Possibility of Resilience
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January 13, 2019

If I want to talk about resilience, I must do so from my own socio-economic location. I am privileged to have lived a live I love. I was born into a very large, very poor family, and to white, college educated, parents. From a young age many caring adults, from school, or church, even the local librarian and police officers, actively worked to help me prosper in life. I followed my marble fortune by mowing lawns at age 10, a paper route at 12, working the grill at McDonald's at 14, and as a weekend dishwasher at a fancy restaurant at age 16. I was primed to make my way in the world, to be resilient, and for that I am grateful.

Thanks to the help of a Harvard educated high school English teacher, I made my way to Yale College and then Harvard Business School. Yet, little came easily. I was so poorly prepared for Yale that I could barely manage my classes, then sophomore year I tore my right-hand wide-open climbing over a riot gate (youthful foolishness), next my fiancée cheated on me by sleeping with my friend. I went into a downward spiral. Then I met a remarkable, irrepressible, freshman girl named Loretta, who saved me, and we have been together over forty years. Especially in times of trouble, we need one another, to comfort us, to help us discover the inherent possibility of resilience in our lives.

I was estranged from my father when he almost died of lymphoma in 1977. Loretta and I were in the midst of young love. He miraculously recovered. Loretta and I moved to Boston and married in 1979, where I joined Bain and company. The following year we moved to Bain London, where my daughter Sarah was born in 1982. Then I learned German and opened an office for Bain in Munich. The early 1980's was also when my next oldest brother David, a young gay man living in NYC, began to exhibit symptoms of what initially was called gay cancer.

I eventually grew to hate my job, with its stresses, too frequent travel demands, and obsessive bosses and colleagues. So, I quit, and Loretta arranged for us to take a pilgrim journey around the world for seven weeks. The possibility of resilience sometimes requires us to walk away from a good safe life seeking the life we were born to lead. We moved back to Boston, where six months later Loretta became pregnant with our son Robert, and I was offered the job as the first Chief Financial Officer (CFO) of a biotechnology start-up called Genzyme. My career path started to get truly bumpy, swinging wildly between promotions and potentially being fired, with possibilities of wealth and bankruptcy.

The 1980's for me was also a time of centering around family life, the joyous, confusing excitement of young married life, learning to be an adequate and involved father to both my children as they grew. My brother David's ongoing treatment and inevitable setbacks while dying from AIDS. Then how our large extended family and friends coalesced around my gay brother David and his inevitable death transformed my faith and my father's Baptist congregation. This was followed two years later by the return of my father's lymphoma, and his death in the early 1990's. Birth and death, love and pain, joy and suffering, all of these are life itself. Our lives are full of joy and suffering woven fine together.

Our tenth wedding anniversary found me the Chairman and CEO of a public biotechnology company in Worcester, now a millionaire and respected biotechnology entrepreneur, but with far too little time for my wife and children, and seemingly no time for my spiritual life. That problem was resolved in 1993, during an industry wide down-turn, when my Board of Directors fired me, and the Wall Street Journal ran my business obituary. The resilience I had developed as a child greatly helped me through these times of trouble, as did my remarkable wife, as I gradually discovered the person I was born to be. If you want to know the rest of my story, please buy and read my book *SPIRITUAL AUDACITY: Six Disciplines of Human Flourishing,* but the focus of this sermon is on the possibility of resilience in each of our lives.

Rev. Manish K. Mishra-Marzetti is a Unitarian Universalist of Hindu and Indian-American heritage, and he has served several UU congregations. He says the possibility of resilience begins when we remember that "For each child that's born, a morning star rises, and sings to the universe who we are." It may be the work of a lifetime, and in some cases, such as my own, require four or five different careers, to discover that unique individual that we were each born to be. Listen carefully! Can you hear what the universe is uniquely calling you towards? As Manish says, "You, the result. You, the outcome. You, the celebration."

We each contain a unique song of possibility. Some possibilities can be hard to pursue. Or frightening. Others just plain scary. That's okay. We all have roads not taken, wrong turns, destinations that disappoint. Yet our song persists. As Manish says, "The music calls us to recognize our limitations... Here in community bringing alive that most primordial and original impulse, the desire to sing to the universe who we are." Will we rise to the universe's call? Can we foster resilience here?

Aurora Levins Morales is a disabled and chronically ill, community supported writer, historian, artist, and activist. The community surrounding her gives her the possibility of resilience. She calls us to imagine the possibilities. To always remember, that with our efforts another world is possible. Nobody wishes to be disabled or chronically ill, but even then, we can help to make a better world possible. A world without white supremacy. A world where children of color are not killed in the streets, or in government detention centers. A world where every child, no matter how poor or marginalized, can learn to sing to the universe who we are. We can collectively work towards just such a world. That is the song of the universe with which we are asked to harmonize our voices. This possibility of resilience calls us forward.

None of the people I truly admire had easy lives. My favorite mystic, Jalal al-Din Muhammad Rumi, was born in 1207 to a Persian family under Turkish Muslim rule in what is present day Afghanistan. When he was eight years old Mongol invaders attacked, killing 90% of the people in his village, and forcing his family to flee deeper into Arabia. They wandered for 13 years, finally settling in Konya, Anatolia (now the mountains of Turkey) in a Christian region where Muslims were only 10% of the population. He was too young (24) when his father died to assume leadership of his father's respected religious school, but nine years later he became an Islamic theologian, jurist and mystic teacher.

Then, when everything was going well for Rumi and his growing family, he developed a mystical friendship with Shams of Tabriz, a wandering Sufi dervish. For the next four years they were inseparable, as they explored together the nature of divine mystery and dancing with the Beloved. Just

when Rumi attained ecstasy, through union with the divine with Shams, Shams disappeared and was thought to be dead. Rumi's grief was inconsolable, it broke his heart open, and from Rumi's awakening came the most beautiful Islamic poetry to God ever written.

But let me offer a more contemporary example. In 1935 Lhamo Thondup was born to a Chinese speaking farming and horse-trading family in a tiny Tibetan village on the Chinese border. At the age of two he was recognized as the 14th incarnation of the Dalai Lama. This is where his troubles began. For two years he was held hostage by the Chinese military, until after paying a $300,000 ransom, he was allowed to travel with Muslim traders to Lhasa to formally begin his training as a Buddhist monk. He was 15 when China invaded Tibet, and to oppose Chinese rule, he was quickly enthroned as the legitimate ruler of Tibet. Following the 1959 Tibetan uprising to throw off Chinese rule, the CIA helped the Dalai Lama escape to northern India, where he has lived in exile ever since. Talk about living always with turmoil and hardship!

Yet for over 60 years the Dalai Lama has traveled the world speaking out on the environment, economics, women's rights, non-violence, interfaith dialogue, physics, astronomy, neuroscience, reproductive health, and human sexuality. He is a leading teacher of Mahayana and Vajrayana Buddhism and in 1989 was awarded the Noble Peace Prize. I hope none of us will ever encounter such extremely dire circumstances as Rumi and the Dalai Lama, yet we will all face our own challenges in our own lives. The question is can we find their kind of resilience in the face of our own turmoil and hardships, of our suffering and pain?

Sociologists say the possibility of resilience relies primarily upon three interconnected aspects of being: our place in the economic structure, our cultural values and supports, and our own attitude and activity. I was blessed in two out of these three areas. Born into the lowest socio-economic tier of society, few of my peers would rise as I did. Yet being white, with both my parents college educated, and my five older siblings all completing college, I had an enormous advantage. Teachers, librarians, police officers, and members of my church all helped prepare me for success in life. I was incredibly resilient, and worked very hard for what I got, but I started with a resilience advantage. I grew up in a tight knit loving community that believed I could do incredible things.

How about this community? Do we create such an environment here for our youth? How about for each other? Do we in this community help each other foster the possibility of resilience? As our hymn asks, "When I am frightened, will you reassure me? When I'm uncertain will you hold my hand?" Will you share your stories, your questions, your feelings with me?" For it is in our stories that we develop the possibility of resilience. "When I'm troubled, will you listen to me? When I'm lonely, will you be my friend? Because if you show me compassion, acceptance, commitment, then I may learn to care, to give, to love." This is the possibility of a community of faith. We each have a unique song to sing, and yet we harmonize beautifully together. Amen and Blessed Be.