

Patience (5 of 6) Patient Acceptance of Truth

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SUMMARY KEYWORDS

well-being, compulsions, attachments, clinging, wave, reactivity

Gil Fronsdal

This is the fifth talk on patience. The specific aspect is the patient acceptance of truth. In this context, “acceptance” means the willingness and openness to stay close to the truth.

When I began this series, I introduced it by saying that I wanted to have the reference point for patience not be a directive that from zero to 60 you should be patient without any other context. Many of you have been meditating for some time and have been in Dharma practice for a long time. Hopefully, it has given you some reference point for a way of being that is satisfying. This is a way of being true to oneself and to life that is worthy and meaningful of staying close to.

We recognize that as the mind and heart get involved in other things – for example, reactions, desires, attachments, addictions, aversions, resentments, hostilities, fantasies, fears, anxieties, commentary, complaining, all kinds of things that the mind does – that it is less satisfying than what we’ve tapped into. It is less meaningful and less true. And so to be patient is not to overlay patience on top of our experience. It is not to bear down and tighten up and not react.

But rather patience is staying true to what we know is valuable. It is coming back and staying close to what we know is valuable and not giving in to the forces of anger, resentment, and impatience that might come along.

As Dharma practice deepens, so does our contact with something that feels truer, so does our contact with a deep sense of peace, ease, and happiness. This is well-being that can well up from the inside. It is not dependent on experiences in the world or on what happens around us with other people. It does not depend on getting a raise at work or winning the lottery. It does not depend on what other people do. Instead, it really seems to well up from the inside out.

Ideally, we carry within us a sense of well-being that becomes strong enough that we are not buffeted by the experiences around us. We are not dependent on the world around us to behave in a certain way. We are not dependent on people to be a certain way because we carry with us this stability and this well-being. As it deepens, we become more clearly aware of what takes us away from it and aware of what is true. For example, being less selfish is a true thing. And so the patient acceptance of these truths of deeper well-being – such as the value of not clinging, of not being hostile or selfish or self-centered, the value of not holding on to things – these kinds of things are seen as being true.

In Buddhism, this kind of truth statement has less to do with propositional truth as such, but rather with the truth of how we respond to whatever is happening in the world. We don’t respond with clinging or hostility, or by overlaying layers of stories, commentaries, reactions, and bias. In practice, patient acceptance of truth is difficult sometimes.

Just stay close to the truth of non-clinging. Stay close to the truth that it is not worth getting involved in ambition and busyness. It is not worth getting so busy trying to save the world from all possible catastrophes that we are not effective. We can recognize that all kinds of things about how we are, are not a useful or good way of being. A patient acceptance of that truth is sometimes the hardest for patience. The inner impulses we have can be quite strong because of the conditioning and attachments we have.

So, we can see our attachments arise and still have the patient acceptance of what’s truer, so that we don’t give in to our attachments. We see that delusions and biases arise in our mind. We can see with clarity that they are not true. What is true is our not giving in to them, not being caught in them. And so it can be a tug of war. We can think: “Wait a minute. This is how I’ve lived my life. I won’t be safe if I don’t act this way or react this way.” This is where we need the patient acceptance of the truth.

And this goes deeper and deeper. Some of the deeper acceptances of truth have to do with really beginning to see how changeable, inconstant, and impermanent our world is. That can be kind of frightening. It's like we want some stability, where we can hold on to something. And so the patient acceptance of not holding on and not clinging in the middle of this world of impermanence can seem a bit frightening.

But we've learned over time that it doesn't really work to cling. It doesn't work to hold on tight. It doesn't work to resist the changing nature of this reality we live in. It doesn't work to try to keep yourself young forever. At some point, we can't hold on or cling. We have to accept with patience that we're getting older.

There are all these basic human existential truths that at some point we will directly confront and meet, such as our dying. There is patient acceptance that there will be loss. There is patient acceptance that, even with loss, it's not worth having ways of being that are simply not worth it. Instead of the normal reactivity that we may have, we're being patient so that we don't succumb to ways of being that we know and have learned are not useful or supportive.

What I'm pointing to in this way is that we're learning to become our own reference point for practice. We're learning to recognize in ourselves what is valuable, and what is valuable to stay close to. So when we need to be patient with ourselves, we can do so because we know something valuable, we know something important. We've experienced it.

We might lose touch with this truth. But our memory still says: "Wait a minute, I know that this reactivity I have is not the way forward. I think that I at least need to be patient, to not give in to it. The patient acceptance of truth is the truth that this is not worthwhile doing. So I'm not going to say what I was going to say. I'm not going to do what I feel compelled to do. I'm going to be patient with this."

Occasionally, these acts of patience require a lot of effort. The pull of addictions, the pull of desires or hostility, the pull of thinking things have to be different – these can be so strong. Then we may think it's okay to succumb to our anger.

One of the interesting things to do in being patient and not giving in to the impulse is to sit and be quiet, maybe in meditation, and feel the strong compulsions arise. They might come with a whole army of lawyers that tell you: "You have to act. It has to be this way." But sit with it all, like a rising wave until the wave has crested and you find yourself on the back of the wave. Then decide what is the wise thing to do.

When you feel the compulsion to act or speak, it is probably not the best time to do so. Chances are that with compulsion there is no wisdom, and you're not connected to something that you've learned is a valuable place from which to talk or act – a valuable place of wisdom from which to participate in this world of ours. We accept the idea that being patient with compulsions is better because we know something else is truer.

So we don't act on the compulsion. We ride the wave until we find ourselves on the back of the wave. In the middle of these compulsions, it can feel impossible to wait. It feels like it has to be now. But it's just a wave. Everything has its time. Everything has a half-life and will eventually pass away. We become confident in that truth, in the patient acceptance that all compulsions and attachments will pass if we allow them to. Learning how to be patient and not giving in to compulsions is a gift for ourselves and the world.

A patient acceptance of the truth. You might consider today, what have you discovered? What is more important that you want to stay true to? What have you discovered that's true? That teaches you what not to do, what not to say, what not to react to? You're not avoiding reacting or speaking that way as repression, but rather because you know the opposite is true – that you lose yourself in the reactivity, that what's most true about yourself is not found through the reactivity that can feel so compulsive.

So what do you know? What have you discovered that's true for which it's useful to have patient acceptance?

Thank you. We have one more talk tomorrow on patience.