

## Vulnerability

1 Vulnerability is not knowing victory or defeat, it's understanding the necessity of both; it's engaging. It's being all in. **Brene Brown**

2 If I'm not free to fail, I'm not free to take risks, and everything in life that's worth doing involves a willingness to take a risk. **Madeleine L'Engle**

3 Whatever you think the world is withholding from you, you are withholding from the world. **Eckhart Tolle**

4 Learning takes place only in a mind that is innocent and vulnerable. **Jiddu Krishnamurti**

5 In exposing vulnerability we are always taking a chance and sometimes might get hurt. What makes us willing is that the greater hurt, the real suffering, is in staying armored and isolated. While it takes courage to be vulnerable, the reward is sweet: We awaken compassion and genuine intimacy in our relationships with others. **Tara Brach**

6 The real gift and the crux of our difficulty is our constant and entirely natural experience of vulnerability. Trying to live without feeling vulnerable means we do not understand the fierce nature of the reality we inhabit. In closing off our vulnerability, we close off the authentic exchanges that tell us we are actually having a real conversation. Vulnerability is the door through which we walk into self-understanding and compassion for others. Being enlightened does not mean we assume supernatural powers or find a perfection that exalts us above the daily losses other human beings are subject to; enlightenment means we have accepted thoroughly our transience, our vulnerability and our imperfections and live just as robustly with them as without them.

The relationship between the ego and the deeper enlightened self is much like the relationship between the rescuer on the muddy path and the person who does not 'wish' to be rescued, who must gestate through the lonely night in the woodcutter's hut. The ego is meant to look after us, to care for us and protect us, and perhaps come looking for us when we seem to be lost. But when we identify completely with that protective figure, we lose the more important story and halt the possible transformation occurring in the depth of the night. Sometimes the best thing to do is to hold a kind of silent vigil beside the part of us that is going through the depths of a difficult transformation. When the outer story that the ego tells, merges with the one the inner self has come to, this becomes 'the marriage of true minds.' The ego seems to disappear, but

actually it has simply assumed its rightful place in the hierarchy of priorities; it has become a good servant to the soul's desires.

--**David Whyte**, *The Three Marriages: Reimagining Work, Self and Relationship*

## **7 To Risk**

To laugh is to risk appearing the fool.

To weep is to risk appearing sentimental.

To reach out for another is to risk exposing our true self.

To place our ideas--our dreams--before the crowd is to risk loss.

To love is to risk not being loved in return.

To hope is to risk despair.

To try is to risk failure

To live is to risk danger.

But risks must be taken because the greatest hazard in life is to risk nothing.

The person who risks nothing, does nothing, has nothing, is nothing.

He may avoid suffering and sorrow,

But he cannot learn, feel, change, grow or live.

Chained by his servitude he is a slave who has forfeited all freedom.

Only a person who risks is free.

The pessimist complains about the wind;

The optimist expects it to change;

And the realist adjusts the sails.

--**William Arthur Ward**

8 In a popular teaching story, a man being chased by a tiger leaps off a cliff in his attempt to get away. Fortunately, a tree growing on the side of the cliff breaks his fall. Dangling from it by one arm—tiger pacing above, jutting rocks hundreds of feet below—he yells out in desperation, “Help! Somebody help me!!” A voice responds, “Yes?” The man screams, “God, God, is that you?” Again, “Yes.” Terrified, the man says, “God, I’ll do anything, just please, please, help me.” God responds, “Okay then, just let go.” The man pauses for a moment, then calls out, “Is anyone else there?”

— **Tara Brach**, *Radical Acceptance: Embracing Your Life with the Heart of a Buddha*

9 **Rosa Parks** (excerpt--this is the second half of the poem)

**Nikki Giovanni**

. . . This is for the Pullman Porters who, when the sheriff was trying to get the body secretly buried, got Emmett’s body on the northbound train, got his body home to Chicago, where his mother said: I want the world to see what they did to my boy. And this is for all the mothers who cried. And this is

for all the people who said Never Again. And this is about Rosa Parks whose feet were not so tired, it had been, after all, an ordinary day, until the bus driver gave her the opportunity to make history. This is about Mrs. Rosa Parks from Tuskegee, Alabama, who was also the field secretary of the NAACP. This is about the moment Rosa Parks shouldered her cross, put her worldly goods aside, was willing to sacrifice her life, so that that young man in Money, Mississippi, who had been so well protected by the Pullman Porters, would not have died in vain. When Mrs. Parks said "NO" a passionate movement was begun. No longer would there be a reliance on the law; there was a higher law. When Mrs. Parks brought that light of hers to expose the evil of the system, the sun came and rested on her shoulders bringing the heat and the light of truth. Others would follow Mrs. Parks. Four young men in Greensboro, North Carolina, would also say No. Great voices would be raised singing the praises of God and exhorting us "to forgive those who trespass against us." But it was the Pullman Porters who safely got Emmett to his granduncle and it was Mrs. Rosa Parks who could not stand that death. And in not being able to stand it. She sat back down.

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The full poem: <https://www.poetryfoundation.org/poems/90180/rosa-parks>

### **For Reflection and Discussion**

A Do you feel you have lessons to learn around vulnerability? What are your goals and your challenges?

B How do you relate to your own vulnerability? What are some of the ways that you protect yourself from feeling vulnerable?

C Has your experience at All Souls informed your understanding and your experience of vulnerability? How so?

**--Mary Beth Hatem, for Covenant Groups at All Souls Church, Unitarian**