

**Theme for February – Resilience:  
*The Practice of Hope***

**Questions for discussion and discernment on your own, around the table**

*Where do resilience and hope come from? Where does one get them? Hope may be a kind of inspiration, since it comes even when the brain might tell us our life or the world around us is hopeless. If we are resilient, we have gotten past the narrow perspective that tells us we cannot recover. We have learned to fall, and with faith we learn that we will get up again. Maybe hope and resilience mean continuing the journey, walking one step at a time with an unspoken belief that things will change. When the path we walk seems grim and uninspiring, when our hearts are broken, life tests our resilience and our hope, burning away easy answers. In those moments, if we open ourselves to unseen and unknown answers, to grace and possibilities, we may grow more resilient and more capable of hope.*

1. Can you remember a time in your life when you felt that an issue or situation was hopeless but you kept going anyway? How did you maintain hope in a hopeless situation?
2. Did you ever encourage someone who was without hope? Were you able to help and, if so, how? What did you learn from the experience? Did you feel that something larger than yourself was at work?
3. Looking back on experiences of where you needed or utilized hope and resilience, what helped you to maintain hope? For example, do you feel there may have been divine intervention that helped get you through? Was a community of people involved? If not, what kinds of small steps did you take to help you to rise above despair?
4. Do you associate hope with letting go? In other words, does hope require a surrendering or an opening to what will come? If so, how?
5. Think about important issues about which you are currently concerned or have been discouraged. Have you made progress on those issues in the past 10 or 20 years that could give you reason to hope?
6. How much does seeing other people work through adversity help you to have hope? Where have you seen hope within our church community?
7. Have you ever felt hope that deepened your faith? Has Unitarian Universalism affected your experience of hope?
8. Do you feel that hope transcends limitations? What helps you to see that things are transitory and will change?

**Readings and Resources for Reflection:**

The English word hope comes from the Old English hopian, “to wish, expect, or look forward (to

something).” Some suggest a connection with hop on the notion of “leaping in expectation.” Resilience is the power or ability to return to the original form after being bent, compressed or stretched; the ability to recover readily from illness, depression, adversity, or the like; buoyancy.

Hope is the foundation for creativity, inspiration, joy and all those emotions which allow us to transcend ourselves.

— **Verena Kast** in *Joy, Inspiration and Hope*

Hope is the thing with feathers  
that perches in the soul,  
and sings the tune without the words,  
And never stops at all.  
- **Emily Dickinson**

## **ALL ABOUT CHANGE**

by **Thanissaro Bhikkhu**

Insight into change teaches us to embrace our experiences without clinging to them — to get the most out of them in the present moment by fully appreciating their intensity, in full knowledge that we will soon have to let them go to embrace whatever comes next.

Insight into change teaches us hope. Because change is built into the nature of things, nothing is inherently fixed, not even our own identity. No matter how bad the situation, anything is possible. We can do whatever we want to do, create whatever world we want to live in, and become whatever we want to be.

### **Cultivating Hope...**

*Excerpts from a speech by M. Cathleen Kaveny, professor of law and of theology at the University of Notre Dame, given in Baltimore October 21, 2005. She spoke at the inauguration of Loyola College in Maryland's new president, Jesuit Father Brian Linnane.*

What is hope? According to Thomas Aquinas, hope takes as its object "a future good, difficult but possible to obtain." (1) Fundamentally, then, hope is a way of relating to the future, a way of moving beyond and transcending the limitations, the darkness, the injustice of the present day. But it is a particular way of doing so.

First, hope is not to be equated with a sunny, cockeyed optimism. Hope does not pertain to easy or certain things, no matter how good they may seem and how much we miss them right now. Hope is tough: Hope knows there are difficulties and realizes what it will cost to deal with them.

Second, precisely because hope deals with difficulties, it requires hard work. The process of pursuing the object of hope is arduous. Hope demands engagement, not just bare acquiescence. And in fact, hope enables action in difficult times. We do not embark upon a difficult course of action unless we have the hope that we will succeed.

Third, hope is not solitary. The fulfillment of my hope frequently requires activity or assistance from others. Think of those trapped by Hurricane Katrina, hoping for safety, depending for safety upon the rescuers coming in time. Furthermore, I can hope for the good of someone else - provided, according to Thomas, that I am united to them in love and so will their good as my own.(2) By expanding our hearts in love, we also expand the scope for our hope.

Fourth, while the object hoped for has to be in the future, not the past or the present, it doesn't have to be achieved at any specified or certain date.

Cultivating hope has always required us to provide one another with practical assistance in our respective distress - the fruits of our hearts and hands. But we learn from Lynch that it also requires providing one another with the fruits of our hearts and minds - the fruits of our imagination. Practical imagination is a collective project, a fundamental act of human solidarity.

### **Excerpt from WORDS OF WISDOM**

**By Howard Thurman**

[http://www.morehouse.edu/about/chapel/thurman\\_wisdom.html](http://www.morehouse.edu/about/chapel/thurman_wisdom.html)

Look well to the growing edge.  
All around us worlds are dying  
and new worlds are being born;  
all around us life is dying and life is being born.  
The fruit ripens on the tree,  
the roots are silently at work  
in the darkness of the earth  
against a time when there shall be new leaves,  
fresh blossoms, green fruit.  
Such is the growing edge.  
It is the extra breath from the exhausted lung,  
the one more thing to try when all else has failed,  
the upward reach of life  
when weariness closes in upon all endeavor.  
This is the basis of hope in moments of despair,  
the incentive to carry on when times are out of joint  
and men and women have lost their reason,  
the source of confidence when worlds crash  
and dreams whiten into ash.  
Such is the growing edge incarnate.  
Look well to the growing edge.

### **Victoria Safford, Unitarian Universalist minister:**

Our mission is to plant ourselves at the gates of Hope — not the prudent gates of Optimism, which are somewhat narrower; nor the stalwart, boring gates of Common Sense; nor the strident

gates of Self-Righteousness, which creak on shrill and angry hinges... ; nor the cheerful, flimsy garden gate of 'Everything is gonna be all right.

**Excerpt from TAKING PICTURES OF GOD**  
**by Bruce T. Marshall**

As we pursue our goals in life, optimism may lead us to expectations that are unrealistic and ultimately hurtful. Hope advises us to look squarely at the realities that confront us while remaining aware of the possibilities.

Erich Fromm observed, "To hope means to be ready at every moment for that which is not yet born, and yet not become desperate if there is no birth in our lifetime. Those whose hope is weak settle for comfort or for violence, those whose hope is strong see and cherish signs of new life and are ready every moment to help the birth of that which is ready to be born."

It is helpful guidance, I think, whether we are faced with a serious illness, a personal dilemma, or a society that seems determined to destroy itself—not optimism that a particular result will occur, but hope to "see and cherish signs of new life" wherever these may occur.

**ONE ART**  
**By Elizabeth Bishop**

The art of losing isn't hard to master;  
so many things seem filled with the intent  
to be lost that their loss is no disaster,

Lose something every day. Accept the fluster  
of lost door keys, the hour badly spent.  
The art of losing isn't hard to master.

Then practice losing farther, losing faster:  
places, and names, and where it was you meant  
to travel. None of these will bring disaster.

I lost my mother's watch. And look! my last, or  
next-to-last, of three beloved houses went.  
The art of losing isn't hard to master.

I lost two cities, lovely ones. And, vaster,  
some realms I owned, two rivers, a continent.  
I miss them, but it wasn't a disaster.

-- Even losing you (the joking voice, a gesture  
I love) I shan't have lied. It's evident  
the art of losing's not too hard to master

though it may look like (Write it!) a disaster.

### **IN A DIFFICULT TIME**

**By Jud Wolfskill**

After lying on the rock in the sun  
with us, watching the river rise,  
he took  
two steps and  
jumped  
into the green motion.

Let me remember  
how he leapt—throwing his arms  
out, kicking his legs—  
and fell  
hysterical into the depth, and  
suffocated for seconds  
in the cold, but was buoyed  
up, and met the light again,  
grinning.

Let me know again—  
stepping towards a jump—  
how he plunged  
laughing into the dark.

### **PICK YOURSELF UP**

**From the 1936 film: *Swing Time***

**(Lyrics by: Dorothy Fields / Music by: Jerome Kern)**

Nothing's impossible I have found,  
For when my chin is on the ground,  
I pick myself up,  
Dust myself off,  
Start All over again.

Don't lose your confidence if you slip,  
Be grateful for a pleasant trip,  
And pick yourself up,  
Dust yourself off,  
Start all over again.

"Just as despair can come to one another only from other human beings, hope, too, can be given to one only by other human beings." — **Elie Wiesel (b. 1928), writer, activist and Holocaust survivor**

"Hope is like a road in the country; there was never a road, but when many people walk on it, the road comes into existence." — **Lin Yutang (1895-1976), Chinese writer and inventor**

## **SONG OF FIREFLIES**

**By Walt Whitman**

GIVE me the splendid silent sun, with all his beams full-dazzling;  
Give me juicy autumnal fruit, ripe and red from the orchard;  
Give me a field where the unmow'd grass grows;  
Give me an arbor, give me the trellis'd grape;  
Give me fresh corn and wheat--give me serene-moving animals, teaching  
content;  
Give me nights perfectly quiet, as on high plateaus west of the  
Mississippi, and I looking up at the stars;  
Give me odorous at sunrise a garden of beautiful flowers, where I can  
walk undisturb'd;  
Give me for marriage a sweet-breath'd woman, of whom I should never  
tire;  
Give me a perfect child--give me, away, aside from the noise of the  
world, a rural, domestic life;  
Give me to warble spontaneous songs, reliev'd, recluse by myself, for  
my own ears only;  
Give me solitude--give me Nature--give me again, O Nature, your  
primal sanities!  
--These, demanding to have them, (tired with ceaseless excitement,  
and rack'd by the war-strife;)  
These to procure, incessantly asking, rising in cries from my heart,  
While yet incessantly asking, still I adhere to my city;  
Day upon day, and year upon year, O city, walking your streets,  
Where you hold me enchain'd a certain time, refusing to give me up;  
Yet giving to make me glutt'd, enrich'd of soul--you give me forever  
faces;  
(O I see what I sought to escape, confronting, reversing my cries;  
I see my own soul trampling down what it ask'd for.)