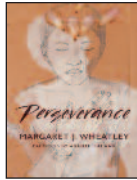




PERSISTING WHEN THE GOING GETS TOUGH

BY MAUREEN E. DOALLAS



Perseverance By Margaret Wheatley

The highly regarded writer, speaker, and educator Margaret Wheatley has produced a practical, insightful, and inspirational book for each of us: *Perseverance* (Berrett-Koehler, 2010). Having observed people persevering through tragedies and other difficult circumstances that she honestly admits she hopes never to encounter, Wheatley seeks to uncover what keeps you or me or a friend or a colleague going in the face of failures, betrayals, setbacks; how we find energy or motivation when exhausted or despairing; how we hold onto faith when it seems faith has only let us down. She aims to enlighten us about what enables devotion to a cause, a day-after-day focus, and otherworldly dedication to a pursuit or a calling.

Wheatley, whose book includes images of beautiful paintings by Asante Salaam and calligraphy by Barbara Bash, doesn't offer this-is-how-you-survive-it advice or even anything that resembles a hard-and-fast answer to getting through and beyond uncertainty, of navigating ourselves out of darkness when hope is evanescent.

What she offers is the wisdom of words. Words that get us started thinking about our personal struggles and challenges and how we deal with the pain and fear and anxiety they cause. Words that carry us from that place where we intuit "a knife poised over our hearts"—the symbols, in Chinese, for *perseverance*—through willingness to try to rise above heady waters, to being able to change things by becoming aware of and exercising the choices that each of us has.

The questions we ask ourselves when confronted with a difficulty are, as Wheatley avers, not to be taken lightly, and our experiences as humans, which make up "the story of perseverance," contain the answers to the questions of what makes some of us steadfast, patient, tenacious and others unable to get up in the morning.

Wheatley divides her almost-pocket-size book into five parts, each containing a rich mix of illustrative or thought-provoking quotations or poems and commentary that focuses on specific feelings, situations, challenges, and behaviors that either support or

inhibit us in our ability to respond to whatever life puts in our paths. The short essays (none more than a page long) take up such subjects as fear, blame, praise, death, loneliness, anger, discipline, groundedness, laziness, boredom, jealousy, vigilance, choice. Each is self-contained, eliminating the sense that some process is at work that we can trace from starting point A to culminating point Z and need only learn to apply to produce magical results every time. None of the sections depends on the other but together they cover a lot of ground.

And especially laudable is Wheatley's unique approach: Each commentary is devoid of examples of other people and what they've experienced and done to persevere. While such examples might be instructive—who doesn't enjoy reading about someone else's tragedy and how he or she rose above it?—they would fail to deliver Wheatley's crucial point, which is that *each of us is our own example*, that the answer to how to persevere lies in our examination and understanding of our mindset and personal experiences. Moreover, by not linking a particular person's response to a particular situation, or a particular situation to a particular theory or suggestion of approach, Wheatley neither dates her commentary nor deprives it of the very thing that makes it work: its universality.

Physically, *Perseverance* is a lovely book, produced with care and attention to format and flow, without requiring a linear perspective. It can be read a chapter or a section at a time or entirely randomly. Browsing it is almost like having a conversation with the author, who addresses her readers in a familiar voice. The book's appeal also owes much to its author's prodigious powers of observation as well as her compassion both for the messiness of the human condition and our capacity to ride out and rise above our "most horrific" circumstances.

Wheatley also is offering a free e-mail series, "For Persevering People," comprising two pages from the book that will arrive on your desktop every week for eight weeks. ■

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