better understand the connection of self-worth to resilience, we must include self-esteem since they are two sides of the same coin, one made of the metal of resilience. Hailey Shafir writes, "Self-esteem and self-worth are related, but they have important differences. Self-esteem describes how you think and feel about yourself, which changes based on mood, circumstance, performance, or the approval of others. Self-worth is a more global and stable form of self-esteem that comes from knowing and believing in your worth..." Qiaolan Liu et al. write, "Resilience positively affects life satisfaction and psychological distress through the mediation effects of self-esteem. High self-esteem has been regarded as a protective factor for resilience; at the same time, resilience is seen as a promoting factor for self-esteem." Self-worth also protects resilience and benefits from it.

Inherent worth and dignity affirm basic human goodness. Theological anthropology, a branch of systematic theology, seeks to understand human nature. It considers the role of human beings in history, the capacity and willingness to do good, grow, change, and act in the world for good or ill. Our faith tradi-

tion has maintained a high regard for humanity, which is called high anthropology. Low anthropology views human beings as being

"totally depraved." For example, William Ellery Channing's 1828 sermon, *Likeness to God*, stated that "the Divinity within us" supported partaking in the Divine's moral perfection. For Channing, this made it possible to perfect one's character as a path to salvation.

Theologically, our high anthropology is significant but insufficient because we must also account for evil. Historically, this has been a challenge given our tendency to unbridled optimism and a view of progress as ever upward and onward. World War II, generally, and the Holocaust, specifically, forced religious liberals to face evil, not as a supernatural reality, but as the product of human hearts and hands. As we consider those broken by the world who are not stronger, per Hemingway, a theology of



resilience must take seriously the forces that oppress and brutalize. Of course, Hemingway's impersonal "the world breaks everyone" is poetic yet disingenuous. The broken are broken, not by the "world" but by individuals, groups, and institutions using interlocking systemic oppressions.

If we are to construct a meaningful theology of evil, it must account for the sin of racism, which has broken too many. Unitarian Universalist minister and theologian Paul Rasor wrote, "...we must attend to racism's spiritual dimensions.

To do this, we must see racism not only as a matter of institutional structures and social power disparities but as a profound evil." He continues, "It is hard for liberals to talk in these terms because we have no real theology of evil...."

Unitarian Universalist minister Clyde Grubbs once said, "Too many of our ministers think that anti-racism is a ...social justice issue, but not a theological issue."

Unitarian Universalist community minister Elizabeth Ellis, who served as the Executive Director of the Unitarian Universalist Urban Ministry in Boston, spoke of the "systemic and spiritual evils of racism and poverty" at a three-day convocation on theology and racism held by the UUA in 2001. There, longing and wisdom, searching and regret, anger and truth-telling, and more were voiced by James Cone, Rosemary Bray McNatt, George "Tink" Tinker, Patricia Jimenez, William R. Jones, Paul Rasor, Thandeka, Rebecca Parker, Gary Smith, and 23 others. Marjorie Bowens-Wheatley and Nancy Palmer Jones captured the "proceedings" in the landmark 2003 book, *Soul Work: Anti-Racist Theologies in Dialogue*. While out-of-print, it is available as a Kindle edition. It does not articulate a concise theology of evil, but the sin of racism expressed in that dialogue is powerful, persuasive, and painful. Opposing and transforming such evil requires many things, including incredible resilience.

Our affirmation of inherent worth confers dignity. Though oppressors disrespect the marginalized, dignity, self-respect, and the insistence on respect are powerful. Maya Angelou wrote in her 1976 poem *I Rise*, "Did you want to see



me broken? / Bowed head and lowered eyes? / Shoulders falling down like teardrops. / Weakened by my soulful cries." This stanza captured her oppressor's intent: to withhold respect, to marginalize her, and to strip her of her dignity. She continued, "You may shoot me with your words, / You may cut me with your eyes, / You may kill me with your hatefulness...." Is she defeated? Hardly, because she then wrote, "But still, like air, I'll rise." Angelou continued, "Out of the

(Continued on page 7)

## The 7 Cs of Resilience

John Dabell

[In *Building Resilience in Children and Teens: Giving Kids Roots and Wings*, Kenneth Ginsburg and Martha Jablow recount the 7 Cs of Resilience that need to be cultivated in children and youth.]

### 1. Competence

Children need ...to be given opportunities to develop specific skills. If children ...display a particular passion for something or aptitude for a specific skill, Activity, or sport, we need to ... encourage them.

### 2. Confidence

The solid belief in one's own abilities is everything. We build children's confidence ...by ...creating age-appropriate opportunities for experiencing success.

### 3. Connection

When children are part of a community..., they know they aren't alone if they struggle and that they can develop creative solutions to problems. Close ties to family, friends, school, and community give children a sense of security.

### 4. Character

Children need an understanding of right and wrong and the capacity to follow a moral compass. A fundamental sense of right and wrong helps children make wise choices....

### 5. Contribution

The experience of offering their own service makes it easier for children to ask for help when they need it. ...Being willing to ask for help is a big



part of being resilient. ...

### 6. Coping

Children need healthy coping strategies to manage their stress. Some strategies involve ... breaking down ...problems and challenges into smaller ...pieces, avoiding things that trigger extreme anxiety, and just letting some things go.

### 7. Control

Children need to feel like they have a degree of control over their lives and their environment. When they realize

that they can control their decisions and actions, they're more likely to know that they have what it takes to bounce back.

Source: <https://johndabell.com/2018/05/01/the-7-cs-of-resilience/>

## Cultivating Resilience

In 1999, Karol Kumpfer published a list of internal resilience factors. They make clear that resilience emerges out of a complex interaction of many things.



These factors are:

### Spiritual/motivational factors

- Dreams and goals
- Purpose/meaning in life
- Spirituality
- Belief in uniqueness of oneself
- Independence (autonomy)
- Hope and optimism
- Determination and perseverance

### Cognitive competencies

- Intelligence
- Academic achievement & homework skills
- Ability to delay gratification
- Reading skills
- Moral Reasoning
- Insight
- Interpersonal Awareness
- Self-esteem
- Planning Ability
- Creativity

### Behavioral/social competencies

- Social skills and street smarts
- Problem-solving skills
- Multicultural/bi-gender competencies
- Empathy
- Emotional stability and management
- Happiness
- Recognition of feelings
- Emotional management skills
- Ability to restore self-esteem
- Humor

### Physical well-being and competencies

- Good health
- Health maintenance skills

Physical talent development

Source: *Character Strengths and Virtues: A Handbook and Classification* by Christopher Peterson & Martin Seligman

## Family Activity:

### *The Rose that Grew from Concrete*

This activity involves an autobiographical poem, *The Rose that Grew from Concrete* by Tupac Shakur. He wrote it when he was 19. It was about his life. You can read the poem with your children. It is on page 7 at the bottom of the first column. You can also watch two short YouTube videos. The first video by Chukwukere Ekeh includes his reading of Tupac's poem and then Ekeh's three points about the meaning of the poem. It is at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TPcqP3SWYpc> (2:27). Another short video at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=lqO2NdvoL8o> (1:00), shows a rose in concrete and invites the viewer to ask what it means.

You might have to read and watch several times to take in the poem and the videos.

Remind your children that the poem is about the author. It shows determination, grit, and resilience. Then ask them the following questions.

1. What is "concrete" in your life, or the lives of other children, the hard stuff that makes it difficult to grow?
2. How does it make you feel when someone doesn't believe in you; or believes you can't do something?
3. How could a rose or another plant grow in concrete? What would it need?
4. What do children need to grow, especially when things are hard?
5. What helps you when things are hard to do?



# The Ripple of Resilience Flows Outward to Community

(Continued from page 1) **Introduction**

self-awareness and self-regulation.

**Social Resilience** is the ability to work with others on natural disasters and other challenging situations. It involves compassion, collaboration, commitment, and valuing community.

**Spiritual Resilience** is the ability to remain grounded, centered, and hopeful. It grows out of mindfulness, a commitment to guiding principles, and a sense of worth, dignity, and purpose.

In her book, *The Gifts of Imperfection*, Brené Brown, whose research has focused on vulnerability, shame, authenticity, and belonging, offers ten guideposts to living what she calls a “wholehearted” life. In “*Cultivating a Resilient Spirit*,” Brown writes that resilience involves

- ◆ being resourceful and having good problem-solving skills;
- ◆ asking for help when necessary;
- ◆ believing that acting will help manage one’s feelings and increase the ability to cope;
- ◆ having a support system to draw upon, and
- ◆ being connected with family, friends, and workmates.



To better understand resilience, consider how it can be impaired. Gerry Valentine outlines one example, a repeating cycle of adversity, fear, and paralysis. He writes, “When faced with ad-

versity, we all feel fear. ...That’s perfectly natural. However, a problem develops when fear becomes a paralysis that prevents us from responding productively to the adversity. And the paralysis always leads to even more adversity—either the original adversity worsens, or a new one arises.”

Unfortunately, resilience can be impaired by many things, including self-doubt, pessimism, avoiding dealing with adversity, lacking self-esteem or purpose in life, procrastination,

resisting change, blaming others for one’s misfortunes, shame, lacking a support system, and more.

The impairment of resilience can begin in childhood based on the adversity encountered and the nature of adult relationships. The *Center on the Developing Child at Harvard University* distinguishes among three levels of stress and the corresponding responses to stress: positive, tolerable, and toxic. Positive stress is normal, like a child’s response to a new caregiver. Tolerable stress involves a much stronger response due to events like the death of a loved one, a natural disaster, or a severe injury. If the stress is time-limited and help from supportive adults is available, the child can successfully adapt to the situation. Still, if the stressor lasts longer and adult support is absent, it can become intolerable. Intense, frequent, prolonged adversity without adequate adult support triggers toxic stress. Triggers can include physical, emotional, or sexual abuse; chronic neglect; exposure to violence, including war, gang violence, extreme bullying, and systemic racism; caregiver substance abuse or mental illness; and burdens inflicted by poverty. This systemic impairment of resilience often extends into adulthood with tragic consequences.

Prolonged toxic stress can lead to post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), which is, by some definitions, a failure to adapt to significant stress. In the article, *6 Keys to Resilience for PTSD and Everyday Stress*, Margaret Haglund et al. offer factors to protect against and address post-traumatic stress. These build upon Brown’s observations about resilience.

**Active Coping Style:** Problem-solving and managing stress-related emotions; learning to face fears.

**Physical Exercise:** Engaging in physical activity to improve mood and health.

**Positive Outlook:** Using ...strategies to enhance optimism and decrease pessimism; embracing humor.

**Moral Compass:** Developing and living by meaningful principles; putting them into action through altruism.

**Social Support:** Developing and nurturing friendships, seeking resilient role models, and learning from them.

**Cognitive Flexibility:** Finding good in

adverse situations; remaining flexible in one’s problem-solving approach.

The authors write, “Psychiatrist and Holocaust survivor Viktor Frankl wrote of the importance of ‘meaning-making.’ Despite suffering for years in Nazi concentration camps, Frankl wrote that he gained the opportunity to exercise inner strength and be ‘brave, dignified, and unselfish.’ He struggled to survive because he came to believe that his suffering had a purpose: to teach others about his experiences.”

The impact of toxic stress and trauma can be horrific, yet, for many, healing is possible by transforming suffering into surviving and surviving into thriving. The process involves building resilience.

The ripple of resilience flows outward from the individual to include intimate relationships, friendships, families, schools, congregations, organizations, businesses, communities, countries, and, as above, “the interdependent web of existence of which we are a part.” Cultivating resilience differs for each of these and is quite complex, but resilience begets resilience and supports flourishing.

Consider community resilience. Many fail to appreciate the enormous economic and social inputs that confer resilience on middle-income and affluent neighborhoods and deny it to poor neighborhoods. The *Center for Community Resilience* created a graphic that describes what resilient neighborhoods require. Their *Resilience Tree* illustrates how equitable, trauma-informed systems and supports lead to positive health and social outcomes for children and families. (see <https://ccr.publichealth.gwu.edu/sites/g/files/zaxdzs4361/files/2022-06/community-resilience-tree-copyright.pdf>)

The graphic *Visualizing the Issue: Trauma and Inequity* (see [https://ccr.publichealth.gwu.edu/sites/g/files/zaxdzs4361/files/2022-06/final\\_poa\\_resiltrees\\_tutorial.pdf](https://ccr.publichealth.gwu.edu/sites/g/files/zaxdzs4361/files/2022-06/final_poa_resiltrees_tutorial.pdf)) (on page one) lists *Adverse Childhood Experiences* and *Adverse Community Environments*. The tree grows in contaminated soil. Imagine a community with poor air quality, tap water with lead, a food desert offering unhealthy food, poor health outcomes, failing schools, sub-standard housing, high unemployment, ongoing violence,

(Continued on page 7)

(Continued from page 6) **Introduction**

rampant addiction, and lower life expectancy, all of which impair resilience.

Finally, their *Community Resilience Framework* graphic (see <https://ccr.publichealth.gwu.edu/tools-resources/community-resilience-framework>) illustrates the linkages and issues among Community (including economic realities), Housing, Public Schools, and Criminal Justice in disadvantaged neighborhoods. Throughout these four areas, racism and discrimination arise again and again. The framework lists 50 issues to build social capital, create social cohesion, and restore community resilience.

Many poor communities of all races have a long history of trauma, which means that many children suffer from intergenerational trauma because the resilience of families is compromised. As *New York Times* columnist Charles Blow writes, “Children can’t see their budding lives through the long lens of wisdom.... For them, the weight ... can feel crushing and without the possibility of reprieve. And, in that dark and lonely place, desperate and confused, they can make horrible decisions that can’t be undone.”

Countless activists are working to ensure that those horrible decisions and the virus of despair do not have the last word. Instead, a vision of healing, resilience, wholeness, and justice drives them. Despite the crushing burden of generational trauma, post-traumatic growth and resilience are possible, as Black rapper Tupac Shakur knew. Consider this autobiographical poem written when he was 19: *Did u hear about the rose that grew from a crack / in the concrete / Proving nature’s laws wrong it learned 2 walk / without having feet / Funny it seems but by keeping its dreams / it learned 2 breathe fresh air / Long live the rose that grew from concrete / when no one else even cared!* Imagine fields of roses blooming in concrete because people care.

Resilience!



## The Value of Failure

Ice skater Sasha Cohen’s preparation for the 2006 Olympics proved difficult, yet, in the face of failure, she demonstrated remarkable resilience. Cohen won first place in the first competition, but withdrew from the next because of a hip injury. At a third competition, she fell on a jump, got up, and skated to a second-place finish. She then overcame the flu to win her first U.S. Championship. At the 2006 Winter Olympics in Turin, Cohen was in first place after the short program, but in the free skating competition, she had poor form on one jump and fell on another. She got up, finished strong, and won a silver medal.



Mary Pickford said, “failure is not the falling down, but the staying down.”

Abraham Lincoln was familiar with failure. While he won races, his losses included the Illinois State Legislature (1832) and Illinois House Speaker (1838), the US Congress (1843), the US Senate twice (1854 & 1858), and the Vice-Presidential nomination (1856). His resilience in the face of these losses and the many challenges that he faced is notable. Rather than being defeated by setbacks, Lincoln learned by “failing forward.” He became one of America’s most effective Presidents in profoundly challenging times.

Irish Novelist Samuel Beckett wrote, “Ever tried. Ever failed. No matter. Try again. Fail again. Fail better.” Overcoming failure requires resilience, and, in the process, it builds resilience. Winston Church wrote, “Success is not final; Failure is not fatal; it’s the courage to continue that counts.” The courage to continue is supported by resilience. Importantly, success usually does not result in reflection. Failure, if one is resilient, invites reflection, prompts learning, and encourages growth. Source: Touchstones

(Continued from page 4) **Faith & Theology**

huts of history’s shame / I rise / Up from a past that’s rooted in pain / I rise.” She concluded, “Bringing the gifts that my ancestors gave, / I am the dream and the hope of the slave. / I rise / I rise / I rise.” It is hard to imagine a more powerful example of self-respect, a demand that the oppressor respect her dignity, and incredible resilience in the face of oppression.

The poem’s power was such that after 27 years in jail, Nelson Mandela read it at his inauguration as President of South Africa in 1994. In commenting on the poem, Zak Cheney-Rice wrote, “When Maya Angelou died [in 2014] ...., she left behind a legacy of resilience. The Jim Crow South—which raised and shaped her—held terrors so fathomless as to render anyone’s capacity for love inert. But hers survived; it even flourished.”

Our principles are affirmations that inform how we should act. They ripple outward from the individual to the “interdependent web of all existence of which we are a part.” They have stood intact and cherished for over 35 years. The UUA Commission on Appraisal (COA) proposed a revision of Article II in 2009 (see [https://www.uua.org/files/documents/coa/articleii/articleii\\_proposedrevision.pdf](https://www.uua.org/files/documents/coa/articleii/articleii_proposedrevision.pdf)). While the COA completely rewrote the section on sources (not for the better), they left the principles untouched. Their revisions, however, were not adopted.

Despite working to become anti-racist since 1997, there have been disappointments within our liberal faith along the way. Paula Cole Jones, having worked with UU congregations to promote anti-racism for over 15 years, concluded that the seven principles needed to be completed through an eighth principle. In 2013, she collaborated with Bruce Pollack-Johnson to create a draft of the eighth principle. Consideration of this proceeded slowly at first, but the momentum increased. On November 27, 2021, Canadian Unitarian Universalists adopted a version of the eighth principle. The UUA will consider adopting the eighth principle at GAs in 2023 and

(Continued on page 8)

## Theme for Discussion Resilience

**Preparation prior to Gathering:** (Read this issue of the journal and *Living the Questions* in the next column.)

**Business:** Deal with any housekeeping items (e.g., scheduling the next gathering).

**Opening Words:** “More and more I have come to admire resilience. / Not the simple resistance of a pillow, whose foam / Returns over and over to the same shape, but the sinuous / Tenacity of a tree: finding the light newly blocked on one side, / It turns in another. A blind intelligence, true. / But out of such persistence arose turtles, rivers, / Mitochondria, figs—all this resinous, unretractable earth.”

Jane Hirshfield

**Chalice Lighting:** (James Vila Blake) adapted (In unison) *Love is the spirit of this church, and service is its law. This is our covenant: to dwell together in peace, to seek the truth in love, to serve human need, and to help one another.*

**Check-In:** How is it with your spirit? What do you need to leave behind in order to be fully present here and now? (2-3 sentences)

**Claim Time for Deeper Listening:** This comes at the end of the gathering where you can be listened to uninterrupted for more time if needed. You are encouraged to claim time ranging between 3-5 minutes, and to honor the limit of the time that you claim.

**Read the Wisdom Story:** Take turns reading aloud parts of the wisdom story on page one.

**Readings from the Common Bowl:** Group members read selections from *Readings from the Common Bowl* (page 3). Leave a few moments of silence after each to invite reflection on the meaning of the words.

**Sitting In Silence:** Sit in silence together, allowing the *Readings from the Common Bowl* to resonate. Cultivate a sense of calm and attention to the readings and the discussion that follows (*Living the Questions*).

**Reading:** “...the capacity to be resilient, to respond to difficulty ..., is rooted in many diverse factors, but it consistently depends on one thing: the meaning you, the individual, make of where

you are. When suffering leads to meanings that unlock the mysteries of life, it strengthens compassion, gratitude, joy, and wisdom. When suffering leads to barriers and retaliations and hatred, it empties you of hope and love, and then misery will lead to misery....” Polly Young-Eisendrath

**Living the Questions:** Explore as many of these questions as time allows. Fully explore one question before moving on.

1. How do you deal with setbacks and/or cope with adversity?
2. What does it mean to be resilient (physically, emotionally, mentally, and/or spiritually)? Which of these do you value most? Why?
3. Share an experience that required resilience. What did you find challenging? What surprised you? What did you learn?
4. What enhances resilience? What impairs resilience?
5. Who in your extended family, including ancestors, or among people you have known exhibited notable resilience? What was your reaction to their resilience?
6. How can our congregations help participants cultivate a resilient spirit?
7. According to Hemingway, the world breaks everyone, and some are stronger for it, while others are just broken. Do you agree? What breaks people? What heals people? What leaves people broken?
8. How can a theology of resilience adequately challenge racism?

**Deeper Listening:** If time was claimed by individuals, the group listens without interruption to each person who claimed time.

**Checking-Out:** One sentence about where you are now as a result of the time spent together exploring the theme.

**Extinguishing Chalice:** (Elizabeth Selle Jones) (In unison) *We extinguish this flame but not the light of truth, the warmth of community, or the fire of commitment. These we carry in our hearts until we are together again.*

**Closing Words:** Rev. Philip R. Giles (In unison) *May the quality of our lives be our benediction and a blessing to all we touch.*



(Continued from page 7) **Faith & Theology** 2024, as proposed by the *UUA Article II Study Commission*. Meanwhile, over 50 congregations and UU groups have adopted the eighth principle. The core of the eighth principle calls for *actions to dismantle racism in ourselves and our institutions in ways that hold us accountable*.

Our theology of resilience must incorporate the eighth principle, but this is easier said than done. As Wendy Sims-Schouten, et al. write, “current definitions of resilience need to be redefined and reconceptualized, particularly in settings dominated by White middle-class voices that define what ‘positive emotions,’ ‘successful traits,’ and ‘coping mechanisms’ entail.” They suggest that, “resilience can also mean ‘resistance,’ i.e., resisting bad treatment and racism, as well as reflecting agency, identity, and ownership of one’s own life and choices....” They conclude, “Only when individuals and communities are heard, taken seriously, and their needs [are] engaged with, is it possible to truly make sense of what resilience entails and what support is required to facilitate the development of resilience in different social and cultural groups.” Our theology of resilience can only meaningfully evolve through the power of listening far beyond our understandings and assumptions of what good and evil mean in the lives of others, especially those who have been broken yet yearn for healing and wholeness.

Source: Touchstones

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