



## Riding the Waves

BY REV. CHRISTINE ROBINSON, ALBUQUERQUE, NEW MEXICO

Ten adults face a layoff, a messy divorce, a big mistake, serious health problems, etc. You know, all the stuff of life that launches any of us into unwelcome, uncomfortable, inevitable change. Three of those adults sail through, seemingly without much distress, and quickly remake their lives. Five endure a period of misery and difficulty, find their balance and energy on some new life path, learn, grow, and recover with new insights. One takes longer and needs more help, but also finally emerges from the times of trial. One never really recovers.

Ten congregations confront a problem—a change in ministers, building demands, budget deficits, employee issues, a predator among the people, a leaking roof, a beloved elder enveloped in scandal, or perhaps a dreary season of deaths. Some members organize with gusto to do what needs to be done. Some become mired in controversy and blame, gossip and meanness, and don't really ever solve the problem. Some lose heart completely and never recover.

The differences between these ten people or congregations probably don't have much to do with the degree of disruption from change, or how devastating the mistake, how serious the illness, how big the deficit or how difficult the loss. The difference between those who thrive after difficult, unwelcome changes and those who continue to struggle has much more to do with that illusive quality called resilience, a combination of personal maturity, an outlook on life, and a set of skills and experiences which can be brought into difficult situations.

More than a few of us have been catapulted into an unwelcome, uncomfortable time of change by economic conditions and/or the challenges we experience as our health shifts, as we and our parents grow older, as children and spouses and relationships endure difficulties. Our lives are a succession of changes, incremental and disruptive, happy and miserable, and we have to cope, learn, adapt, and let go—over and over and over.

Nor do those changes come politely at the predictable and manageable rate of, say, one per year, but rather pile up on each other quite unfairly. In spite of that, most of us manage to scrape up enough resilience to deal with many demanding dynamics more or less as they come. In the end, you don't get out of childhood without developing a fair number of the skills of resilience. Every single one of us is a monument to the human ability to cope with change, tragedy, social ills, crisis, growth, aging, happiness, grief, turns of fortune and a host of other challenges. You are a resilient person.

But you may not feel resilient enough—enough to cope with aging and family changes *and* an uncertain economy, for instance. Or you may not feel resilient enough to handle the demands of changing job circumstances year after year. Or you may wonder if you are resilient enough to go to memorial service after memorial service as friends and loved ones die. You may wonder how to guarantee that you'll bounce back from health problems or relationship changes or just the normal slings and arrows of life. You may be aware of how much you have weathered but wonder what is in store for the future.

And you'd be right to wonder. We can pretty much guarantee that much is in store for the future—yours and everyone else's. As the poet Donald C. Babcock suggests, we're all like ducks on the heaving Atlantic, and while we can smooth our feathers to keep them in top condition, and peer at the sky to discern changes in the weather, mostly we ride waves which we only partly understand, buoyed by forces

# Quest

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

A monthly for religious liberals

### THINKING ABOUT RESILIENCE

- RIDING THE WAVES  
*Christine Robinson*
- RESILIENCE AS SPIRITUAL STRENGTH  
*Jaco B. ten Hove*
- STRONGER AT THE BROKEN PLACES  
*Teresa Schwartz*
- OBSERVATIONS AT SOUTHWEST  
ATLANTA NATURE PRESERVES  
*Marti Keller*
- FROM YOUR MINISTER  
*Meg Riley*
- RESOURCES FOR LIVING  
*Lynn Ungar*
- I BEGAN TO ASK EACH TIME. . .  
*Audre Lorde*

we can feel but not control. And mostly, we enjoy the ride anyway.

But there are things we can do and ways we can live to enhance our resilience—our ability to bounce back after disruptions and adjust to change. There are things we can do to be of assistance to others and ways we can help the children in our care to develop their ability to bounce back. There are qualities of group life, too, that enhance resilience, such as open communication, steady leadership, well-articulated goals, care for individuals and attention to mission, congruence between authority and responsibility, that sort of thing. Such shared habits are a kind of basic hygiene that can help communities stay strong and elastic.

The equivalent for individuals includes things you've heard about many times—the basic hygiene of good mental and physical health. It's about eating well, exercising and getting your check-ups; about getting out in nature, tending to our spiritual lives; about developing networks of family, friends, and community.

We all know these things and we re-learn how important they are with every crisis in our lives. But it is so easy, when things are going well, to get too busy to do this work. Often people say—when they get to the other side of a crisis—that the silver lining in that cloud was how they were reminded about the importance of those resilience-building practices.

An important part of our ability to recover from extreme change or stress is the community that enfolds us. That points to one of the reasons World War II vets seemed to do better as a group reintegrating to civilian life than Viet Nam War vets. WW II vets returned to a society that was in a healthier place, where their experiences were honored, where wartime sacrifices had been widely shared, including by civilians, and where there were resources available to re-tool their lives.

In contrast, Viet Nam vets returned to significant chaos, lack of recognition (even at times a sense of being shamed) and disruptive inflation. They were surrounded by things that were out of their control. If they also struggled with chaotic families, were not inclined to become a part of a religious or civic community, or had no friends, their innate resilience was often overcome.

There's another aspect to the issue of how relationships affect resilience. Researchers who work with children who grew up in situations of significant social distress suggest that the one kid on the block who goes off to college and makes a major success of herself had something that the other kids, for whatever reason, didn't have. She had someone in her life who gave her the message that she was special, loved, or gifted. This someone was usually not a parent.

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They studied a group of kids whose circumstances tended to include parents who were too beaten down to pay them much attention. The person who made a kid feel like their life was worth something was often a teacher, a neighbor, a coach, or a more distant relative like an aunt or grandfather. That is to say, it was somebody like you and me. Just tuck away that possibility as you go about your business. It probably doesn't just apply to kids. Somebody around you may need to know that they are special and worthy, and with a little caring attention you might just make a real impact on their life.

Another point worth noting is that the kids from these challenging situations

who thrived seemed to be able to collect sponsors. They knew how to ask for help, how much help they could appropriately ask for, and how to express gratitude for that help. Therefore, people reached out to them and gave them that extra helping hand.

I see this “sponsor effect” at work all around me, not just in young people, and in folks whose challenges are very ordinary. There are some people who get all the help they need and who leave those who help them feeling glad they did. There are skills involved in this kind of outreach, skills we should cultivate in ourselves and which we can help our children acquire.

But asking for help is hard for many of us. We UUs tend to be “rugged individualist” types. The same values that sent some of us out of our childhood faiths looking for religious answers that made more sense to us also tend to make us pretty resistant to accepting help or trying out others' answers for ourselves. We are often willing to offer our shoulder for others to cry on, but are much less willing to be seen at our most discouraged. However, we are more resilient in the long run if we find appropriate ways to ask for the help we all need. When our kids see us doing this it is easier for them to catch on to this life skill as well.

Another thing that researchers have learned about resilient people is that their lives are authentic to their innermost values. When we're not authentic we have an especially hard time with change and crisis because we have to manage both our real feelings and the mask we project to the world. Institutions true to their core mission are much more resilient than those that have drifted away from their purpose, which is all too common.

I got an email recently from a colleague who has gone into search for a new congregation because the one she currently serves, much as she loves them, is “more interested in curating their past than living their present or

their future.” *Curating the past* might be an appropriate mission for a history museum, but it will weaken a church because it is so far from what a church is really for.

People and institutions whose energy is inordinately invested in things outside of themselves—like their authority, status symbols, physical appearance or buildings—have a harder time dealing with life’s blows than those who know themselves to be inwardly sturdy, persons of integrity or loving communities. Those qualities are much less subject to the erosions of life than automobiles, jobs or physical beauty.

The ability to think for oneself, to reflect independently, to go against the crowd when necessary is often a part of resilience. The duck who thinks he’s a swan has a much more difficult time balancing in the waves than a duck who knows he’s a duck.

J. Nardini survived a Japanese concentration camp, and went on to become a psychiatrist. He remembers observing that a significant part of the ability to survive the terrible conditions prisoners of war faced was the ability to separate themselves from their surroundings, to hold on to a belief that they were better than their circumstances suggested. “They can treat us like animals, but that doesn’t make us animals,” someone told him. Of course it is true, and those who can hold that kind of thought do better in adversity than those whose sense of self melts into the background abuse more easily.

In the final analysis, those who know deeply *who* they are also know that they *remain* that person no matter what the circumstances of their lives.

Resilient people are willing to learn from their problems, crises, and mistakes, and that learning not only enhances their life’s skill set, it gives any predicament a positive place in their life’s story. The person who can say, “I went to prison but I learned a marketable skill” or “My partner left me and I

was forced to realize how selfish I had been, and why”—that’s a person who has not only stayed afloat in a storm, but has learned to swim.

Our resilience is also related to some of our core beliefs about life. For instance, those who believe that good people are rewarded with riches are in for an especially hard time when things don’t go well for them economically. Not only do they have to pinch pennies, they also have to ask themselves what they did wrong to deserve this downturn. It doubles the pain, and sorting out one’s theology as well as one’s finances can take a long time. It’s much better, in good times and in bad, to cultivate a sense of gratitude for what we have and confidence in our ability to manage whatever comes.

Finally, resilience is related to having a purpose beyond one’s self and a large enough view of life to see one’s situation fitting into a larger scheme. Cultivating those two items are the tasks of one’s spiritual life, and we UUs have a variety of ways of doing that. You might think about the spiritual life as rooted in being a child of God or the universe, or as springing from being a part of the human race, each member with inherent worth and dignity. You might think of your great purpose as growing in love and service, or raising a child, or adding to the store of human knowledge.

However you conceive of life’s purpose, your beliefs and intentional living are important to your resilience. Worship, meditation, prayer, and reflection are practices that help us honor our strivings while recognizing that our ultimate values are not at risk. This may be, most of all, what helps us recover from the large outrages and little blows to our hopes and intentions that seem to come with life.

You were born to live. You came out of this world and into this world to enjoy creation and contribute to it. If you were raised in a Unitarian Universalist home, perhaps you were

dedicated to a life of love and service for and among your fellow human beings. If you weren’t, perhaps you’d like to adopt that dedication anyway, as one set of watchwords for life on the heaving ocean.

You may ask the goddess for the serenity to accept the things you cannot change; you may look to the example of Jesus for the courage to change the things you can; you may simply rely on accumulated human wisdom for the cues you need to discern the difference. But attention to that spiritual part of your life and its meaning is vital to your resilience.

Even if you feel presently battered by some storm, you have ridden the waves of life successfully, resiliently. With a little help from our friends, our faith, and our basic habits of self-care, with the discipline to live out our values, ask for help when we need it and tend to our communities and relationships, we mostly manage to be resilient enough to ride even the big waves of change that are part of every life.

If we are wise and lucky we’ll also notice the glory of the storm and enjoy the thrill of the ride, and know ourselves finally safe in the boundless and beautiful sea. ■

One of the elements that creates resilience in our lives is knowing that we can count on a community that will both support us throughout our spiritual journey and call us toward a vision of who we can become.

Please help the CLF reach out as that community of resilience by giving \$100, or the amount that is right for you, by visiting [www.clfuu.org](http://www.clfuu.org) or by calling **1-800-231-3027**.





## Resilience as a Spiritual Strength

BY JACO B. TEN HOVE,  
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One thing I've learned about the word "resilience" is that it initially came from the field of metallurgy, describing how certain metals when heated will lose their shape, but when cooled can amazingly recover their original form, resiliently. So we've come to define resilience generally as being "able to withstand or recover from difficult conditions," which accurately makes it a reactive skill, often in response to external dynamics.

I think, for instance of baseball superstar Jackie Robinson, who in the 1940s and 50s showed immense resilience as the first African American to play in the major leagues, patiently enduring near-constant racial harassment from fans and fellow players alike.

We can also honor the high degrees of resilience required and shown in places hit by natural disasters, such as Japan, Haiti, Sumatra or New Orleans, just to name a few. Meanwhile, stresses and repercussions around the current political climate in the United States call for great resilience from many of us.

All of which suggests that resilience can also be an ongoing quality of internal strength and hardiness, producing a supple capacity for prospering amid whatever difficult conditions might emerge. It can be an overarching practice—intentionally building a resilient way of life, both individually and together.

Resilience is not about merely recovering from one trial or another, one after another. Resilience is also a proactive skill and a way of life, both personally and in community.

As resilience has risen as a topic of interest, many global studies have explored how diverse populations have demonstrated various degrees of it. For instance, *Community Resilience: A Cross-Cultural Study* (from the Wilson International Center and the Fetzer Institute) identifies qualities that appear to be characteristic of more and less resilient communities.

Three experiences are usually part of low resilience settings: people feel displaced, insecure and voiceless. They do not feel like they have a place where they belong; they are anxious about their safety, their future or both; and they are not feeling heard. Displaced, insecure and voiceless, none of us would feel very resilient.

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### Resilient communities full of resilient people. I know it can happen.

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In contrast, people in settings of high resilience, besides not experiencing those three feelings, generally portray a significant overall common characteristic: they stay in touch with the core, defining essence of their community. And when challenges or adversity arise, they believe they can change things for the better. They resiliently manage to find a way back to expressing that defining essence—their purpose for and mission in being a community together.

What I take from these comparisons is confirmation that resilient community is shaped by collective thought—a mutuality of purpose. Without that shared purpose a group of people will feel disjointed, more likely to experience the painful effects of low resilience. In the same way that the best medical care attempts to both repair damage as necessary and suggest good preventative behavior that builds physical resilience and helps avoid more trips to the clinic, so, too, can we look at our life in community.

We may be well aware of the problems that besiege us, and that our efforts to fix what goes wrong or is unfair are important. But we can also build systemic resilience that proactively improves the odds for strong communities that will ride relatively smoothly over whatever bumps are ahead. Mutuality of purpose can be seen in any community's common sense of identity, expressed by its shared value system and collective spiritual strength.

The eminent historical scholar Howard Zinn is also encouraging:

*When you have models of how people can come together, even for a brief period, it suggests that it could happen for a longer period. When you think of it, that's the way things operate in the scientific world, so why not socially? As soon as the Wright brothers could keep a plane aloft for 27 seconds, everyone knew from that point on that a plane might be kept aloft for hours. It's the same socially and culturally....*

*We've had countless incidents in history where people have joined together in social movements and created a spirit of camaraderie or a spirit of sharing and togetherness... If true community can stay aloft for 27 seconds, it is only a matter of time before such a community can last for hours.*

Resilient communities full of resilient people. I know it can happen.

As much as I strive for sustainability, I yearn for resilience, which shines as a somewhat brighter beacon for me these days. Resilience is a reasonable, personal, inviting path, actively honoring our Unitarian Universalist principle of "respect for the interdependent web of all existence of which we are a part." I see it as a spiritual strength to be cultivated.

Let the beloved community unfold in sustained resilience. ■



## Stronger in the Broken Places

BY TERESA SCHWARTZ,  
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A famous rabbi once said the truth will set you free. *Trouble is, the truth is truth, whether we like it or not.* The truth is that we will all break in this life. That's how we learn to recover.

I've had a few orthopedic surgeries over this year; I've spent most of the last twelve months in physical therapy. I like PT because there's a certain sense of community there. We all have no illusions: we are all broken—and in some quantifiable, diagnosable way.

Physical therapy can be a pain in the butt. Three times a week, in fact. Often, it's just painful. After an injury or surgery, the body creates scar tissue. Flesh grows back darker, raised. On horses it's called proud flesh. Proud flesh; it's a badge the skin wears. It is stronger, which is good. The tissue is stiffer, though, which is not so good, especially in a joint that's supposed to move. And so, over and over again, I practice bending.

My therapist told me that I can only heal by breaking. Breaking up the tissue, over and over again. The truth will set us free. Sometimes, the truth makes us stronger.

The other day, my five year-old son found my three-pound hot pink barbells in the basement. They had gotten lonely under an end table for a little while—by which I mean three years. He recognized them, but didn't know the word for them. He calls them "strengtheners." We go on, day by day, lifting the weights of our lives, hoping to be a bit better, or at least to have triceps like Michelle Obama.

You feel sore afterwards. It turns out that soreness is actually tiny, tiny tears in the muscles. It's through breaking

## Observations at Southwest Atlanta Nature Preserves

BY REV. MARTI KELLER,

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Stunning in their endurance,

despite chain saws and sewage spills,  
mounds of old tires, garbage, plastic bottles that blanket creek banks;  
despite the invasive plants:

English Ivy, Privet and Chinaberry trees carried here  
for decoration, for erosion control, literally smothering the natives;

The million year plants have persevered, even resurrected in the living soil of a nearly extinct forest.

Wary coyotes still patrol their territory.

Frogs and herons find the remaining clear running streams, the almost hidden springs. Watchful resident birds and migrating warblers still nest and rest from their long journeys,

despite human incursion, degradation and care-lessness.

I have re-learned something about resilience  
from this moody summer, drowning and baking the land,  
from this overlooked place:

How living things want to live.

How a centuries-old tree, a lucky accident of survival, can generate and sustain new growth.

How limbs may flexibly bend and not break,

but even when limbs break, life can refashion itself.

Gaping holes can shelter magnificent mushrooms.

Creek beds can fill up, change course in a single afternoon,  
whether or not we can bridge over them.

*From Hardihood: A Series of Prose Poems*

the body that it knows how to grow stronger. Resilience is the ability to grow stronger at the broken places.

This month brings the Jewish High Holy Days—the New Year, Rosh Hashanah, followed ten days later by Yom Kippur, the Day of Atonement. The days in between are known as the Days of Turning—a time devoted to fixing what has broken in one's relationships. There is wisdom in admitting that our brokenness is how to make a new start.

At Mt. Sinai, Moses received the commandments from God. He descended the mountain and saw his people dancing around a golden calf, an idol. And Moses smashed the tablets bearing the

original commandments, and they shattered to bits.

Later on, Moses received a new set of tablets. But what became of the broken pieces? In the Talmud it says the broken pieces remained precious. They were placed in the most sacred place—the Ark of the Covenant, alongside the intact commandments.

Mystical Judaism teaches that the Ark of the Covenant is a symbol of the human heart. And there, in our hearts, brokenness and wholeness live side by side; we carry them wherever we go.

The Chassidic Rabbi Menachem Mendel of Kotzk may have said it best: "There is nothing more whole than a broken heart." ■



## From Your Minister

BY MEG RILEY  
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Times that are hard require more spiritual practice for me. This past year, I've been hard at work strengthening my spiritual systems to create more resilience. For me, stronger resilience requires building flexibility, love, agility, and willingness.

How do I build these component pieces of resilience? Each one takes attention and time.

When it comes to flexibility, I've realized that I need to have more of it physically, emotionally, spiritually. It's hard to admit, but I can get kind of set in my ways. Fluidity can freeze up, often from judgments petty or large which I silently render, ranging from The Correct Way to Load the Dishwasher to What it Means to Be A Good Person.

In this year of challenge and difficulty, I ramped up my environment to build in more flexibility. I took up physical practices to increase my flexibility—deep-water aerobics and yoga. But more than that, realizing that I was beginning to feel orderly to the point of controlling in my home, I invited in roommates, including a young woman with a baby and a seven-year-old kid. They altered my landscape in many ways, including letting go of neatness and order. What's wrong with a floor covered in Legos and tables covered with mashed rice? It keeps me flexible.

Love is central to resilience, and I also invited in new housemates to increase the love flowing in my household. What makes you ooh and ahh more than a baby playing peek-a-boo? Well, maybe kittens. So I got a couple of them, too. They mostly get along with another roommate's dog. Having a diverse household, in terms of species and all kinds of other things, makes

love bigger and keeps my heart open. My spiritual practice is to ground myself in love and I don't get out of bed in the morning until I feel my taproot touching deeply into love.

Some days that is much harder than others. I look at the news in the morning, and afterwards I am often angry at the greed or indifference or cruelty that I see reflected in the world. I do not feel in the least bit loving. I want to strike back. And, though I am committed to taking strategic action to stop greed and cruelty, doing so with the goal of punishment doesn't work any better in the big world than it does in a family. The retribution of "I want you to feel as bad as I feel so you know how it feels" has never moved life forward. It's different energy to say, "What you are doing is hurting the world and I am going to do what I can to stop you" than to say "You should suffer for what you have done."

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**For me, stronger resilience requires building flexibility, love, agility, and willingness.**

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After reading the news, I meditate on a reading that centers me in love. My taproot of love grounds me with the centuries of resistance around the world, often by indigenous people, poor people, people of color, vulnerable, marginalized people. I ground myself in the strength of the massive numbers of people who resist tyranny daily. Only when I am there do I feel the strength to face another day with love and humility.

Developing agility means that I need to be able to pivot, on a moment's notice, to adjust to what is happening. Things change quickly. My best weekly practice for this is my improv class, where rule #1 is to say *Yes* to whatever is happening—whatever the other improvisers offer up. I might be acting under the impression that a scene I'm in is

taking place in the middle of a forest in Germany, but when my improv partner indicates that we're in downtown London—I go to London without looking back! Improv is a way to playfully build agility, but I have many opportunities to do it in other ways each day.

Agility's pivot may mean offering a sincere apology for making an assumption or using language that is hurtful to someone. It may mean realizing that I am over my edge, so I abruptly turn off media and go to bed. It may mean stopping a conversation I am in the middle of, when I cannot proceed in a way that is kind. Agility allows me to stay awake to the truth each moment offers and not ground my identity in the belief that what is true in one moment will be true forever.

Finally, resilience means being willing. Being willing to get up and try again after being knocked down; being willing to try another door when door after door is locked; asking again when the answer has been no, no, no, no, and no. I do not always feel willing. For me, remaining in a willing posture is an ongoing practice of coaxing myself, sometimes bribing myself, sometimes pushing myself hard, sometimes allowing myself to say *Enough* and stop.

And if willingness isn't to be found without violence to myself or others, I respect that. But a simple willingness to show up, day after day, is central to resilience. As Woody Allen said, 90% of life is just showing up.

Flexibility, Love, Agility, and Willingness. We're not going to do any of them perfectly. That's why it made me laugh to find that the concepts I view as central to resilience spell "FLAW." Accepting that we are flawed, that we will have days when we don't want to come out from under our security blanket, and others where we feel we can leap tall buildings in a single bound, gives us compassion not only for ourselves but also for everyone else who is struggling to stay human in an often inhumane world. ■

## REsources for Living

BY LYNN UNGAR, MINISTER FOR LIFESPAN LEARNING, CHURCH OF THE LARGER FELLOWSHIP



You know those little, colorful, ultra-bouncy Super Balls? That's what comes to mind when I think of the word "resilience." People and other beings who are resilient bounce back when they get dropped.

It turns out that how tough you are is not a measure of how well you bounce back. An iron ball is harder and stronger than a ball of synthetic rubber. But if you drop it, it just sits there in the little hole that it dug in the floor. Being flexible is closer to being resilient, but it isn't quite the same thing. Water would be the ultimate in flexibility. It doesn't just go with the flow; flow is its very nature. But if you pour out a bucket of water, it doesn't hold together. It flows off, or evaporates. There's no *there* there.

So what makes a rubber ball so resilient? What can we learn from whatever it is that makes balls bounce back?

Well, the first thing that makes a ball bounce is that fact that it lets itself be affected by its environment. When the ball hits the floor it gets pushed in. You can actually see this taking place with an inflatable bouncy ball—Super Balls are much too quick to see it happen. But unlike the iron ball, which holds to its shape no matter what, the rubber ball bends where it is pushed.

If you're a person, getting dropped almost never looks like getting thrown out of an airplane. But there are plenty of times when it feels like we are falling, or have bottomed out. Like when a friendship ends; when we don't succeed at something that matters to us; when someone we love dies; when we lose a job or a marriage or a physical ability; when someone we trusted betrays us. The list of ways that we can feel like life has dropped us can go on and on.

And when that happens, the first important piece of bouncing back is to bend to the circumstances. It doesn't help to pre-

tend that everything is fine. *No, really just fine.* The things that hurt us hurt us, and we need to be honest about that. The things that hurt us also change us. Which isn't necessarily a bad thing. Most people would say that the times that they have grown the most have been times when they felt dropped—when something changed in a way that was deeply painful and disorienting.

Because what happens to a rubber ball after it bends to the impact of the floor is that it pushes back. If you drop a bag of sand, it will bend to take on the shape of the floor as it hits. But then it just sits there. Resilience, bouncing back, is about the combination of bending to what happens to you and then pushing back. And what allows a rubber ball to push back is that it *remembers its true shape.* And going back to its true shape is what pushes it back up into the air. Resilience is about being able to push back against circumstances because you remember who you really are.

There are lots of things that can help us remember who we are: the support of people who know and love us; stories of other people who've made it through; meditation or prayer that helps us to return to center; any practice that we truly love, whether it be running, singing, writing, sports, gardening, riding a bike, dancing, etc., etc. We may not spring back to our true shape as quickly as a Super Ball, but the better we know who we are and honor what most matters to us, the faster we will be able to reclaim that shape. So even if everything is going smoothly in your life, it's worth paying close attention to what shapes and heals and holds you.

Here's one more important fact about a Super Ball. It's really hard to predict just which way it is going to bounce. Resilience, pushing back into your true shape, doesn't necessarily mean heading right back where you were before you got dropped. Bouncing back most often means heading up in a new direction—either just a shade off from where you were before or to a completely different part of the room. That's what's really exciting about resilience. It allows us to hold on to our true self while adapting to a world that is different, which can mean heading in a new direction ourselves.

Resilient people, resilient communities, even resilient ecologies function

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**Resilient people, resilient communities, even resilient ecologies function that way because they both accept changing circumstances and push back against them....**

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that way because they both accept changing circumstances and push back against them by holding to what is most essential and being prepared to change and adapt in ways that allow for a positive new direction. But here's where the Super Ball analogy breaks down. Super Balls are safe to use in the house because they're soft enough not to break things. They don't change their environment. But resilient people and resilient communities not only change themselves, they can also find ways to change what is around them, pushing back in ways that shape the environment to be healthier or kinder or more compassionate for everyone.

So the next time someone says: "Just roll with it," tell them, "I bounce!" ■





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I began to ask each time: “What’s the worst that could happen to me if I tell this truth?” Unlike women in other countries, our breaking silence is unlikely to have us jailed, “disappeared,” or run off the road at night. Our speaking out will irritate some people, get us called bitchy or hypersensitive and disrupt some dinner parties. And then our speaking out will permit other women to speak, until laws are changed and lives are saved and the world is altered forever.

Next time, ask: What’s the worst that will happen? Then push yourself a little further than you dare. Once you start to speak, people will yell at you. They will interrupt you, put you down and suggest it’s personal. And the world won’t end.

And the speaking will get easier and easier. And you will find you have fallen in love with your own vision, which you may never have realized you had. And you will lose some friends and lovers, and realize you don’t miss them. And new ones will find you and cherish you. And you will still flirt and paint your nails, dress up and party, because, as I think Emma Goldman said, “If I can’t dance, I don’t want to be part of your revolution.”

And at last you’ll know with surpassing certainty that only one thing is more frightening than speaking your truth. And that is not speaking.

*by Audre Lorde, from a talk given in 1977, published in her collection Sister Outsider by Crossing Press in 1984.*

