

# Universalist Unitarian Church of Halifax

Themed Church Magazine - January 2016

## Resilience



### Definition

#### resilience n.

1. the power or ability to return to the original form, position, etc., after being bent, compressed, or stretched.
  2. ability to recover readily from illness, depression, adversity, or the like.
- Synonyms: elasticity, buoyancy, flexibility, pliancy, adaptability

This is the fifth in a series of monthly “magazines” on the topic of the theme for the month. Each magazine will contain inspiring words, questions to ponder, articles to read and further resources to explore.

What Does Resilience Mean .....	2	Wise Words.....	6
Our Spiritual Exercise.....	3	Articles.....	7
Video and On-line.....	4	Books.....	8
Your Question.....	5	Movies.....	8

## What Does Resilience Mean in your Life?

When did we decide that resilience was a solo project?

It's not that we ever consciously decided that this was the case. It's just what we've been taught. The dominant culture around us may be well intended, but it takes us down the wrong path. "Pull yourself up by your own bootstraps," it says. "You're stronger than you think." "If it first you don't succeed, try, try again." This is how resilience is most often framed: It's all about individual mental toughness and inner strength.

Our faith tradition sometimes plays into this heroic form of resilience. We reject the idea that human beings are depraved, broken and weak. Instead, we champion the view that we are strong--not just inherently worthy but also inherently resourceful. We have, at times, promoted a "You can do it!" theology.

This view of resilience places a heavy burden on each of us and can result in a sense of shame when we are unable to live up to the expectation. In addition, it isolates us one from another. A healthy human community is a dynamic network of people being helped and people helping. Some of us have been on our own for so long that we have lost the connections that tell us we have inherent worth and dignity. We need that assurance and when one helps another, both benefit and are stronger.

And yet at our best, we are more nuanced. When it comes to resilience, our most saving message has always been, "You can do it *and* you do not have to do it on your own!" There is a common metaphor about resilience; the one about being a tree that is willing to lean and bend rather than hold tight in place and break. We UU's take a different approach to this strategy of leaning. Yes, be willing to lean back and forth, we say. But most importantly, be willing to lean in --and on-- each other! It is a reminder that resilience does have a lot to do with what is inside us, but it has even more to do with what is *between us*. The true path of resilience is the path of connection. We are indeed *a people* of resilience, not just a person of resilience.

So this month, let's look around as much as look within. Get that idea of resilience as a solo project out of your head and heart. Reach out for help when you need it, and look for others that you can help when you have the stamina and resources to do so. Our covenantal theology asserts that we belong to each other. Let's also remember that our resilience also belongs to and depends on each other.

Amen!

It's not the load that breaks you down, it's the way you carry it.

Lena Horne

## Our Spiritual Exercise

### Option A: Test Your Resilience

Use one of these tests for resilience (<http://www.resiliencescale.com/your-resilience/test-your-resilience/>) and find out your score. What did the questions unearth for you? What are some answers you'd like to see change?

### Option B: List 'Em

We can exercise our power of resilience, and we can help other to do the same. We have more techniques at our disposal than we realize.. This month let's be a bit more aware of and intentional about these resiliency strategies that regularly restore us and help others to recover as well. Here's your assignment:

1. Carve out some time this month to make a list of your *TOP FIVE* resiliency practices and habits. For instance, here are some ideas:

- Getting enough sleep
- Getting *some* exercise
- Creating external order – taking a day to clean and organize the house
- Managing eating and drinking
- Meditating 3 mornings a week
- Once-a-week email Sabbath – i.e. do not check email one day a week
- Family dinners, with family gratitude grace
- Spending time with animals
- Knitting
- Watching something on TV that makes you laugh.
- Listening to some favourite inspiring or energizing music.



2. After you list your top 5, organize them according to these questions:

- Which resiliency practice/habit is “helping” you right now?
- Which one have you let slide and need to start doing more of again?
- Which one was given to you by someone else? Which was a gift?
- Which one did you discover on your own?
- Which do you need to pass on to someone in your life? Who could benefit from sharing in this strategy? Might you invite them to do it with you?



### Option C: Tap Into Your Resilient Past

Therapists and spiritual directors tell us that one of the best ways to bring resiliency back into our lives is to revisit a time in our life when we were successfully resilient. This month take some time to revisit and honor a time when your powers of resiliency were at their peak. There are many ways to honor this period of your life: write the story down, ask a close friend to be a witness and listen to you retell the story, find a picture that captures that moment in time, wear clothes or even the hairstyle from that period, play a song connected with the event over and over this month or be bold and get a tattoo to permanently keep that time in your life close.

There is nothing like returning to a place that remains unchanged to find the ways in which you yourself have altered. Nelson Mandela

## Option D: Check your Attitude toward Winter

January was chosen as the month to celebrate resilience because you must be tough and resilient to survive the first real month of winter – or better yet to enjoy it. Think about strategies that you might adopt to help you bounce back from the winter storms, the icy sidewalks, the shoveling etc. Can you find things to celebrate and enjoy about our Canadian winter? Make a list and determine that you will enjoy some aspects of the month ahead like:

- Get some really good cold weather clothes and determine to do some winter hiking.. Allyn Clarke will gladly help you with that.
- Pick out a book that you will read in a nice cozy spot when the weather keeps you indoors.
- Perfect the absolutely best cup of hot chocolate and share the result with friends.
- Make this the year you skate at the Halifax Oval, better yet, organize a skating party for the entire church!
- After that perfect snowfall build the perfect snowman complete with carrot nose and scarf.



## Option E: Consider How You Might Help Another

You read earlier that resilience is not a solo project. Think about others that you know. Observe others in your social circle. Can you identify some people whose resilience is low? Realizing that resilience is based on exercising physically, mentally, emotionally and socially, can you visualize how you might help the other person to rebuild their resilience? For the purpose of this exercise just think about how you might make such a difference in another person's life, and what that might feel like to you. Do not feel obligated to take action on these thoughts, the process of considering what you might do, will guide your reaction to others in subtle small but important ways.

## Videos and Online

### **The Game That Can Give You 10 Extra Years of Life**

Jane McGonigal discusses how she created a game after a trauma to help people heal better.

[http://www.ted.com/talks/jane\\_mcgonigal\\_the\\_game\\_that\\_can\\_give\\_you\\_10\\_extra\\_years\\_of\\_life](http://www.ted.com/talks/jane_mcgonigal_the_game_that_can_give_you_10_extra_years_of_life)

### **The Power of Vulnerability**

Brene Brown shows the link between shame, vulnerability, and resiliency in this moving talk.

[http://www.ted.com/talks/brene\\_brown\\_on\\_vulnerability](http://www.ted.com/talks/brene_brown_on_vulnerability)

### **12 Step Program to Get Through a Breakup**

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=trWgx7YoZyk&feature=youtu.be>

## Your Question



*No need to treat these questions like “homework.” You do not need to engage every single one. Instead, simply find the one that “hooks” you most and let it lead you where you need to go.*

- **Are you ready to take the next step?** One definition of resilience is the ability of something to return to its original shape after it has been pulled, stretched, pressed, bent, etc. Where are you in the journey of resilience? Starting to feel pulled? Already significantly bent? Stretched and worried about snapping? Slowly returning to form? Gratefully back? **What one thing do you need from those around you (friends, family, church) to move you on to the next step?**
- **What does having a “resilient faith” mean to you?** Does it mean finding your way back to a previously held belief by seeing it anew? Does it mean finding a way to trust and love life again? Or does it mean being able to move on from what was? i.e. have the adaptability to grow and evolve into new forms of faith? **What is life trying to teach you right now about the importance of a resilient faith?**
- **Is holding on getting in the way of your resilience?** Many of us remember Kenny Rogers’ famous line: “You got to know when to hold ‘em, know when to fold ‘em, know when to walk away, and know when to run...” Resilience is about the ability to return. Hard to do that when you’re not willing to let go of what’s got you stuck.
- **How resilient are you when it comes to anger?** Anger and resentment regularly bend us out of shape. Righteous anger tempts us to stay twisted. Is the call of resiliency inviting you this month to return to a less resentful form?
- **How resilient are you when it comes to forgiveness?** When others wound or offend you, how easily do you bounce back to connection? How easily do you let them off the hook? Is the call of resiliency inviting you this month to figure out why you so desperately hold on to your grudges?
- **Do you wish your family was more resilient?**
- **Is your child more or less resilient because of you?**
- **Do you make your religious community more or less resilient?**
- **Who is your resilience hero and are you honoring them?** Who taught you the most about resilience? A person close to you or a public figure? Did their resilience rub off on you? Does it need to?
- **Is integrity your current resilience struggle?** Our culture can put a real strain on our ability to remain authentic as persons. **What skills or practices are helping (or not helping) you resiliently return to yourself?**
- **What’s your question?** Your question may not be listed above. As always, if the above questions don’t include what life is asking from you, spend the month listening to your days to hear it.

When I stand before thee at the day's end, thou shalt see my scars  
and know that I had my wounds and also my healing.

Rabindranath Tagore

## Recommended Resources

As always, this is not required reading. These pieces are simply meant to get your thinking started, and maybe to open you to new ways of thinking about what it means to “be a people of resilience”.

### Wise Words

The greatest glory in living lies not in never falling, but in rising every time we fall.

Nelson Mandela

It's not the load that breaks you down, it's the way you carry it.

Lena Horne

You drown not by falling into a river but by staying submerged in it.

Paul Coehlo

When I stand before thee at the day's end, thou shalt see my scars and know that I had my wounds and also my healing.

Rabindranath Tagore

It is not the critic who counts; not the man who points out how the strong man stumbles, or where the doer of deeds could have done them better. The credit belongs to the man who is actually in the arena, whose face is marred by dust and sweat and blood; who strives valiantly; who errs, who comes short again and again, because there is no effort without error and shortcoming; but who does actually strive to do the deeds; who knows great enthusiasms, the great devotions; who spends himself in a worthy cause; who at the best knows in the end the triumph of high achievement, and who at the worst, if he fails, at least fails while daring greatly.

Teddy Roosevelt

We all have these moments when the rose loses its color for some reason, or the music no longer stirs us, or the sweet, gentle soul across from us no longer seems to soften our heart. To move in and out of meaning is as natural as moving in and out of light because clouds form and dissipate... It reminds me of a man who built a home on a cliff by sea, only to have a month-long fog roll in. He cursed the place and

moved away, but a week after he'd gone, the fog cleared. Being human, we all have fogs roll in around our heart, and often, our lives depend on the quiet courage to wait for them to clear.

Mark Nepo



Here is a river flowing now very fast. It is so great and swift that there are those who will be afraid, who will try to hold on to the shore. They are being torn apart and will suffer greatly.

Know that the river has its destination. The elders say we must let go of the shore. Push off into the middle of the river, and keep our heads above water. And I say see who is there with you and celebrate.

At this time in history, we are to take nothing personally, least of all ourselves, for the moment we do, our spiritual growth and journey come to a halt.

The time of the lone wolf is over.

Gather yourselves.

Banish the word struggle from your attitude and vocabulary.

All that we do now must be done in a sacred manner and in celebration.

For we are the ones we have been waiting for.

ELDERS OF THE HOPI NATION

Each night, when I go to sleep, I die. And the next morning, when I wake up, I am reborn.

Mahatma Gandhi

## More Wise Words

### Sweet Darkness

When your eyes are tired  
the world is tired also.

When your vision has gone  
no part of the world can find you.

Time to go into the dark  
where the night has eyes  
to recognize its own.

There you can be sure  
you are not beyond love.

The dark will be your womb tonight.

The night will give you a horizon  
further than you can see.

You must learn one thing.  
The world was made to be free in.

Give up all the other worlds  
except the one to which you belong.

Sometimes it takes darkness and the sweet  
confinement of your aloneness to learn

anything or anyone  
that does not bring you alive

is too small for you.



*By David Whyte  
from The House of Belonging  
©1996 Many Rivers Press*

### Autobiography in Five Short Chapters By Portia Nelson

I

I walk down the street.  
There is a deep hole in the sidewalk  
I fall in.  
I am lost ... I am helpless.  
It isn't my fault.  
It takes me forever to find a way out.

II

I walk down the same street.  
There is a deep hole in the sidewalk.  
I pretend I don't see it.  
I fall in again.  
I can't believe I am in the same place  
but, it isn't my fault.  
It still takes a long time to get out.

III

I walk down the same street.  
There is a deep hole in the sidewalk.  
I see it is there.  
I still fall in ... it's a habit.  
my eyes are open  
I know where I am.  
It is my fault.  
I get out immediately.

IV

I walk down the same street.  
There is a deep hole in the sidewalk.  
I walk around it.

V

I walk down another street.

## Articles

### **How to Bounce Back from Failure: 7 Habits of Highly Resilient People**

Carolyn Gregoire

<http://www.dailygood.org/story/618/how-to-bounce-back-from-failure-carolyn-gregoire/>

### **Handle with Care: A Conversation with Maya Angelou**

<http://www.ascd.org/publications/educational-leadership/sept13/vol71/num01/Handle-with-Care@-A-Conversation-with-Maya-Angelou.aspx>

## Books

*Coming Back to Life: The Updated Guide to the Work that Reconnects Us* by Joanna Macy and Molly Brown

*The Color Purple* by Alice Walker

*Bailey's Café* by Gloria Naylor

*Perseverance* by Margaret Wheatley

*The Tin Drum* by Gunter Grass

*Daring Greatly* by Brene Brown

*A Feminist Ethic of Risk*  
by Sharon Welch

*The More Beautiful World Our Heart Knows is Possible* by Charles Einstein

*David and Goliath: Underdogs, Misfits, and the Art of Battling Giants*  
by Malcolm Gladwell

*The Impossible Will Take a Little While: A Citizen's Guide to Hope in a Time of Fear* by Paul Rogat Loeb

Excerpt here:

<http://www.spiritualityandpractice.com/books/excerpts.php?id=14402>

## Books from UUA's Beacon Press

*Prison Baby: A Memoir* by Deborah Jiang-Stein

A deeply personal and inspiring memoir recounting one woman's struggles—beginning with her birth in prison—to find self-acceptance

*All Souls: A Family Story from Southie* by Michael Patrick MacDonald

MacDonald, who grew up in Southie's Old Colony housing project, gives testimony to lives lost too early, and the story of how a place so filled with pain could still be "the best place in the world."

*The New Wild: Why Invasive Species Will Be Nature's Salvation* by Fred Pearce

In an era of climate change and widespread ecological damage, it is absolutely crucial that we find ways to help nature regenerate. Embracing the new wild, Pearce shows us, is our best chance.

## Movies

12 Years a Slave  
A Beautiful Mind  
Beasts of the Southern Wild  
Erin Brockovich  
Freedom Writers  
I Am



Nebraska  
The Pianist  
Precious  
Selma  
Short Term 12  
The Wrestler

## Get Ready for February's Theme – Reconciliation!

There will be an opportunity to discuss and explore this material and your thoughts on Resilience with Rev. Norm and other friends. The "Resilience Salon" with wine and cheese will be held at the church at 7 pm on Tuesday, January 26. If you would like a ride please contact Rev. Norm Horofker. Also if you would like to be part of an experiment to join the conversation Jan. 26 by computer link, please let Norm know.