

Perseverance

Unitarian Universalist Fellowship of Stony Brook, NY, September 2012

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Opening Words (from a story told by Heather Forest)

Once, in Korea, there was a soldier who returned to his family from the war. They were very glad to see him, very glad. But he wasn't able to be there really. You see, he was shell-shocked. Suffering from post-traumatic stress, we would say these days. Anyway, his wife and children felt sad to see him that way. He didn't want to get up in the morning, he didn't want to go out and find work, he didn't want to play. Some time went by and still he seemed no different. Worried and wanting her husband back, the wife visited the village shaman. She asked for a love potion to win his heart once again. The shaman said he could prepare such a potion, but would need for it the whisker of a tiger. What! exclaimed the woman, the whisker of a tiger? The shaman repeated, If you want the love potion, you will bring me the whisker of a tiger. So the woman went off to find the whisker of a tiger.

She stopped at the supermarket and bought a large piece of meat, then she walked out into the countryside to the cave where people believed a tiger lived. She waited in the bushes and sure enough, a tiger ambled by and went into the cave. Gingerly the woman put the piece of meat on the ground, then ran back to the bushes to see what would happen. After a while, the tiger emerged, headed straight for the meat and ate it up. Then he lay down for a nap. Everyday the woman repeated her actions. She brought the finest meat for the tiger to eat. Everyday she put the meat closer and closer until the tiger would allow her to remain in the vicinity while he ate. Soon the tiger would allow her to sit beside him as he ate. Soon the tiger would allow her to pet him as he ate, and stay beside him as he napped. Soon the tiger would eat out of her hand. So one day, after many months of acquaintance with the tiger, the woman sat beside him as he napped. She quietly took a pair of scissors from her pocket and gently cut off one of his whiskers. The tiger never even woke up.

Triumphant, the woman ran all the way back to the shaman's house. I have it! she called. I have brought you the whisker of a tiger. Now prepare the love potion. The shaman was duly impressed. It is indeed a whisker from a tiger, he said. How did you get it? The woman told him her story. The shaman said, you are wise. Then he threw the whisker into the garbage. I don't need this. You don't need this. If you had the perseverance to approach the tiger so carefully and respectfully, to go slowly and allow

him to proceed at his own pace, you have what you need to find your husband once again. Now go home. So she did.

Chalice Lighting and Silence

Review of Covenant(s) or Portions (optional)

Check-in

Topic Introduction

The word perseverance comes from the Latin and means to see things through to the end. The Chinese character for perseverance is written as a knife poised over a heart. It is often the same character as the one used for patience.

Our lives are a journey the specific end of which is not fully known. In many ways we live amidst uncertainty and, in the uncertainty of life, perseverance is always a choice, as is the choice to let go of something or someone. Is perseverance always desirable? How do we know when the choice to persevere will be or has been worth the time and struggle? Rubem Alvez, a Brazilian theologian, wrote "So let us plant dates, even though/we who plant them will never eat them./ We must live by the love of what we will never see./ . . ."

Quotations

Activity (*Facilitators-- give out paper and pens. This activity should be given 10 minutes (5 min per question) and will be used as a springboard for the discussion questions.*)

Perseverance requires the qualities of patience, courage, imagination, strength, flexibility, creativity, persistence, hope, optimism, discipline, the long view -- just to name a few.

1. When you think about perseverance, what images come to mind? Can you draw one such image, or describe it in writing?
2. Think of a time when you showed perseverance. Write down the inner qualities, people, and circumstances that enabled your perseverance. As you consider your list, which two factors do you think might have been the most influential?

Questions for Group Reflection

1. If you are willing, share the image and the experience you wrote about a moment ago or another one that comes to your mind.
2. Share some of the inner qualities on your list that promote perseverance. What other factors have helped you "see things through to the end" in the past? What are the most important?

3. What personal qualities or circumstances can get in the way of your ability to persevere?
4. Who are the people in your life who have taught you the most about perseverance? Where else have you learned about perseverance (animals, scripture, poems, books, etc.)?
5. Can you recall a time when you did not persevere and wish you had? Or a time when you persevered and wish you had not?
6. Looking back at this point, what factors have led you to choose to persevere and what factors have led you to let go of a job, a person, a goal, a dream?
7. After this consideration of perseverance, how do you feel now about the story we heard at the beginning of the session? What was your initial reaction to it?

Likes and wishes

Considering both the topic and the group process, was there anything especially interesting, exciting or helpful about this session? Was anything missing, confusing, annoying or hurtful?

Closing words and Chalice extinguishing

Mario Cuomo, in an interview given a few days after he lost the gubernatorial election in New York State, compared campaigns to life. Campaigns, and life, he says, "start with conjecture and hope, they are filled with unexpected gifts, undeserved rejections, inexplicable pain, incredible joy, confusion, vindication, everything. . . . And there's significance to it. . . I'm saying this is a metaphor for everybody's life, that it is in the living, it is in the campaigning, that you make your mark. Sometimes you win. Sometimes you win." (NY Times 11/13/94)

Quotes on Perseverance

The difference between perseverance and obstinacy is that one comes from a strong will, and the other from a strong won't. ~Henry Ward Beecher

When the world says, "Give up,"/ Hope whispers, "Try it one more time." ~Author Unknown

When you come to the end of your rope, tie a knot and hang on. ~Franklin D. Roosevelt

Consider the postage stamp: its usefulness consists in the ability to stick to one thing till it gets there. ~Josh Billings

Perseverance is the hard work you do after you get tired of doing the hard work you already did. ~Newt Gingrich

If you work hard at something but find that too many obstacles prevent you from accomplishing it, you may have to give up. In that case, you shouldn't get depressed. Conditions aren't right. Perhaps this will change, perhaps it won't. You are not a failure.
~Master Sheng Yen

It's not that I'm so smart, it's just that I stay with problems longer. ~Albert Einstein

Don't be discouraged. It's often the last key in the bunch that opens the lock. ~Anon

The great majority of men are bundles of beginnings. ~Ralph Waldo Emerson

If we are facing in the right direction, all we have to do is keep on walking. ~Buddhist Saying

To live in this world you must be able to do three things: to love what is mortal; to hold it against your bones knowing your own life depends on it; and, when the time comes to let it go, to let it go. ~ Mary Oliver

People often say that motivation doesn't last. Well, neither does bathing - that's why we recommend it daily. ~Zig Ziglar

Never think that God's delays are God's denials. Hold on; hold fast; hold out. Patience is genius. ~Georges-Louis Leclerc

Most people never run far enough on their first wind to find out they've got a second.
~William James

A door opens to me. I go in and am faced with a hundred closed doors. ~Antonio Porchia, Voces, 1943, translated from Spanish by W.S. Merwin

Look at a stone cutter hammering away at his rock, perhaps a hundred times without as much as a crack showing in it. Yet at the hundred-and-first blow it will split in two, and I know it was not the last blow that did it, but all that had gone before. ~Jacob A. Riis