

## 2018 Strength Rosie Rosa

I am not doing the 12 powers in any particular order. Fillmore often presents them in the order Jesus called the disciples, pairing each power with a disciple. I, on the other hand, wanted to wear purple on my birthday so we started with the Power of Power and I thought Strength was the perfect power for Labor Day weekend. Just a glimpse into the crazy way my mind works!

Today our historical characters are two Roses: Rosa Parks and Rosie the Riveter. Some of you might be thinking, "But didn't Charles Fillmore make Strength a masculine faculty?" Aha! More of the subversive way my mind works. If our goal is to move towards Oneness and a mindset of oneness, Fillmore's gender duality baffles me. He says we all have both genders but then he divides stuff up: masculine/feminine; human/divine; spiritual/material. In every division we assign a superior and inferior judgment. It is just what we do. And then we must call upon Strength to overcome the very division and judgment we have created. Wouldn't it seem simpler to just not divide and judge?

In the Revealing Word, Charles says strength is "the energy of God. Freedom from weakness; stability of character; power to withstand temptation; capacity to accomplish." Webster's online dictionary says strength is "the capacity for exertion or endurance; and the power to resist force : solidity, toughness."

So one way strength expresses through me, through my humanity is empowerment. Now that is defined as "to give someone authority; to make someone more confident, especially in controlling their life and claiming their rights." As the energy of God and a sense that we have the capacity to accomplish what is before us, spiritual strength goes beyond physical strength. And yet, it empowers us in a way that lifts up our thoughts and attitudes and we feel a renewed energy in our physical body. "Lord give me strength" is a prayer of opening to the energy within us to rise up and empower our thoughts and actions so that we are solid in our convictions and able to do all that is ours to do.

On December 1, 1955 in Montgomery, Alabama, Rosa Parks took the bus home from a long day on her feet at work. When the bus driver asked the row of blacks to stand and make room for a white man to sit, three people stood and Rosa refused. It was not the first time she had clashed with that driver over enforcement of the segregation rules. She was convicted of violating the segregation law.

Parks was a member of the NAACP and its leader, E.D. Nixon had been looking for a strong and principled plaintiff to challenge the legality of segregation. He convinced Rosa and her family that she was the one to bring the lawsuit. The Montgomery Improvement Association formed and conceived a bus boycott to protest segregation on the buses. The young activist, Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr was elected leader of the MIA and he helped organize and run the boycott; which lasted until the Supreme Court ruled November 13<sup>th</sup>, 1956 that bus segregation was unconstitutional.

“People always say that I didn’t give up my seat because I was tired,” wrote Parks in her autobiography, “but that isn’t true. I was not tired physically... No, the only tired I was, was tired of giving in.” And so Rosa Parks called upon spiritual strength. It was a long road to that Supreme Court decision. Parks lost her job and she and her family were harassed and threatened. After the Supreme Court decision, due to ongoing threats, the Parks family moved to Detroit. Rosa became an assistant in the Detroit office of Congressman John Conyers. She continued to work for civil rights after her retirement in 1988 and wrote her autobiography, Rosa Parks: My Story. In 1999, Parks was awarded the Congressional Gold Medal by President Bill Clinton, the highest honor the United States bestows on a civilian. When she died at age 92 on October 24, 2005, she became the first woman in the nation’s history to lie in state at the U.S. Capitol.

Spiritual strength gives us the authority to speak into manifestation, “**Yes I can do it!**” When we are weary, not just physically but emotionally. How many of us have felt that kind of weary? Often when we find ourselves in new situations, like becoming new parents or taking on new endeavors like college or a different job; we may be feeling overwhelmed by everything we are called to do. There is just too much! Finding a balance between rest and going forward, we call upon spiritual strength, with faith and wisdom to fortify us and get us through the day and night.

Sometimes we need strength not in the midst of newness but in the midst of a long struggle. Parks says she was tired of giving in. We call upon spiritual strength to say, “**Yes I can do it!**” when we stand up and try something bold and new or we try one more time. Strength expresses through us as **persistence**.

Rosie the Riveter was a part of government moral boosting and recruitment for women to take jobs during WWII that had traditionally been held by men. Some of these jobs not only called for physical strength, they also were higher

paying and more intellectually challenging positions than women had previously held. And guess what? The women were successful. And so, at the end of WWII, as men returned home from active war service, a conflict was set up. Women were expected to quietly return to working in the home or in the lesser paying clerical positions. The focus was on finding work for the “Bread winners” or men, no longer engaged in battle.

Unity had a preferential program at that time run by James Dillet Freeman to recruit men into ministry. It seems Unity ministers were predominantly female and so a program only for men was developed. It was eligible for GI education funding. It was discontinued after only a few years.

But in the workforce, women who had proven they had the physical strength and intellectual capacity for any work placed before them called upon spiritual strength as they persisted in claiming a place at the table. Today we continue to see the effort to gain pay equity or equal pay for equal work, without regard to gender. We see gender barriers down for positions in first responders and military service. The barriers are lowered but harassment and oppression continue.

The story of the Women Air Service Pilots sort of tells the struggle of women taking their place at the table. Begun in 1941 as two separate groups of civilian women pilots, these women flew military planes in non-combat flights to free up the male pilots for active fighting. They transferred planes from the place of manufacture to the command post they were needed at or moved planes around the country from base to base. Between September 1942 and December 1944, the WASP delivered 12,650 aircraft of 78 different types. They flew with the same basic training the men received and they flew in all weather conditions. There was a great deal of resistance to their training and use. They provided their own transportation, uniforms and housing. They endured facilities with mud fields and lack of bathrooms and the harassment of their male counterparts. Despite the fact that 1,074 women earned their wings, 38 died and all served within the military, they were not granted military status or benefits at the end of the war. But they persisted. In June of 1944 a bill to give them military status was narrowly defeated. In 1977 records of their service were unsealed and in that year President Jimmy Carter signed the GI Bill Improvement Act providing that service as a WASP counted as “active service” for programs administered by the Veterans Administration. The National WASP WWII Museum grand opening was May 28, 2005 which was the 62 anniversary of the first WASP graduating class.

The museum is housed in a hanger at Avenger Field outside Sweetwater TX, one of the original training sites for the WASP. On July 1, 2009 President Barack Obama and the United States Congress awarded the WASP the Congressional Gold Medal. Three of the roughly 300 surviving WASPs were on hand to witness the event. During the ceremony President Obama said, "The Women Airforce Service Pilots courageously answered their country's call in a time of need while blazing a trail for the brave women who have given and continue to give so much in service to this nation." If you'd like to read a fictional account of the WASP pilots and women's work during WWII, I highly recommend Fannie Flagg's book, "The All Girl's Filling Station's Last Reunion". Flagg is the author of Fried Green Tomatoes and among other things, a Unity member. Once she discovered Unity, most of her books include some reference to Unity and several are set in a fictional town in Missouri.

And so, we come to the place in our spiritual evolution in which Divine Strength expresses through each of us as empowerment and persistence as we live beyond the illusion of gender and the illusion of race and the illusion of comparative worth and worthiness. Each of us capable of choosing a position of leadership in the world and a position of nurturing in the home. Each of us free to claim a better balance among our faculties so we don't see ourselves as a single dimension—only strong or only loving or only wise or only faith filled. We call upon Strength to take a stand for the gifts we all possess and the opportunities we all deserve. We call upon Strength for the persistence to get back up each time we feel we are knocked down by any condition, thought or circumstance in the outer world or in our own thoughts. For Love to overcome Hate, Love must encounter Hate time and time again and persist. Strength says I CAN love and love and love. I love not the harmful actions we may manifest but the divine essence that connects us all. I CAN take my place on the field with everyone being equal and I have no need to compare or make anyone else less in order for me to be whole. To quote the gospel of James, we do **not** become weary in doing right.

Years ago, Unity Southeast in Kansas City did a version of a James Cleveland gospel song. It began, "God is the source and the strength of my life" and it ends with "God is my all in all." It is now a familiar mantra that plays in my head whenever I find myself stressed. Strength to *be who I am* and strength to *keep being* my authentic self in every circumstance, every day.

**Divine Strength expresses through me as empowerment and persistence.**

