

February Theme

Perseverance: The Practice of Tenacity

FOR FURTHER EXPLORATION

Books

- *Rising Strong: The Reckoning, The Rumble, The Revolution*, by Brené Brown
- *Resilience: Why Things Bounce Back*, by Andrew Zolli & Ann Marie Healy

Movies

- *Homeward Bound* (G)
- *Finding Nemo* (G)
- *Queen of Katwa* (PG)
- *Forrest Gump* (PG-13)
- *Lion* (PG-13)
- *Pray the Devil Back to Hell* (NR)

Music

- 'Time Will Tell', by Gregory Alan Isakov
- 'I'll Rise', by Ben Harper (Maya Angelou lyrics)
- 'East to the West', by Michael Franti
- 'Higher Ground' – Songs Around the World (check out video on YouTube!)

Videos & Podcasts

- '[Instructions for a Bad Day](#)', by Shane Koyczan (on YouTube)
- 'When Facing Adversity, Which One Are You: Potato, Egg, or Coffee Bean?' <https://www.facebook.com/JayShettyIW/videos/1767703950210729/>

Children's Books/Stories

- *The Little Engine that Could*, by Watty Piper
- *Rosie Revere, Engineer*, by Andrea Beaty
- *She Persisted: 13 American Women Who Changed the World*, by Chelsea Clinton

QUOTES FOR CONTEMPLATION

I have walked that long road to freedom. I have tried not to falter; I have made missteps along the way. But I have discovered the secret that after climbing a great hill, one only finds that there are many more hills to climb. I have taken a moment here to rest, to steal a view of the glorious vista that surrounds me, to look back on the distance I have come. But I can only rest for a moment, for with freedom come responsibilities, and I dare not linger, for my long walk is not ended. ~ Nelson Mandela

She stood in the storm, & when the wind did not blow her away, she adjusted her sails. ~ Elizabeth Edwards

Optimism

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

Let it hurt.
Let it bleed.
Let it heal.
And let it go.
~ Nikita Gill

Much protest is naive; it expects quick, visible improvements and despairs and gives up when such improvement does not come. Protestors who hold out longer have perhaps understood that success is not the proper goal... Protest that endures, I think, is moved by a hope far more modest than that of public success: namely, the hope of preserving qualities in one's own heart and spirit that would be destroyed by acquiescence. ~ Wendell Berry, "On Difficult Hope"

She who has not been tried, what does she know?
She who has been surprised abounds with vigilance.
Betrayed, she recognizes what is true.
Scarred, she finds her resilience.
Her illusions gone, she deepens.
~ MJ Abell

When you feel like quitting, think about why you started.
- Aly Juma



Long-Haul People

You find them in churches when you're lucky; other places too, though I mostly only know ecclesiastical varieties. Long haul people upon whose shoulders (and pocketbooks and casseroles and daylight/nighttime hours) a church is built and maintained after the brass is tarnished and cushions need re-stitching. They pay their pledges full and on time even when the music's modern; support each canvass though the sermons aren't always short; mow lawns and come to suppers; teach Sunday School when there's no one else and they'll miss the service. Asked what they think of the minister, or plans for the kitchen renovation, or the choral anthem, or Christmas pageant, or color of the bathroom paint, they'll reply: individuals and fashions arrive and pass. The church—their church—will be here, steady and hale. For a long, long time. It will. For long haul people bless a church with a very special blessing. ~ Rev. Rudy Nemser, UU minister

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

What Does It Mean to Be a People of Perseverance?

"People cry not because they are weak. It's because they've been strong too long." - Shane Koyczan

"This morning I have been pondering a nearly forgotten lesson I learned in high school music. Sometimes in band or choir, music requires players or singers to hold a note longer than they actually can hold a note. In those cases, we were taught to mindfully stagger when we took a breath so the sound appeared uninterrupted. Everyone got to breathe, and the music stayed strong and vibrant... So let's remember the advice of music: Take a breath. The rest of the chorus will sing. The rest of the band will play. Rejoin so others can breathe. Together, we can sustain a very long, beautiful song for a very, very long time. You don't have to do it all, but you must add your voice to the song." - Michael Moore

As a people of perseverance, we are being called not just to grit and strong wills, but to gentleness and self-care.

So, have you been strong too long?

It's not the usual question when tackling the topic of perseverance. Most often, we're asked, "Are you ready to **be** strong?" The standard recipe is well known: Buck up! Grin and bear it! Keep pushing! Keep moving forward! Dig deep; you are stronger than you know! But maybe Koyczan is right. Maybe this typical roadmap isn't the path to perseverance; maybe it's just the path to breakdown.

And when we combine Koyczan's quote with Moore's invitation to breathe, we suddenly see that balance plays a bigger role in perseverance than we often assume. As a people of perseverance, we are being called not just to grit and strong wills, but to gentleness and self-care. Constantly pushing ourselves without also giving ourselves the gift of pause gets us nowhere. Digging deeper without making time to deepen and fill our wells is a recipe for self-inflicted pain.

All of which is to say that maybe vulnerability is the real secret to perseverance. Maybe admitting you're tired and asking for help is the real strength that gets us through. That dominant myth of Sisyphus pushing his rock up that endless hill hasn't done us any favors. We assume that [Sisyphus](#) is suffering because his work is endless, but maybe it's his isolation and lack of a place to rest that is his true torment.

So, friends, this month, let's not torment ourselves. We don't have to give up those pep talks about digging deep and being stronger than we know. But right alongside that, let's make sure we're also doing the more tender work of propping each other up and reminding each other to breathe.

Rabbi David Wolf tells a story that we all should carry with us this month:

A boy and his father were walking along a road when they came across a large stone. "Do you think if I use all of my strength, I can move this rock?" the child asked. His father answered, "If you use all of your strength, I am sure you can do it." The boy began to push the rock. Exerting himself as much as he could, he pushed and pushed. The rock did not move. Discouraged, he said to his father, "You were wrong. I can't do it." His father put his arm around the boy's shoulder and said, "No son. You didn't use all your strength – you didn't ask me to help."



What a gift to remember that perseverance isn't a solo act. May that be the gift this month gives us all.

KIDS' CORNER

Perseverance is a big word. It means to stick to something for a long time, even when we feel like giving up. There are lots of times in our lives that we'll feel like giving up. Sometimes the right thing to do is to give up. But sometimes we need to dig in and keep going. But in order to do that, we need to have some inner strength to keep going. One way to think about this is to make sure our buckets are full. Filling our buckets means to make sure we are doing enough things that help us to feel good that we can keep going. We can fill our buckets by doing things we like to do, spending time with people we love or have friends with, participating in sports, music, or other activities that we like, doing things for others, or lots of other ways!

Draw a bucket here and draw or write ways that you can think of to help fill your bucket and use it as a reminder when your bucket feels empty and you want to give up on something that requires perseverance.

GET THE OBSTACLES OUT OF THE WAY

Yes, perseverance is often about the work of putting one foot in front of the other. It's about keeping going. But sometimes the problem isn't in keeping our feet moving; it's an obstacle in the middle of our path. It's about getting unstuck not so much keeping going. This exercise invites you to lean into this type of perseverance that is about recognizing and removing those obstacles.

Check out this article: <http://upliftconnect.com/little-habits-happiness/>. It's about the barriers to happiness, but its list contains many of the same things that prevent us from moving forward, many of the things that prevent us from persevering. You can make your engagement with the article as simple or complex as you need. You can simply weave it into your meditation practice and use it to identify a place of stuckness that you might not have fully recognized. Or you can take it to the next level and actually work on removing your obstacle using the advice contained in the column.



PERSONAL REFLECTION

As always, don't treat these questions like "homework" or a list that needs to be covered in its entirety. Instead, simply pick the single question that speaks to you most and let it lead you where you need to go. The goal is to figure out what being a part of a people of perseverance means for you and your daily living. So, which question is calling to you? Which one contains "your work"?

1. The saying is widely known: "Trees that bend in the storm don't break." Are you trying to stand tall and remain immovable when life is asking you to bend?
2. We all fall down. Very few of us pick ourselves up on our own. Perseverance is rarely a solo act. Who in your life needs a bit of help getting back up off the mat, or who could you reach out to for help yourself?
3. What if the way through your pain is to feel it?
4. It's hard right now. The light at the end of the tunnel is still a ways off. You've remembered to just keep moving forward. But have you remembered to breathe? Have you remembered to be tender with and to take care of yourself, not just push yourself? What could you do to build in some gentleness for yourself?
5. Are you sure your strategy of "grin and bear it" is still working? What's the worst that could happen if you just walked away?
6. It is said that people who persevere don't just struggle through their pain; they share and tell stories of their pain. Others then respond with their own stories of pain and struggle, leading to the discovery that we are not as alone as we thought. Where in your life could you be a storyteller, not just a survivor?
7. Have you made friends with defeat? Do you still resent it? Or have you figured out the hidden gift, lesson or blessing of your defeat?
8. So you think you've lost the struggle? Or could it be that you've just lost your illusions?
9. Yes, it is important to gratefully acknowledge the shoulders of those you stand on. But how are you doing with the equally important work of offering your shoulders to others? Could it be that perseverance is something we pass on?
10. It is said that mastery requires persevering through [10,000 hours](#) of practice. If you are feeling like you are failing or not good enough, might it be time to consider that you are only 5,000 hours in?
11. **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.

All contents adapted from the Soul Matters Sharing Circle resource materials for February 2018.

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JUSTICE CORNER

The Social Justice Team Invites you to: ACLU Civil Liberties Training

Focused on local action, this training will show people how to network and build skills for ACLU civil liberties campaigns such as voting rights and criminal justice reform. This training is part of a larger series called Trainings for Change Makers, which will help people gain skills and make connections for organizing action on a range of civil rights and civil liberties issues. It is for anyone who wants to put their desire for justice and equity into action.

Saturday, February 10, 11:30am-5pm

Register online at: www.aclunc.org/trainme