



The Power of Patience, by Sharon Salzberg

If we can be quieter, more in the moment with what is actually happening, a world of perception opens up for us based on where we are, not on where we one day hope to be. "Nobody sees a flower, really; it is so small," said artist Georgia O'Keeffe. "We haven't time, and to see takes time, like to have a friend takes time." If we learn to take a little more time and be more fully aware of just where we are, we might see many new flowers and have many more friends.

One way of describing an ability to hold our convictions without drawing premature conclusions, feeling automatically defeated, or losing sight of what goodness life might be offering us today is the old-fashioned virtue patience. Despite the common misconception, having patience doesn't mean making a pact with the devil of denial, ignoring our emotions and aspirations. It means being wholeheartedly engaged in the process that's unfolding, rather than yanking up our carrots, ripping open a budding flower, demanding a caterpillar hurry up and get that chrysalis stage over with.

True patience isn't gritting one's teeth and saying, "I'll bear with this for another five minutes because I'm sure it will be over by then and something better will come along." Patience isn't dour, and it isn't unhappy. It's a steady strength that we apply to each experience we face. If the situation calls for action, we must take it - patience doesn't mean inertia or complacency. Instead, it gives us a courageous dedication to the long haul, along with the willingness to connect with the multilayered truth of what is right here.

Are those of us not naturally blessed with patience doomed to yell at our children or our forgetful parents, litter our office floors with disemboweled computer parts (or at least threaten to), or berate ourselves each time we fail to live up to our own expectations? Or can we cultivate a new way of responding?

Anytime we're waiting - for the checkout person to ring us up, for the doctor's office to call, for a friend who has hurt us to apologize - we can remember we're alive right now. We can be determined to use this moment as a vehicle for paying attention, for growing, for opening.

Whenever we're pushing against what is, as though if we tried hard enough we could force the tempo of change, we can take a breath. Whatever our vision for how things should be in the future, we can make sure we do the very next thing we need to do today. And whenever we're in a fury of impatient resentment because our companion is

walking too slowly or the mail came too late or we're being ignored or we can't concentrate or we can't name what we want - or any of the countless everyday things we find hard, we can remind ourselves of what is good right now. Then, as we work to redress what is wrong, the belligerence, agitation, and frustration will drain out of our "now," and the word can become a declaration of purpose and strength, supported by the gentle, developing power of patience.

Published at www.awakin.org on Feb 10, 2014