

Resilience—UUFVB Covenant Groups—February 2018

Chalice Lighting

May we know once again that we are not isolated beings,
but connected, in mystery and miracle,
to the universe, to this community and to each other.

Check-in: How is your spirit right now?

Centering: Find a stillness, hold a stillness, let this moment of silence ease your soul.

Opening Reading

On the threshold of spring,
let us take heart that we have ridden the whitecaps of winter.
On the threshold of spring,
let us celebrate the residue of lingering crystalline whiteness,
even as we cheer on the crocus and forsythia.
On the threshold of spring,
let us affirm this circle whose caring has warmed us through the deepest of chills.
On the threshold of spring,
let us be in this moment of threshold.
Astride these seasons of our living,
let us be present again to one another.

Topic Exploration

Resilience refers to an individual's ability to "bounce back" from adverse life events. There exist undeniable biological differences in the individual's response to stress. Genes through their interaction with the environment during brain development, help shape the neural circuits involving fear, reward, emotional regulation and social behavior that are thought to facilitate resilience. However, recent research has demonstrated that individuals can become more resilient at any age.

A recent *New York Times* article by Tara Pope entitled, "How to Improve Resilience in Middle Age," noted that more mature individuals may be better equipped to develop the skills needed to increase resilience. By middle age we are able to draw insights from life experiences and generally have developed an increased ability to manage our emotions and a concern for future generations (*Adam Grant, U Penn*). Ms. Pope offers seven strategies for building resilience:

1. Practice optimism. Avoid worse-case scenarios. Surround yourself with optimistic people.
2. Reframe your situation; the end of a marriage becomes the beginning of a new life.
3. Don't personalize it by placing all of the blame on yourself.
4. Remember other times in your life when you have survived and moved on from significant setbacks.
5. Support others. Studies have shown that resilient individuals demonstrate higher levels of gratitude and empathy.
6. Take stress breaks; give your body and your mind time to rest and recover.
7. Challenge yourself: creating then conquering stressful situations is said to help habituate your body to stress.

Questions / Sharing

1. Are there strategies you would like to add or subtract from the list above? Are there strategies that seem to have been written with you in mind?
2. Describe a time in your life when you successfully employed one of the above strategies to recover from a difficult life event.
3. A strong, supportive adult presence is often cited as strong factor in the development of resilience in children. Did someone ever play this role for you? Describe him or her.
4. Do you believe that human beings grow stronger with adversity? Why or why not?
5. Some especially resilient people are able to see failure as a helpful form of feedback. Describe a time when failure ultimately made a positive difference in your life.

Closing Reading Hear the poet Jane Hirshfield's outlook on resilience. Entitled "Optimism," she writes:

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.

Check-out and reflections on today's session: How were your needs for connection and spiritual growth met by this session? Do you feel your voice was heard?

Extinguish the Chalice

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.

Housekeeping