



# *Soul Matters*

## **March 2015**

*What Does It Mean To Be  
a People of Resilience?*



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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.

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 UUs 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. This is where our Soul Matters framing is so important; we are indeed *a people* of resilience, not just a person of resilience.

We survive our pain by knowing it is shared. We continue to walk through the dark only when we sense we are not alone. Internal grit only gets us so far; empathy, assurance and love from others gets us the rest of the way. Resilience has everything to do with the water within which we swim and the web of connections that surround us.

So friends, 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. 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.

A poem from the Hopi Nation starts us off on the right foot. It reads:

*"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  
The time of the lone wolf is over."*

Amen!

# Our Spiritual Exercises:

## Option A: **List ‘Em**

We are more resilient than we realize. We have more resiliency tricks up our sleeves than we often give ourselves credit for. This month let’s be a bit more aware of and intentional about these resiliency strategies that regularly restore us and keep us sane.

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 two lists from two of our Soul Matters facilitators:

- 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 prayer
- Spending time with animals
- Knitting
- Watching The Daily Show

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

- Which resiliency practice/habit is “saving” 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?

3. Come to your group ready to share your insights from this exercise.

## Option B: **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, bring in a picture to your group 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.

## Option C:

### **Play That Resilient Tune**

We all know it works: That perfect song played at the perfect time gives us the strength to hold on, keep going and struggle back toward joy. This month, find that perfect song and play it until it bounces you back. Consider bringing it to your group to share.

## Option D:

### **Get into the Resilience Game**

In her Ted Talk Jess McGonigal talks about the game she developed, SuperBetter, to help herself and others heal after trauma or injuries. Play the game this month (even though it costs \$5) and come to your group ready to share what you discovered. Hear her talk here:

([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)),

## Option E:

### **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? Come to your group with your results and your readiness to share about the process.

# ***Your Question:***

*As always, don't treat these questions like "homework." You do not need to engage every single one. Instead, simply or take a picture **the one** that "hooks" you most and let it lead you where you need to go. And then come to your Soul Matters meeting prepared to share that journey with your group.*

- 1. 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?**
- 2. 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?**
- 3. 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 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.
- 4. How resilient are you when it comes to anger?** Anger and resent 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?
- 5. 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?
- 6. Do you wish your family was more resilient?**
- 7. Is your child more or less resilient because of you?**
- 8. Do you make your religious community more or less resilient?**
- 9. 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?
- 10. 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?**
- 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.

## Recommended Resources:

*As always, this is not required reading. We will not analyze or dissect these pieces in our group. They 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.”*

### **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

## **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

**A Rainy Morning** by Ted Kooser

<http://writersalmanac.publicradio.org/index.php?date=2014/04/25>

“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

**Sweet Darkness** by David Whyte

[http://www.davidwhyte.com/french\\_sweetdarkness.html](http://www.davidwhyte.com/french_sweetdarkness.html)

“You got to know when to hold ‘em, know when to fold ‘em, know when to walk away, and when to run...” - Kenny Rogers

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

**For What Binds Us** by Jane Hirshfield

<http://www.poetryfoundation.org/poem/186177>

## Videos & 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)

### **Chapters by Portia Nelson**

A longer poem on the roads we take which garner our resilience  
<http://www.doorway-to-self-esteem.com/autobiography-in-five-short-chapters.html>

### **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)

### **Resilience & Putting The Pieces Back Together**

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1CvExk1TVM0>

### **Resilience: More Than What is Inside Us**

[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=eHyv\\_LFXkVU](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=eHyv_LFXkVU)

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

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

### **Resilience and Health**

The secret of making your day harder!  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=whPuRLi4c0>

### **Resilience Through Humor:**

If Lesbians Said The Stuff Straight People Say  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=I9dt5SEiWHM#t=73>

## Articles:

### **Ten Ways to Become More Resilient**

Kendra Cherry  
<http://psychology.about.com/od/crisiscounseling/tp/become-more-resilient.htm>

### **Raising Resilient Nonconformists**

Michelle Richards  
<http://blogs.uuworld.org/parenting/2010/08/09/raising-resilient-nonconformists/>

### **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/>

### **The Heart of Urban Resilience**

Leo Hollis  
<http://www.shareable.net/blog/the-heart-of-urban-resilience-is-trust-not-technology>

### **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>

## 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

## 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>

### From our 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.

## March Events & Resilience:

*Women's History Month*

*Rev. James Reeb murdered (March 11)*

*Susan B. Anthony's Death (March 13)*

*First day of Spring (March 20)*

Join our Soul Matters Facebook page to engage in the theme with participants from all around the US and Canada:

<https://www.facebook.com/groups/soulmatters/>

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