

December Theme

Hope: The Practice of Surrender

Hope is being able to see that there is light despite all of the darkness.

~ *Desmond Tutu*

There is a true story about a man who nearly drowned. He was swimming in the ocean when a giant wave pulled him under. The water was strong and the man fought furiously to save his life. At some point, though, he knew his efforts were futile. He stopped fighting and let go of his struggle. But he did not die. As soon as he let go, the wave spat him out of the water. He took a giant breath of air and had an epiphany: surrendering saved his life.

Like the man in the wave we all struggle with something. Feelings, relationships, work, love are all places where we may feel that if we could just have control, we would be able to predict the outcome and thus find more happiness and success. Being independent and in control over one's life is highly valued in our culture. Most of us think of surrender as giving up, that if we lose control, everything will fall apart. But we know that striving to control everything can leave us feeling miserable and isolated. Happiness, peace, and success may manifest when you surrender the need to control. When you sit in the truth of the moment, allowing things to unfold you may find that your intuition begins to guide you more than your ego and the door to hope opens.

Surrendering to the experience, quieting the mind, and acknowledging the reality of the situation can open our hearts to the hope of a positive outcome. Spiritual surrender is a key practice in all the major religions, whether it is to a higher power, non-attachment, or your own instinct. One of the tenets of our Unitarian Universalist faith tells us to respect the interdependent web of life. Accepting the fact that we can't control everything gives us the freedom to receive support from the universe. Surrender is the ultimate act of faith...in the world around us, in the people around us.

Surrendering to the fact that our understanding of the world is limited leaves us open to the hope that life is more full of promise than we can ever imagine. Terrible things happen and yet people are resilient and life continues. There is a peaceful, yet focused energy that accompanies holding the intention of what we want, (hope again) but not forcing ourselves to do it and accepting the possibilities of a different outcome.

If we don't learn how to surrender now, we'll learn it on our deathbed, which is the final life

lesson. Our Sages comment that when we are born our fists are clenched and when we die they open. What would it be like to live with our fists unclenched?

Questions for discussion and discernment on your own, or with each other:

- 1) What am I afraid will happen if I let go of control?
- 2) What would 'letting go' feel like?
- 3) How do you exhibit a life of surrender daily?

- 4) What do you need to surrender to right now?
- 5) How do you deal with feelings of hopelessness?
- 6) How does hope inspire you to take action?

Quotes

“What is the difference
Between your experience Of Existence
And that of a saint?

The saint knows
That the spiritual path
Is a sublime chess game with God

And that the Beloved
Has just made such a Fantastic move

That the saint is now continually
Tripping over Joy
And bursting out in Laughter
And saying, “I Surrender!”

Whereas, my dear,
I’m afraid you still think
You have a thousand serious moves.”
~ *Hafez, Persian Poet*

“Hope is not blind optimism. It's not ignoring the enormity of the task ahead or the roadblocks that stand in our path. It's not sitting on the sidelines or shirking from a fight. Hope is that thing inside us that insists, despite all evidence to the contrary, that something better awaits us if we have the courage to reach for it, and to work for it, and to fight for it. Hope is the belief that destiny will not be written for us, but by us, by the men and women who are not content to settle for the world as it is, who have the courage to remake the world as it should be.”

~ *Barack Obama*

“May your choices reflect your hopes, not your fears.”

~ *Nelson Mandela*

“Remember that sometimes not getting what you want is a wonderful stroke of luck.

~ *Dalai Lama*

“At fifteen life had taught me undeniably that surrender, in its place, was as honorable as

resistance, especially if one had no choice.”
~ *Maya Angelou*

Hope, the practice of Surrender- taking emotional risks in the name of life, in the name of love.

Surrendering to the reality of what is can be difficult when things feel really awful but here is an exercise that may help.

Start by asking, “Where is my struggle?”

Think for a moment about your greatest challenge, whether it is something immediate or ongoing. Connect with that struggle for a moment.

What does this struggle feel like in your body?

Is there tightness, tingling, pain, a frozen feeling? Does your head feel like an overactive beehive buzzing with thoughts and confusion?

What is the inner dialogue that accompanies this struggle? Is there negative self-talk or a voice of doubt? Or perhaps your mind freezes, as if all your thoughts ran away in fear. Recognize the feeling(s) and accept the reality of the situation without attaching any emotional judgments to it. This is important because the feelings that accompany struggle are often more about the *struggle* than the actual challenge.

For example, if your challenge is “lack of clients” then the struggle may be more about the *feelings* associated with not having enough clients, which may ultimately be about not having enough money. A tightened chest, paralyzing fear, nervousness—all of these feelings not only get in the way of intuition and inner wisdom, they may make it harder to attract clients.

When you let go of the anxiety, fear, and indecision and sit in

the truth of the moment, simply accepting the situation as it is, it becomes easier for clarity to filter through and helpful thoughts can be heard. That's the process of surrender. It's a letting go of attachment to outcomes or a feeling that you're not where you're supposed to be. Surrender is accepting what you have. We often hear from Nathan and other spiritual leaders to "Want what you have." Easier said than done when money is tight and time is running out on a deadline. It's something most of us need to be reminded of over and over again. Surrender will help us move beyond our struggles and leads to the last step in this exercise.

Ask a question.

Using the client example above, I might create a question like, "Where is the opportunity to find more clients?" I then pose the question to anyone who will listen: God, the universe, family, friends, even my pets. When I ask the question I notice any accompanying feelings. If panic sets in, I surrender to what is and trust the process will evolve in a way that is productive, even if that just means learning that I have taken a wrong turn.

I might also use my question to incubate a dream or explore in a journal. Regardless, I always get an answer. When I follow through with what I hear, my challenge is solved. When I ignore what I hear, my challenge remains a challenge.

With surrender you realize that the things you worry about so much don't necessarily happen, and you have little control over the things that do. We try to control things because of what might happen if we don't. Control is rooted in fear of the unknowable future. If you stop trying to fix things or change people you allow yourself to trust that things in this moment

are the way they should be. You are OK right where you are. Admitting that we don't have control over everything we can let go of the stress and anxiety that block us from experiencing the beauty in life. Faith in the universe is what we really have. Even when things are scary and it appears the world, as we perceive it, is crumbling this is rarely the truth.

Surrendering to whatever form the present moment takes and being one with that moment is a key practice in spiritual traditions. The intention to surrender one's life and being to a wisdom that transcends human understanding is a building block in spiritual growth. In Christianity, Judaism, and Islam surrender occurs in the practice of contemplative prayer. In Buddhism the notion of non-attachment is a way of surrendering to what simply is.

The act of surrender feeds hope. When we let go of the desire to fix, understand, and control things we leave ourselves open to trust our own instincts and to have faith that the world continues. We are receptive to different possibilities and can hope for something beyond what we know in the present moment.

Perhaps the Serenity Prayer sums it all up.

“God grant me the serenity to accept the things I cannot change, Courage to change the things I can, and wisdom to know the difference.”

When we look at the guidelines from this prayer: acceptance, courage, and wisdom, we can link each with its yogic counterpart: surrender, passionate non-attachment, and discernment. These six concepts can merge and reframe any chaotic situation in your life and breathe the possibility of

serenity and hope into it.

Here are six steps for putting this prayer into practice. Pick one arena of your life in which you are struggling. Practice radical compassion and notice without judgment, as you contemplate, journal, and consider these steps in relationship to that specific struggle:

Acceptance.

What if reality, in its relentless perfection, is giving you exactly what you need to grow, no matter the discomfort of this moment? If this were true, how might your attitude towards the situation change?

Surrender.

If surrender means getting on the winning, rather than losing, side, what would it look like in terms of your behavior, if you were to surrender just a bit in this arena?

Courage.

Remember a time in which you acted with courage. What did it feel like? Where did you feel it in your body? Can you apply anything from this memory of courage to your present situation?

Passionate non-attachment.

To take action and let go of the results of that action is a powerfully freeing practice. How might this practice apply to your situation?

Wisdom.

Remember a time when you acted with wisdom. What

happened? How did it feel? How might that evidence apply to the present situation?

Discernment.

Discernment is perception in the absence of judgment with a view to obtaining spiritual direction and understanding. What judgment do you hold toward this person, place, or situation? If you peeked beneath the judgment what would you find?

“Letting go is the most powerful act of faith, vulnerability, and surrender. It takes guts to jump into the unknown and trust that creativity will build you a net. It takes hope and a tough love for your own heart, to save you from yourself. It’s easy to be somebody else’s hero, but it’s the quest of a lifetime to fearlessly become your own.”

Andrea Balt.