

**Theme for October - Falling:**  
*The Practice of Getting Up*

Our theme dovetails with last month's Jewish holiday, Yom Kippur. To learn how to fail is nothing less than a succinct five-word summary of the Yom Kippur confessional. It requires us to be mature enough to face up to the personal failings which well-meaning parents, teachers and friends tried to shield us from recognizing. It asks us to admit we're not perfect precisely because we're willing to take on the challenge of perfecting ourselves. Indeed, our Unitarian Universalist asks to acknowledge that failure is part of life and not punishment for a way living.

How common it is to feel that we have fallen! To sense that we have missed the mark in some way; let ourselves or others – a friend, family member, partner, or co-worker – down. Perhaps you have felt yourself falling on a more global level such as with the environment, political or civil action, or issues of racial, economic or gender justice. In the moments when you find yourself in the depths of falling, what do you feel called upon to do?

The topic of failing can be a painful one for people, as the experience forces us to look at our character flaws, limitations, and shortcomings and decide what we will do with them. In certain instances we may become paralyzed. Some failures can be utilized as powerful motivators to make much-needed changes. We may choose to view our failures as exquisite gifts. As these experiences shape and propel us forward on life's journey, we may experience a deep sense of gratitude.

What's far more important than the actual act of falling is the other side of failure -- the process of getting up. In the wake of falling what do you need as part of your "getting-up" process? Support from loved ones? From this congregation? A newly developed set of coping skills? Time to mourn the "losses" that you have incurred? It may be about the willingness to let go of the pre-falling set of blueprints in favor of a new and far-more-useful road map.

*As you reflect on these important concepts and questions, we offer readings, quotes and additional questions for further inquiry and larger discussion. In the words of John Wooden, "Success is never final. Failure is never fatal. It's courage that counts."*

***Questions for discussion and discernment on your own, around the table, or with each other:***

What is the relationship between one's willingness to take risks and falling? Does failing change the level of willingness?

What life circumstances or personal habits have caused you fall? How have you experienced the "getting up"?

How do you tend to treat yourself after falling? Do you beat yourself up or are you able to forgive yourself?

What impact does failure have on your relationships – with self, with loved ones, with colleagues, with God?

What role does our church play in your efforts to get up after failure?

When has failing lead to something better in your life?

What is it like to witness someone else fall? How can you help someone get back up?

***Reading and Quotations:***

"On this path effort never goes to waste, and there is no failure. Even a little effort toward spiritual awareness will protect you from the greatest fear."

– Bhagavad Gita

"I have not failed. I've just found 10,000 ways that won't work."

– Thomas A. Edison

"All of us failed to match our dreams of perfection. So I rate us on the basis of our splendid failure to do the impossible."

– William Faulkner

"We pay a heavy price for our fear of failure. It is a powerful obstacle to growth. It assures the progressive narrowing of the personality and prevents exploration and experimentation. There is no learning without some difficulty and fumbling. If you want to keep on learning, you must keep on risking failure all your life."

– John W. Gardner

"Those who dare to fail miserably can achieve greatly."

– Robert F. Kennedy

"In God's world, for those who are in earnest, there is no failure. No work truly done, no word earnestly spoken, no sacrifice freely made, was ever made in vain."

– Frederick W. Robertson

"Our business in this world is not to succeed, but to continue to fail, in good spirits."

– Robert Louis Stevenson

“Not many people are willing to give failure a second opportunity. They fail once and it’s all over. The bitter pill of failure is often more than most people can handle. If you’re willing to accept failure and learn from it, if you’re willing to consider failure as a blessing in disguise and bounce back, you’ve got the potential of harnessing one of the most powerful success forces.”

– Joseph Sugarman

“From time to time, life as a leader can look hopeless. To help you, consider a man who lived through this: Failed in business at age 31. Defeated for the legislature at 32. Again failed in business at 34. Sweetheart died at 35. Had a nervous breakdown at 36. Defeated in election at 38. Defeated for Congress at 43. Defeated for Congress at 46. Defeated for Congress at 48. Defeated for Senate at 55. Defeated for Vice President at 56. Defeated for Senate at 58. Elected President at age 60. This man was Abraham Lincoln.”

– Source Unknown

Hope abides; therefore I abide.  
Countless frustrations have not cowed me.  
I am still alive, vibrant with life.  
The black cloud will disappear,  
The morning sun will appear once again  
In all its supernal glory.

- Sri Chinmoy

A failure is not destruction.  
A failure is a challenge  
To overcome and go forward.

- Sri Chinmoy

### *Falling: The Code*

1. Through the night  
the apples  
outside my window  
one by one let go  
the stem-snap, the plummet  
through leaves, then  
the final thump against the ground.  
Sometimes two  
at once, or one  
right after another.  
During long moments of silence

I wait  
and wonder about the bruised bodies,  
the terror of diving through air, and  
think I'll go tomorrow  
to find the newly fallen, but they  
all look alike lying there  
dew soaked, disappearing before me.

2. I lie beneath my window listening  
to the sound of apples dropping in

the yard, a syncopated code I long to know,  
which continues even as I sleep, and dream I know

the meaning of what I hear, each dull  
thud of unseen apple-

body, the earth  
falling to earth

once and forever, over  
and over.

- Li-Young Lee

### *Autumn*

The leaves are falling, falling as if from far up,  
as if orchards were dying high in space.  
Each leaf falls as if it were motioning "no."

And tonight the heavy earth is falling  
away from all other stars in the loneliness.

We're all falling. This hand here is falling.  
And look at the other one. It's in them all.

And yet there is Someone, whose hands  
infinitely calm, holding up all this falling.

- Rainer Maria Rilke