

Persistence is a Group Activity



CB BEAL

*Justice and Peace
Consulting*

When Rev. Michael Tino reached out to me and asked me to reflect on persistence, I laughed and laughed. The dictionary definition of persistence calls it “an obstinate continuance in a course of action in spite of difficulty or opposition.” As a person with ADHD, I am pretty much the opposite of the definition of persistence. My squirrel brain is easily distracted and finds anything new more interesting than something old. I have been known to make to-do lists and then think I have already done the task. I am then surprised that my laundry is still in the bag by the door because I was sure that I had done laundry. I mean, I wrote it down!

This essay is already three days late.

In 2017, U.S. Senator Elizabeth Warren of Massachusetts read a letter from Coretta Scott King into the record on the Senate floor. As she continued to read it, Republican leaders, including Senate Majority Leader Mitch McConnell told her to stop. After much back and forth, the Republican majority voted to silence her for the remainder of the hearings.

Afterward, McConnell explained himself: “She was warned. She was given an explanation. Nevertheless, she persisted.”

That line became a full-throated rallying cry for many people. It resonated deeply within a broad U.S. culture that lays out the idea that persistence in the face of opposition is a sign of strength. Warren didn’t take no for an answer. We love that stuff. We read story after feel-good story of the person who tried for years to accomplish their goal and then did, through persistence.

If only we try hard enough, we are told, we will be able to succeed at whatever we put our mind to. Our single-minded commitment will overcome all obstacles. Persisting, someone decided, is something that a person does or does not do. Keep going. Don’t stop. Continue in the face of opposition. Just Do It.

But hand in hand with that idea is the ugly underbelly that if persisting will get us to our goal, then if we don’t accomplish something, it will be our fault for not continuing. Just Do It. And if you don’t do it, it’s your fault.

Nonsense.

Joking aside, there are plenty of things at which I’ve persisted. I have completed complex tasks, essays written, children fed, courses completed, and painted rooms. But I never did them alone. That’s the myth that we persist independently.

Group Activity, continued on page 3

Quest

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“The best
way out
is always
through.”

ROBERT FROST

in this issue

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PERSISTENCE
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A CLASS ON FEAR
Robert

NOTICE OF CLF ANNUAL MEETING

**GENERAL ASSEMBLY 2023
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PERSISTENCE

What is the value of persistence? When have you struggled with it, or felt its benefits?

MICHAEL

CLF Member, incarcerated WI

Persistence drives people to accomplish great things. I have struggled with persistence throughout my life, I put limits on the tasks I take on, and at times, I take on too many tasks. I keep it up, because I can feel the benefits of 90% of my persistence. ■



PHOTO BY MARCUS DALL COL ON UNSPLASH

RUSSELL

CLF Member, incarcerated in MD

Ever since my first incarceration at age 14, I have been meditating with the goal to escape my physical body. I sucked at meditation at first! I would either fall asleep trying to do it, or give up out of boredom. But I had read every book about the subject, so I knew that the goal to escape my body was possible.

One day in 2004 while I spent the summer in solitary confinement, I had read a book that gave me the key I was missing. It said: lay down. Plug your ears and cover your eyes, deprive yourself of all senses. Relax. Breathe easy, don't concentrate on anything but leaving your body. Once you feel your body begin to feel loose, commit to forcing your consciousness

up and out of your forehead, and don't stop this course, come whatever may. I did this. I felt the looseness as if I were half asleep and half awake. Then came swirling white light in a cyclone type motion behind my eyelids that began to increase more and more as I looked at it and forced my mind upward and outward. Suddenly the swirling light began to make the sound of a tidal wave, like crashing water in my ears. It grew louder and louder as I forced my concentration upward. Without warning my body felt light as a feather, as if I was laying down on the floor of an elevator as it was going up.

This feeling increased until I felt myself being sucked through the cyclone like a wind tunnel. Within seconds I was surrounded by darkness so thick that it felt tangible. I was aware that

this experience was real and that I was no longer in my body. I sought to prove it by waving my hand before my eyes. What I saw was an imprint of atoms that made up what was my physical hand. I had no words for this experience other than utter amazement. I saw no up or down, only space.

I became afraid that a guard might come up to my door and think I was unresponsive, so I sought a way to get back in my physical vehicle. There were no sounds to hear, nothing to see. Suddenly a thought occurred to me. Since I felt myself ascending, and I saw the light atoms of what made up my hand, if I pushed myself back down into my body I should be okay.

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Group Activity, continued from page 1

I think persistence is not an individual character trait. It's a group activity, and we should understand it as part of community care.

Persistence is collective. It is in the endurance of actions of those who would not give up on me when I gave up on myself. It's the support of our family and friends and even strangers. It's the people who grow our food, even people we pay to help us do those things we cannot accomplish alone. Persistence is in

the people who let me sleep on their couch while I commuted from Philly to N.Y. for school. It's the people who took me in and fed and watered me when my mental health collapsed in on itself. It's the people who send me cards with stickers in them to remind me I am loved. We move forward together.

Persistence is a group of people moving toward their goals. Taking turns, like geese flying in formation, take turns at the front, at that hardest bit. As a community, we take turns with the things we are best at and alternate our effort at the most challeng-

ing activities. We persist collectively in the face of collective opposition.

Wonder what happened to the letter by Coretta Scott King? Senator Jeff Merkley read it into the Senate record. Warren persisted, and then Merkley continued. Someone else completed the task she set out to do.

Persistence is a group activity. All of us persist together, supporting one another when and how we can, accepting the help of others. This group activity is part of how we all get free together. ■

Persistence, continued from page 2

As I thought this idea, I began to feel myself descending. I kept pushing myself down until I suddenly heard voices, the same waves crashing and swirling white light. I had the feeling of being shocked awake as when someone makes a loud bang and one wakes with their nerves buzzing. Then I could feel the shirt over my eyes and toilet paper balls I used as ear plugs in my ears. I moved my hand before my face and saw only the fabric of my state shirt. I jumped up and screamed, "I did it! I escaped my body for real!" I was absolutely ecstatic with joy.

Were I not persistent, I would never have learned what exists beyond the physical world. My reward was a disillusionment about life and death that only comes from personal experience. Never ever give up! ■



PHOTO BY COLTON STURGEON ON UNSPLASH

A Class on Fear

ROBERT

CLF Member, incarcerated MO

The purpose of this class is to give the tools necessary to confront deeper issues based in fear.

Students will learn what fear really is and how it applies to them. They will learn that some of the negativity in their lives is based in their own fears, and hopefully begin a journey on a more positive path. Coming to terms with fear can lead to a more positive outlook on life and on people as a whole. This can result in more peace and happiness for the individual negating the need for negative expression (i.e. violence). Confronting one's unhealthy fears in a positive way can influence genuine change. Students will also learn that some level of fear is natural.

What is fear & how do we master it?

Definition:

- 1) A feeling of alarm, caused by the expectation of danger, fueled by a basic lack of trust.
- 2) Anxious concern.

Judging by these definitions, fear can range from not jumping off a cliff because of the fear of being hurt, or buying coffee because you are running out. Fear can motivate you to do something as well as not to do something.



PHOTO BY MOHAMMAD MIRZAJANI ON UNSPLASH

The 5 Universal Fears:

- Being hurt
- Hurting others
- Abandonment
- Inadequacy
- Losing ourselves

These are the roots of other fears. Everyone has some level of these fears. It's okay and natural. When we allow ourselves to act in ways that affect ourselves or others in negative ways, you may be experiencing an unhealthy amount of one or more of these fears. It's time to confront this within yourself. Let's break down these fears...

Being Hurt:

In what ways can we be hurt?

- Physically: any way to the body
- Mentally: any way to the mind
- Emotionally: any way to emotions
- Financially: any way dealing with money
- Materially: any way to do with material things
- Spiritually: any way to our sense of spirituality

Looking at this list, which one do you think affects you most?

Hurting Others:

In the same ways we can be hurt, others can also be hurt. Some fear hurting others. There are multiple reasons for this fear, but most are attributed to empathy or fear of consequences for doing so.

Abandonment:

This is in greater or lesser degree the fear of being alone or rejected. This fear can lead to poor relationships, isolation, depression, and bottled up feelings. Remember you cannot have healthy relationships if you have no trust.

People who have an unhealthy amount of this fear may contribute to one or more of these categories:

- People who have never dealt with being alone. People who always were alone or away from key members of their development (i.e. parents).

A Class on Fear, continued on page 6

Notice of the CLF Annual Meeting

To all members of the Church of the Larger Fellowship, Unitarian Universalist:

Per Article VII, Sections 1 and 2, of the Church of the Larger Fellowship (CLF) Bylaws, the 50th Annual Meeting will be held via video/telephone conference call and screen sharing on **Sunday, June 11, 2023 at 7:00PM EDT**. To join the meeting, go to www.clfuu.org/joinannualmeeting.

We will be distributing materials electronically to all CLF members for whom we have a current email address, and posting the documents to our website (www.clfuu.org/annualmeeting). All incarcerated members will automatically receive paper copies of the materials along with postage-paid ballots to return. Others may request hard copies mailed to you by sending back the form on the final page of this issue of Quest, or calling the CLF office at 617-948-6150.

All those who have access to the Internet or phone are encouraged to join our meeting via Zoom and participate in the discussion. Meeting materials will include absentee ballots for those unable to attend in person.

The purpose of the meeting is to:

- Report on highlights of CLF activities and finances
- Vote for the following leadership positions (see nominations from Nominating Committee in the packet):
 - Elect three members to 3-year terms on the board of directors,
 - Elect one member to 1-year term on the board of directors to fill a term vacated before the term was finished,
 - Elect one member to a 3-year term on the nominating committee,
 - Elect a clerk and treasurer for one year

We will elect a moderator from among members present to preside at the meeting.

Aisha Ansano, *Board Chair*

If you are a free world member of the CLF and you would like to receive Annual Meeting materials by mail, please use the tear-off form on the final page of this issue to submit your request.

All incarcerated members will automatically receive these materials by mail.

A Class on Fear, continued from page 4

- People who have been in traumatic situations. Socially under-developed individuals.

Inadequacy:

This is the fear of not being “good enough.” This comes from setting your expectations for yourself too high, or from low self-esteem issues that may have a deeper cause that you need to confront. Oddly enough, one common way this fear is expressed is defensiveness, though not all defensiveness is caused by this. Another way this may be expressed is self-defeating attitudes.

Have you ever not done something because you thought you would fail?

Losing Ourselves:

This is the fear of losing our sense of self, how we want to be seen, or what we represent. People who have an unhealthy amount of this fear, may have at one point lived a shallow life with no purpose or direction. Or at another level, live in or worry about the opinions of others too much.

A thought that may go with this fear is, “This is all I have so I have to maintain it.” Some people express this fear with the fear of change.

Have you ever not talked to somebody because they were a “weirdo” and you don’t talk to weirdos?

What fear really boils down to is lack of trust in Yourself, Others, and/or A Higher Power or Greater Power.

That being said, it is perfectly normal to have some fear. We would be dead without it. Fear is normal, fear is natural.

Ask yourself this question:

When have any of my fears caused me to act or think in a way that was negative?

When fear becomes that, or **False Expectations Appearing Real** is when it becomes unhealthy.

Unhealthy fear may affect our judgment and reasoning, it may harm our relationships, and it may affect our spirituality or our sense of purpose.

So how do we balance fear? A way to balance something may be to seek its opposite. There are many schools of thought on the opposite of fear but for the purpose of this lesson see fear as a lack of trust.

If fear is a lack of trust, the first step is to recognize where the lack of trust lies and to take it for what it really is. This does not mean to go around trusting everything!

A lack of trust in self can be helped with a buildup of self esteem.

- Set realistic goals for yourself
- Don’t compare yourself to others
- Learn from mistakes instead of holding them against yourself
- Challenge yourself
- Bask in your achievements, no matter how small
- Force yourself to smile sometimes
- Be honest with yourself

Do not confuse this with ego, which has its roots in self centeredness.

A lack of trust in others is a harder one to balance. First, determine if you are basing this fear off an experience with someone else. Look for another way to assess your relationships.

Trust in relationships is built with honesty and the acts of sharing deep feelings. This often requires you to share your feelings first. Don’t hold others to your own expectations. Learn to appreciate what makes others unique (the world would be boring without it).

A lack of trust in a Higher/Greater power comes with time and development. What’s the difference between a Greater power and a Higher Power?

A Greater power is anything greater than you alone (i.e. an organization, authority member, or a cause/idea). For those who have a Higher power, this comes with building your relationship with your higher power.

The same effort that goes into your other relationships should go into developing your relationship with your greater or higher power.

Become part of a greater purpose. You already have taken the first step. Build upon your knowledge on various subjects.

Keep an emphasis on the question of “why” when searching within yourself. This is only the surface of fear but it does give you a starting point. Remember that this takes time. ■



UUA GENERAL ASSEMBLY PITTSBURGH • JUNE 21 - 25, 2023

Would you like to represent the Church of the Larger Fellowship at General Assembly (GA) this summer?

The CLF is entitled to 22 delegates at the UUA's General Assembly, which will be held both online and in-person in Pittsburgh, PA from June 21-25, 2023. You will be able to attend online or in-person workshops, programs, and worship services. Proof of vaccination for COVID-19 is required to attend in person. As a delegate you will vote on association business during General Sessions. General Sessions will be held from 2:30-5:30pm ET on 6/22-6/24 and

2:00-4:00pm PT on 6/25. Delegates should be able to be online or in person to attend the majority of these General Sessions. CLF delegates vote their conscience on matters related to the denomination of Unitarian Universalism, and are responsible for their own expenses. There is no set registration fee for delegates who are attending only for business virtually at General Sessions.

If you'd like to participate in GA 2023 in this role, please fill out the online application at clfu.org/delegate-application. Visit the UUA's GA website at www.uua.org/ga for details.

FOR YOUR REFLECTION

In this section, we offer questions for reflection based on ideas explored in this issue. You may wish to explore it individually or as part of a group discussion. To submit your reflection for possible inclusion in a future issue of Quest, tear off your answer and mail it back to us using the envelope included in the middle of this issue, or mail a longer reflection separately.

Do you experience persistence as a group activity? When have your relationships with others been a necessary part of reaching a difficult goal?

If you would like us to be able to publish or share your writing in the future, remember to include "You have permission to edit and publish my words" somewhere on your submission.



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