



Chalice Circle Packet

March 2020

What Does It Mean to Live Faithfully with Resilience?



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Unity Church-Unitarian
St. Paul, Minnesota
unityunitarian.org

RESILIENCE

It's that time of year when I watch for the first delicate crocuses to break through the hardened crust of the March ground. Yellow, purple and white, their short blooms open like small cups of sunlight. But by night, the delicate blossoms close up, waiting until dawn coaxes them to yawn agape again. Their daily opening and closing reminds me that so much growth happens not in straight-line arrows stretching onward and upward as diagonals of progress cutting across a chart, but rather in rhythmic expansion and contraction more akin to breathing.

Resilience – the capacity to recover quickly from challenges, setbacks or trauma – is a much touted quality that is only present when straight-line progress is interrupted by pauses or downturns. In the scientific definition, resilience refers more literally to elasticity and the ability to bounce back or return to the shape or trajectory something had before being stressed, compressed or deterred. As a human capacity, it also depends on flexibility; but very often it does not return us to our original “shape.” Rather, human resilience often stretches us as we grow into new capacities, understandings or relationships – new ways of being that respond to barriers we encounter or trauma we have experienced while still being true to who we are.

When flowers open and close in circadian rhythm, their contraction is caused by the outer leaves or petals growing faster than the inner ones in darkness and cool temperatures. Then, in the warmth of daylight, the inner petals grow too, pushing the blossom open.

Might we learn from this, a rhythm for our own human resilience, individually and collectively? As we experience the setbacks of our challenging times or the natural ebb and flow of life, can we step out of our urgent quest for outward action and progress long enough to turn inward, to nurture our spiritual growth, which in turn, will spur us to new outward growth and action? Can we resist the dominant culture's addiction to continuous growth – the onward and upward trap of 20th-century notions of progress – and allow ourselves, our systems and our organizations time to rest, to reflect, sometimes even to contract, learning who we are and what we need before asking what it is we are to do and how and where and when?

According to author Andrew Zolli, resilient systems “move at more than one speed.” They demonstrate both “the agility that comes with short-term thinking and wisdom that comes from long-term thinking.” Another rhythm, this one fluctuates between an immediate response to urgent needs, and a slower, thoughtful reflection on options, consequences and the long game. It is a rhythm found in healthy religious communities, moving at more than one speed at the same time, rooted in tradition while responding to the suffering of the present day and working toward a better future. It is also found in spiritual practices engaged by activists.

We hear this in the statement, “The arc of the moral universes is long but it bends toward justice,” voiced by Martin Luther King, Jr. paraphrasing a 1853 sermon by abolitionist and Unitarian minister Theodore Parker. King and Parker both practiced the rhythms of moving at more than one speed. As Parker said originally, “I do not pretend to understand the moral universe. The arc is a long one. My eye reaches but a little ways. I cannot calculate the curve and complete the figure by experience of sight. I can divine it by conscience. And from what I see I am sure it bends toward justice.”

We cannot see the full arc of history to know exactly how or when today's injustices and suffering will be addressed. But being rooted in spiritual practices, faith traditions and teachings committed to justice across the millennia, our conscience is awakened – one might say *stretched* into the shape of new understandings,

new capacities, new relationships. And as we experience the adversity, setbacks and inevitable heartbreak of working to end oppression, we find resilience in the rhythms of breathing in and breathing out, opening and closing, resting and acting, drawing inward and reaching out. Resilience, in this sense, connects past and future in an arc bent and continually rebounding toward justice, through our dreams and actions, our faith and work, our imagination and daily practice.

With this ebb and flow, we grow. We stretch into new ways of being that can adapt to the dramatic loss and change and stresses that are all hallmarks of the 21st century. So it is that we discover resilience as the rhythmic movement of our human blooming.

Our reflection in chalice circle practices and sharing is just one of the ways we encourage that blooming.

Karen Hering

Associate Minister

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Spiritual Practices

Option A

Tending the Body and Befriending Emotions

One of the keys to resilience is honoring the emotions that arise from stress, conflict and difficulty, learning from them, and transforming them into energy we can use to move through our challenges in healthy ways. Therapist and author Miriam Greenspan¹ offers exercises for what she calls emotional alchemy – converting grief, fear, despair and anger to gratitude, hope, compassion, connection and action. This practice of tending our bodies and befriending our emotions is based on several of Greenspan’s suggested exercises for this alchemy.

Begin with conscious breathing, one of the most basic (and uniformly accessible) practices to calm and center us in the face of challenges, conflict, and stress. First, assume a comfortable position, sitting, standing or lying down, and notice your natural rhythm of breathing. Then, intentionally, slow it down, breathing in and out through your nose. Expand your inhale, drawing it deeply into your abdomen and trying not to raise your shoulders. Pause briefly before exhaling, and then exhale as slowly as you comfortably can, emptying the old breath fully. Pause briefly before inhaling, and repeat for several minutes, until you feel yourself relaxing into a slower rhythm. Visualize your breath as a cleansing cycle, bringing in what you need, and letting go of what no longer serves you.

If you are especially stressed when you do this, you might want to exhale through your mouth, perhaps even pursing your lips to create a gentle resistance that will naturally slow your exhale down.

After settling into conscious breathing, move on to the next step of listening to your body and your feelings. Ask yourself what are the difficult emotions you might be feeling now – and where do you feel them in your body? Many people experience grief in the chest, fear in the gut, and despair as a generalized numbness. But each of us carries and experiences our emotions in our own way. You might have a knot of anxiety in your shoulder or a pain in your back or neck that could arise from any number of emotions. This practice is simply one of noticing and naming, with curiosity and without judgement, what emotions you have and how and where you feel them in your body. Then as you continue your conscious breathing, direct your breath toward the places in your body where you are experiencing painful emotions. Visualize your breath reaching any place where you’ve noticed a difficult emotion residing. Breathe in whatever that place of pain needs for relief; breathe out whatever it needs to release.

After five minutes or more of this listening to your emotions and body with conscious and cleansing breathing, take one more especially deep breath and return to your normal breathing. Notice how you feel now, and reflect on what you learned from your body, your emotions, and your respond to this practice. Do this practice daily, or as close to daily as you can, recording a few notes about your experience each time you do it.

Come to your Chalice Circle ready to share this experience, and anything you notice about what you learn from practicing it over time.

¹ *Healing through the Dark Emotions: the wisdom of grief, fear and despair*, Miriam Greenspan, Boston: Shambala, 2004.

Option B

Naming Resilience Practices and Habits

We are more resilient than we realize. Or maybe it's more accurate to say we have more resiliency tricks up our sleeves than we give ourselves credit for. Over time we all accumulate go-to strategies that help us maintain our resilience, but we don't always name them as such. This practice invites you to become more aware of resiliency tools you already have and to try out one or two new ones.

Begin by listing your *TOP FIVE* resiliency practices and habits. There's no right or wrong here. Just name five things you do to stay calm, centered and grounded when stressed or challenged.

Now scan the list of common practices below, noticing whether any of these are ones you already use. If so add them to your list above. Then, review the list below again and circle one or two that you don't commonly use and try them out this month, noticing whether they are helpful to you or not.

1. awareness of breath
2. walking
3. humming
4. connecting with others (virtually or in person)
5. getting some sleep
6. searching out words of wisdom, poetry or scripture that encourage you
7. meditation or prayer
8. touching and being touched
9. swimming, bathing or showering
10. dancing, alone or with others
11. creative activities (writing, knitting, making art or music, etc.)
12. tai chi or yoga
13. physical exercise, rigorous or gentle
14. cooking and eating a nutritious meal that tastes good
15. getting some fresh air (and sunlight if possible)
16. singing, alone or with others
17. honoring emotions and giving them expression
18. spending time with animals
19. laughing

As you prepare for your chalice circle this month, notice when you are stressed and which of your listed tools you make use of. Try using a new one. Notice what makes you more resilient in the moment.

Consider sharing your list with someone who knows you well. Ask them if they recognize the list as true. Have them offer what they think is missing.

As you reflect on your list, the following questions might guide you: Which resiliency practice or habit is "saving" you right now? Which ones have you let slide? Do you wish to start doing more of again or are you substituting others that help you in the same way? Which ones were given to you by someone else? Which did you discover on your own? Which might you want to pass on to someone in your life?

Come to your group with your list, ready to share your insights from this exercise.

Option C

Playing a Resilient Tune

Music and dance can be key ways we muster our resolve and our resilience to move through difficult times, to metabolize trauma and to celebrate when we have regained our footing and found our way to a better place.

Revisit the music that has helped you through hard times. Then pick one song, bring it into your circle, play it for them and tell the tale of how it supported your resilience.

For some inspiration, check out the playlist of Resilience songs prepared by a fellow church member and included in this packet: <https://open.spotify.com/playlist/50Xfsxukk4H8e5wsAPw8uD>. Or listen to the playlist on Resilience developed by Soul Matters at: <https://www.youtube.com/playlist?list=PLvXOKgQQVYP7-GP08C-jEL-DqEBVydlE5> or <https://open.spotify.com/playlist/6xOFPSl9vtV3w2oPzGDLO?si=qrCPxBQFREihjvZ8gcZ9Bw>

Questions to Ponder

Read through the questions below and notice which one(s) resonate with you. One or more of the questions might seem particularly compelling – or some might stir resistance in you. Either of these reactions might make the question fruitful to consider. Choose just one and take time to consider it, over several days if possible. Write it down on a piece of paper you carry in your pocket. Or take a picture of it with your phone. Or record it in your journal – and spend some time, each day if you can, reflecting on it in writing or otherwise, noticing where it leads you and what you learn from it and your response to it.

1. One definition of resilience is the ability to return to one's original shape after it has been unexpectedly jolted, stretched, flattened, bent, compressed, etc. What part of this description do you relate to in your life now? Starting to feel pulled? Already significantly bent? Stretched and worried about snapping? Slowly returning to form? Still trying to figure out what's causing the kink? Gratefully back to your original shape? Realizing there's no going back and adapting to a new shape?
2. What does human resilience look like and require when we cannot return to how we were before? Is it still resilience?
3. When do you remember first noticing a parent, grandparent, teacher, caregiver or other elder act resiliently – or without it? What did you learn from their example?
4. What does resilience look like to you? Recall several examples of it in other people and notice how they are similar or different. What makes your own resiliency unique?
5. Has someone else's resilience helped you survive? When did you not give up because they didn't give up? What aspect of their resilience story offers a strategy for your own resilience in the future?
6. How does privilege (that you have or lack) affect your understanding and experience of resilience?
7. When have your trusted ones or communities you belong to made you more resilient? Are you quick or reluctant to turn to them when facing challenges? How does that affect your resilience?
8. What did your hardest moment teach you about yourself and about resilience?
9. What's your question? Perhaps your question is not one of the above but one rising from your own heart and life as you consider the packet's reflection and resources. If so, name your own question and reflect on it as you would one of the above.

Resources

Recommended Resources for Personal Exploration & Reflection

The following resources are not required reading. They will not be analyzed in our circles. Instead they are here to companion you on your journey this month, get your thinking started and open you to new ways of thinking about what it means to be part of a people of resilience.

Word Definitions & Roots

Resilience

(n) the power or ability to return to the original form, position, etc., after being bent, compressed, or stretched; elasticity.

(n) ability to recover readily from illness, depression, adversity, or the like; buoyancy.

Origin: from the Latin *re*, meaning “back” and *saliens*, or “the beginning, the starting point, the heart of the embryo.” *Saliens* also holds the suggestion of movement; to leap, to flow, to run, to hurry. These images instill a sense of an active effort to retain that core heart of ourselves. Resilience is not a passive idea, it asks us to take action to sustain our core essential self.

Wise Words

You may encounter many defeats, but you must not be defeated. In fact, it may be necessary to encounter the defeats, so you can know who you are, what you can rise from, how you can still come out of it. *Maya Angelou*

Although the world is full of suffering, it is also full of the overcoming of it. *Helen Keller*

If your heart is broken, make art with the pieces. *Shane Koyczan*

Ultimately, resilience is learning from your past rather than resenting it. *Rev. Scott Tayler*

Anyone can slay a dragon, he told me, but try waking up every morning and loving the world all over again. *Brian Andreas*

Life’s reality is that we cannot bounce back. We cannot bounce back because we cannot go back in time to the people we used to be. The parent who loses a child never bounces back. The nineteen-year-old who sails for war is gone forever, even if he returns. You know that there is no bouncing back. There is only moving through... What happens to us becomes a part of us. Resilient people do not bounce back from hard experiences; they find healthy ways to integrate them into their lives. *Author and former Navy Seal Eric Greitens*

You know that Glennon Doyle quotation about wanting her kids not to avoid fires but to know that they are fireproof and can survive hard things? That they are brave and resilient? I want that for my fellow UUs too. Doyle says in trying to protect our kids from all pain, we remove from them an essential tool they'll need if they're going to become the people we hope they'll be.

I want THAT for my fellow UUs too.

Rev. Janet Newton

If you need to fall apart, then do —
for Life will hold you in that,
will teach you how to desiccate and blow away
and then will call you back from the four corners of the earth
and will renew you with the water
of the tears of others
who
like you
weep for all that is lost.
She will breathe back into you
the breath that washes from the mouths of children
laughing
from the lion's roar.

Rev. Audette Fulbright Fulson

[Resilience] is to watch a gathering darkness until all light is swallowed up completely without the power to interfere or bring a halt. Then in that darkness, to continue one's journey with one's footsteps guided by the illumination of remembered radiance.

Howard Thurman

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. *Sheryl Sandberg*

I can be changed by what happens to me. But I refuse to be reduced by it. *Maya Angelou*

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

You may write me down in history
With your bitter, twisted lies,
You may trod me in the very dirt
But still, like dust, I'll rise.
Maya Angelou

School said I'm a slave
But kindred call me a queen I exist between
Cherizar Crippen

The human capacity for burden is like bamboo—far more flexible than you'd ever believe at first glance.
Jodi Picoult

Poetry

Optimism, poem by *Jane Hirshfield*
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....

For the full poem and Jane Hirshfield's comments on what trees and poetry both teach us about resilience, visit the *Washington Post* at:
https://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2009/09/18/AR2009091801307_pf.html

Joy Unspeakable by *Barbara A. Holmes*

Joy Unspeakable
is not silent,
it moans, hums, and bends...

joy unspeakable is practicing freedom while chains still chafe... while Jim Crow stalks...

Full poem at

<https://www.drbarbaraholmes.com/single-post/2016/08/15/Read-between-the-lines>

Sweet Darkness, by *David Whyte*

When your eyes are tired
the world is tired also.
When your vision has gone
no part of the world can find you...

A Rainy Morning, by *Ted Kooser*

A young woman in a wheelchair,
wearing a black nylon poncho spattered with rain,
is pushing herself through the morning.

You have seen how pianists
sometimes bend forward to strike the keys... Such
is the way this woman...

Full poem (print and audio) at:

<https://writersalmanac.publicradio.org/index.php%3Fdate=2014%252F04%252F25.html>

The Peace of Wild Things, by *Wendell Berry*

When despair for the world grows in me...
I go and lie down where the wood duck
rests in his beauty on the water, and the great
heron feeds..
I rest in the grace of the world and am free.

Video #1, w/text, read by Garrison Keillor:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zwrgWvP9DZE>

Video #2, put to song:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ObYb8EtZm78>

Won't you celebrate with me, by *Lucille Clifton*,

read by Lucille Clifton: <https://vimeo.com/197834578>

somewhere I have never travelled, by ee cummings, read by cummings:
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=uWcuGo0rEFo>

Music

For a playlist inspired by the opening reflection on this month's theme, visit this Spotify link. (Note: you may have to register for a free Spotify account to listen to more than 30 seconds of each song.)
<https://open.spotify.com/playlist/50Xfsxukk4H8e5wsAPw8uD>

Videos & Podcasts

I, I, I. Him - Invisibilia Podcast
<https://www.npr.org/2017/06/30/593135007/podcast-i-i-i-him>

What do you do when you lose big, and in the process lose yourself? How do you find yourself again? How do you get back? (40-min. podcast)

How to Raise a Black Son in America - TED Talk by Clint Smith, 5-minute talk
https://www.ted.com/talks/clint_smith_how_to_raise_a_black_son_in_america

As kids, we all get advice from parents and teachers that seems strange or confusing. This was crystallized one night for a young Clint Smith, who was playing with water guns in a dark parking lot with his white friends. In a heartfelt piece, the poet paints the scene of his father's furious and fearful response.

Living Beyond Limits - TED Talk by Amy Purdy
https://www.ted.com/talks/amy_purdy_living_beyond_limits

On imagination and resilience. The story of Amy Purdy, who lost both her legs below the knee. And now is a she's a pro snowboarder.

"And it was then that I asked myself that life defining question: If my life were a book and I were the author, how would I want this story to go?... and that's when my life began again..."

How Do You Mend A Broken Heart? - Soul Pancake, 2-minute video
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YbSSzBFwp7c>
People of all ages answer the question, "How Do You Mend a Broken Heart?"

Choose to Laugh – TEDx talk by Sebastian Gentry, 13-minute talk
https://www.ted.com/talks/sebastian_gentry_sebastian_gentry_choose_to_laugh_it_s_good_for_you
Sebastian talks about the benefits of choosing to laugh and leads the audience in some fun exercises designed to spark laughter and make us feel better.

Nothing is impossible – 6-minute video about the story of Hari Budha Magar
www.youtube.com/watch?v=P5KtMgWQO_o
A Former Gurkha soldier Hari Budha Magar who had both his legs amputated after being injured serving in Afghanistan. He will be the first above the knee, double amputee to summit Mt. Everest. He is not only an adventurer but also the one who inspires many to do something in their life. He and his vision for the disabled community inspire many.

Articles

things i did today to recover, blog by *adrienne maree brown*
<http://adriennemareebrown.net/2016/11/09/a-range-of-reflections-on-resilience/>
Strategies of resilience after Donald Trump won the 2016 presidential election.

Black Women and The Sacred: With “Lemonade,” Beyoncé Takes Us To Church, by Yolanda Pierce
<https://religiondispatches.org/black-women-and-the-sacred-beyonce-takes-us-to-church/>
“To make lemonade out of lemons is code for powerful spiritual practice in the hands of women. Since the beginning of chattel slavery in this country, black women have been magically making something from nothing, conjuring up lives for themselves and their families with nothing but crumbs, dust and ashes... “Lemonade” is a reminder of the revolutionary [and resilient] power of self-love...”

Books

My Grandmother's Hands: Racialized Trauma and the Pathway to Mending Our Hearts and Bodies,

by Resmaa Menakem

Therapist Resmaa Menakem examines the damage caused by racism in America from the perspective of trauma and body-centered psychology. Because the body is where our instincts reside and where the trauma inflicted by racism is experienced and stored, Menakem argues racism's destruction will continue until Americans learn to heal the generational anguish of white supremacy.

Especially focused on the trauma affecting African Americans, white Americans, and "blue" Americans—our police of all races—with exercises to help readers heal from this trauma.

Resilience: why things bounce back, by Andrew Zolli and Ann Marie Healy

What causes one system or person to break down and another to rebound? In the face of constant disruption, can we build better shock absorbers—for ourselves, our communities, our economies, and for the planet as a whole? Reporting firsthand from the coral reefs of Palau to the back streets of Palestine, Andrew Zolli and Ann Marie Healy relate breakthrough scientific discoveries, pioneering

social and ecological innovations, and important new approaches to constructing a more resilient world.

Rising Strong, by Brené Brown

*Five years after her TED talk about vulnerability, Brené Brown's new book, *Rising Strong*, suggests that the only path to resilience, love, belonging, creativity, and joy is vulnerability.*

Where the Crawdads Sing, by Delia Owens

A novel set in Barkley Cove, a quiet town on the North Carolina coast in the 1950s and 60s. At once an exquisite ode to the natural world, a heartbreaking coming-of-age story, and a surprising tale of possible murder. Owens reminds us that we are forever shaped by the children we once were, and that we are all subject to the beautiful and violent secrets that nature keeps.

Movies & T.V.

[I Am Not Your Negro](#)

[If Beale Street Could Talk](#)

[Precious](#)

[He Named Me Malala](#)

[Roma](#)

[The Shawshank Redemption](#)

This packet was created for use at Unity Church-Unitarian, St. Paul, Minnesota, based on the Soul Matters Sharing Circle model of small groups and incorporating content from the Soul Matters packet on Resilience.

soulmatterssharingcircle.com and unitychurchunitarian.org