

SESSION 41: Patience

WELCOME

Welcome again to our course on realizing a life of love! It's good to be with you!

If you're new to this course, I strongly recommend that you review the first ten sessions because they make up the core foundation. You'll need this to benefit from the remaining sessions.

SO LET'S GET STARTED

Again, as a reminder, the 3 As of awakening are *Attending*, *Appreciating*, and *Acting* with love. Attending leads to appreciation, which then leads to skillful loving action. Appreciation has two meanings, however: both understanding the nature of things and understanding the value or sacredness of Reality. Both of these aspects of appreciation arise from careful attending. Together, the twin practices of Attending and Appreciating, called "Appreciative Attending," generate wisdom and reverence, which enable us to fulfill our purpose—to nurture and savor Life. Inspired by reverence for Life, we can then take *Action* to benefit all of Life—others and ourselves—with a loving heart, while enjoying each brief and precious moment of existence.

In our last session, we discussed the love practice of respect. I hope you've had a chance this week to reflect on your own practice of respect and how to cultivate respect. Today we will explore the love practice of patience.

What is Patience?

To be patient is to wait calmly in the face of frustration or adversity. When we're patient, we can endure delays, difficulties, distress, and obstacles calmly without getting angry or upset. We can remain calm when things don't

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go as we'd like or when people don't behave as we'd like.

Our patience can be tested by adversity, such as being unemployed and needing to look for a job, healing from an illness, or waiting for a loved one to recover from their own difficulties.

Our patience can also be tested by the daily hassles of life, such as being in traffic, waiting in long lines, waiting for dinner to be served, or being placed on hold.

Then, there is the need for patience for things that just tend to take time, like getting out of debt or paying off the mortgage, finding a life partner, grieving, healing from an injury or emotional trauma, waiting for a promotion, waiting for a visit from a dear friend, or waiting for the benefits of a practice to develop, such as meditation, tennis, or learning a language. Developing any skill or capacity—including learning to love—takes patience, as the results unfold in their own due course and not on our timetable.

Finally, patience entails being patient with others when they hurt, frustrate, or disappoint us. If we're patient with others, we don't get quite as upset when they frustrate us. As a result, we're less likely to lash out or retaliate. Because we can wait for others to say what they want to say, we patiently let them speak their mind. It takes patience to wait for people to become more skillful and improve their life situations. Nurturing others requires patience (see the lesson on nurturing).

Patient people have good self-control. They exercise restraint and are less likely to label a difficult situation as negative. If we're stuck behind a slow-moving car and late, we're more able to accept it and go with the flow.

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Patient people aren't in a hurry. They don't need to be first, and they're not enslaved by expecting to get what they want right now.

Patience entails several other love practices, including hope, faith, endurance, perseverance, acceptance, and humility. Love is patient, and it doesn't insist on immediate gratification.

Benefits of Patience

Patience truly is a virtue with many rewards. These include better mental and physical health, greater success and achievement, and better relationships.

It enhances emotional wellbeing.[i] Patient people are happier and more hopeful. They have a more positive attitude and greater life satisfaction. Conversely, they're less discontent, depressed, and negative. They're better able to endure and cope with stress. Since patience entails acceptance, they're more in harmony with the way things are.

Patience promotes equanimity and tranquility. Patient people are less annoyed and worried by adversity. Because of less negative preoccupation, they're more grateful, and they experience a greater sense of abundance and greater contentment because they can wait until difficulty passes. They have a longer view of things—a larger perspective—that sees how this moment is as it must and can only be, that it's sacred, and that it shall pass as all moments do, both pleasurable and painful.

Patient people also have fewer stress-related illnesses, such as ulcers, acne, diarrhea, headaches, and even pneumonia.[ii]

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Patience enhances relationships.[iii] Patient people are more tolerant and less irritable with others, and people appreciate this. They're more understanding and able to be affirming. People blossom with a combination of patience, nurturing, affirmation, and assertiveness. This makes patient people better friends, neighbors, and coworkers. They're more cooperative, empathic (understanding), equitable, forgiving, generous, cooperative, and selfless.[iv] Patience makes them less irritable and reactive, which gives them more self-control. In short, it makes them more loving.

Finally, patience promotes life success. All difficult achievements require patience and perseverance. Our brains are wired for immediate gratification over delayed gratification. This causes impatient people to give up delayed rewards, such as enhanced physical vitality from exercising, for the immediate rewards of sleeping in, for example. Patient people are more focused on long-term goals and more willing to do difficult-now-good-later work, such as studying for a test or going to the gym. Because patient people persist, they're generally more skillful and more willing to practice.

Patient people are also more successful because they're less impulsive. They make better, more rational, more thoughtful, and less emotional decisions because they experience less frustration.

Patient people have a better sense of timing. They can wait until the time is right to act, the way a baseball player waits for the right pitch. They know that a moment of patience now can prevent a lifetime of regret.

Barriers to Patience

There are several barriers to patience. One is our "hurry up" culture. We've become accustomed to the convenience of instant gratification and feel

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entitled to it.

Technology has made us more impatient by changing our expectations. Two hundred years ago, it took weeks to cross the country. Now, we can do it in a matter of hours. Two hundred years ago, it even took weeks to receive a response to a letter by “snail mail.” Now, we expect instant responses by email or text from the other side of the world. Ironically, fax machines, air travel, email, and cell phones have created an increased sense of agitation and irritability.

Just last week, I was in a long line at customs, waiting to get into the U.S. from an overseas trip. It took almost two hours, and people were grumpy. One man even started shouting obscenities, prompting the police to take him away. It seemed lost on people that they had just experienced the miracle of overseas air travel. Our conditioning has cultivated expectations and entitlement, which then trigger resentment and impatience when those expectations aren't met.

Our achievement-oriented culture is another barrier to patience. The media—and thus society—idolizes seeming “overnight successes.” We all must be “great” now just to consider ourselves OK. Being is overshadowed by doing. We're a spiritually distressed society poisoned by relentless striving for status, money, pleasure, and comfort. All of this discontent fuels our impatience.

Because we're accustomed to constant doing and stimulation, we have an intolerance for boredom and waiting. Many people just can't stand to be still.

Distress can also be a cause of impatience. No one likes to feel bad. It's

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human to want hard times to change as quickly as possible, but some people are more distress-intolerant than others. This can make them more impatient when stressed.

Intense passion and impulsivity can also cause impatience. If you feel strong emotions or urges, it can be more difficult to let circumstances unfold.

Spiritually, judgments and a lack of acceptance of what is both poison patience. If you can't stand yourself, other people, or the way things are, you will be less patient with yourself, with others, and with Life as a whole.

Cultivating Patience

The first practice for cultivating patience is Appreciative Attending. This promotes reverent, humble wakefulness, and acceptance, which in turn promotes patience. Your discernment will allow you to see both that Life is not just about you and that things are perfect exactly as they are. This will counter entitlement and frustration.

Second, don't make waiting an enemy. Instead, make friends with it, just as you make friends with all of Reality. When you're waiting, such as in a long line or on hold, stop, look, and listen. What do you see? Practice presence. See that this moment of waiting is marvelous. Make it an enjoyable pastime, and relish the opportunity to be still and savor existence. Meditate, pray, or repeat a mantra. If you're at a red light, use it as an opportunity to relax. You might even choose the longest line at the store just to give yourself the chance to practice waiting. Patiently wait for what each moment and person have to teach you.

Third, slow down. Let go of hurrying, and see that it harms you. Make an

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intention to be thoughtful and methodical, doing one thing at a time rather than rushing to do everything at once. You'll get there when you get there, and everything will be done when it's done. See the pain of striving, and let it go. Set realistic timeframes for goals, and flexibly adjust them as circumstances change. At the same time, focus on enjoying the process of doing things rather than just focusing on achieving a goal. See that success will come in due time if you act skillfully in this moment.

Appreciative Attending will also cultivate gratitude and contentment with what is. The discernment of attending will help you see how unskillful it is to pick a fight with Reality—a fight you will always lose. You'll see that Life unfolds at its own pace, not yours. Since you can't change a traffic jam, you'll see the wisdom of letting go, acceptance, and going with the flow. Your gratitude and contentment will counter your striving for more stuff or “better” circumstances.

As you attend, reflect on the virtues of patience. See the benefits of happiness, health, loving relationships, and success. Recognize how the negativity of impatience poisons your life and harms others. See that all great things take time.

Mindfully note when impatience arises. What triggered it? See entitlement, the urge for immediate gratification, and the frustration they cause. Notice the pain of impatience so that your awareness might cause it to fall away. Recognize difficulty as an opportunity to practice acceptance, humility, contentment, letting go, and letting be, even as you act to improve upon the situation. When triggered, counter frustration with relaxation. Take slow, deep breaths.

Counter urges to act impulsively with restraint. Patiently wait until you're

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clear about what you need to do and when. Patience will help you make better decisions.

Practice patience in your relationships, combined with acceptance (see the lesson on acceptance). If someone frustrates you, be patient and kind with them. Help them if you can.

Assert and protect yourself while committing yourself to nonviolence in the face of criticism, injustice, rudeness, and inconsiderate or hurtful behavior. Exercise moderation and restraint. Patiently endure others' difficulties as an act of loving tolerance. Attend carefully to others, and see that people change and grow or not in their own ways and in their own time. It's loving to be patient with them.

In your conversations, patiently listen and wait to fully understand before talking. Abstain from the urge to impulsively respond, and give people time to figure out what they want to say. Allow for a bit of silence. Practice empathy (see the lesson on empathy), and take the time to see the world through the other person's eyes.

Finally, be patient with yourself. Have faith that healing and growth will come with self-acceptance, self-reverence, love, persistence, and practice. You can't use your ego to heal, awaken, or grow. So trust the process of the practice of love.

OUR NEXT SESSION

In our next session, we'll discuss the love practice of accountability. As you will see, holding ourselves and others accountable helps us to be our best.

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In the meantime, between now and then, I encourage you to practice the following:

1. Continue your daily presence practice—both a period of silence, solitude, and stillness in the morning and your practice of stillness in motion through the day.
2. Start your day with a morning intention to love. You might want to recite a daily intention in the form of a prayer as in the dedication to love prayer in the meditations in the resource section of my website.
3. Practice appreciative attending. Inquire deeply into your experience with kind, curious eyes, especially if you're in pain. Ask, "what is this?" and affirm, "this is sacred." Continue to let go of negative judgments.
4. 1.Read this lesson on patience. Reflect on the benefits of patience and on any barriers to patience that you experience. Are there any opportunities that you see to enhance your practice of patience? If so, add these to your daily intentions.

Please take some time after our session today to share your reflections with your fellow members of the WellMind community and to read what others have to say as well. Let us share and support each other in our exploration of love!

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[i] Sarah A. Schnitker (2012) An examination of patience and well-being, *The Journal of Positive Psychology*, 7:4, 263-280, DOI: 10.1080/17439760.2012.697185.

[ii] Patience as a virtue: Religious and psychological perspectives By: Sarah A. Schnitker and Robert A. Emmons

Pages: 177–207 In: *Research in the Social Scientific Study of Religion*, Volume 18. Ralph L Piedmont, Ed. 31 May 2007.

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Pages: 177–207 In: *Research in the Social Scientific Study of Religion*, Volume 18. Ralph L Piedmont, Ed. 31 May 2007.

[iv] Curry, Oliver & Price, Michael & Price, Jade. (2008). Patience is a virtue: Cooperative people have lower discount rates. *Pers. Individ. Dif.*. 44. 10.1016/j.paid.2007.09.023.