

Sticking It Out

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Life can be difficult, challenging, complicated, unfair, and some days just plain overwhelming. Life is complex. For life can be full of joy, pleasure, and enjoyment too. No matter what you are going through right now, break ups, break downs, swirling confusion, righteous anger, deep grief, or amazing gratitude, awe- inspiring beauty, glorious happiness you can be sure that at some time soon or later there will be a change. The inclination especially when we are going through those difficult life experiences is to want to run away or withdraw. Though this is a perfectly normal response it not a perfect way to get through those times. My listeners, I have to tell you that the only way through those times is to keep going and gain wisdom and courage. So today I am going to talk about wisdom, courage, the art of perseverance and offer some suggestions on how to keep going.

First let's look at a perennial question - How does one get wise? Let me tell you this story.

After a long and hard climb up the mountain, the spiritual seekers found themselves in front of the great teacher. They asked the question that had been with them since the beginning of their journey, "How do we become wise?" Slowly the teacher emerged from the meditative state and said, "Good choices." "But," said the seekers, "how do we make good choices?" "From experience", responded the wise one. "And how do we get experiences?" "Well," and the teacher smiled before answering "by making bad choices." ¹ Ah all life is an experiment and a compilation of experiences, and the best we can hope for is to learn how to thrive in the midst of all experiences.

¹ P 239 Essential Spirituality. Exercises from the World's Religions to cultivate kindness, love, joy, peace, vision, wisdom and generosity. Roger Walsh, M.D. Ph.D. Wiley & Sons. 1999

I wonder- Why is the guru always portrayed as being a top a mountain? Might it have to do with the concept of stepping up and out with determination and resolve? And that of course is what perseverance is- resolve and taking another step forward even when that is the last thing we might want to do or think we can do. It might also have to do with thinking that those who have wisdom are above us, are in some exalted place. I prefer also to think that those who have wisdom had also to journey to elevated realms, had to travel rough paths that led them to higher, more developed and more advanced places. Higher being a metaphor for superior and greater. But those who can teach us the most are not unapproachable not removed or without their own experiences, they are only able to translate experiences bad or good into meaningful and learning moments.

I suggest we all travel a similar path, a path with joys and sorrows, pleasures and pains, plenty and want, dreams and empty visions, obstacles and open gates. It has been said that life never gives us more than we can handle. I am not sure I buy this for I have seen people die of broken hearts, die from bad choices, and shrivel up from the problems and pains. However, I have seen persons survive and even grow in spite of the difficulties. I suspect having an inner strength, having external supports, having a sense of possibility, imagination enough to see other ways, maybe having some sort of faith or spiritual beliefs that can sustain us and the presence of loving companions who remain with us is what makes the difference. There is an old saying, fellowship is love, and lack of fellowship is death. I know that for me I would never have been able to survive many of the tragic things that happened in my life if I did not have others around me. I did not need them to speak, I did not need them to offer platitudes or empty promise, I just needed them to be there, to cry with me, to comfort me, to just be.

Joseph Marshall, in his book **Keep Going**, wrote. “Yet, life does give us much more than the obvious. If we can learn to look back on the difficulties we have known, whether old or new, then we have moved past them, at least in time. That we are looking back at a tough experience from the perspective of the present moment means we have survived it. The experience may have taken a toll, as difficulties do, but whatever our losses may have been, we have survived.”² These are great words of wisdom as we think about perseverance and getting through. He also suggests that we get through by knowing when to bend, when to stand strong, when to push ahead, when to back off, when to be like the buffalo or the birch tree. A buffalo in a storm faces into the wind. A buffalo closes its eyes, stands firm and well can you just picture the buffalo, shaking its massive body, fur fluffing, great breaths emanating from the nostrils, set and strong as the storm assails her, and she survives, through perseverance and grit. Now imagine a birch tree. A storm approaches, the gale winds blow, the ice comes and coats all, and all are battered and beaten. The birch tree bends and moves with the force of the storm and survives through perseverance and grace, through bending and bowing, through moving with the storm. In our lives either of those stances- a buffalo strong, resolute, still or the birch tree, bending, melding, meeting and moving the storm is appropriate and will get us through. The wisdom to thriving is finding which one to exercise when. For this we can rely on friend and family, religious community, and our personal spiritual religious beliefs. I would suggest that the greatest of these attitudes to develop is hope and trust that all things change nothing remains the same, and that the universe is ultimately good even though we might not understand all that is happening around us.

² Keep Going: the art of perseverance. Joseph Marshall III. Sterling Publishing.

Joseph Marshall's writes and I paraphrase, Grandfather, says life can give you strength. Strength can come from facing the storms of life, from knowing loss, feeling sadness, from falling into the depths of grief. You must stand up ... life is really trying to teach you to be strong. And being strong means taking one more step forward to the top of the hill, no matter how weary you may be. It means to keep looking for the answer. It means to cling to hope for one more heartbeat, one more sunrise. Grandfather says, Keep Going,"³

What more can I offer than the suggestion that the art of perseverance requires practice, requires refinement, requires making mistakes and missteps as perfecting any art does. One of the other and more crucial components is learning that reaching out for others to offer a stabilizing influence, engaging in the fervent practice of prayer and being around others are also key components. Hope is offered through development of your spiritual practices and it is felt most often when surrounded by those who have your best interest in mind. May you find hope, love and the gentle and heartfelt support of others in this worshipping community. Blessed Be.

³ P 125 **Keep Going: The Art of Perseverance.**