Patience - The Art of Caring Slowly

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Our path of practice and meditation is described in a number of different ways. Different traditions offer different models that we can use to understand or look at this process. The Buddha spoke in different ways. He taught in different ways and elaborated the teaching according to who he was teaching, according to his audience and the situation, the circumstances at the time. This was part of his genius—being able to teach in a way that was suitable for his audience, that they would understand and follow.

And so we find the teachings presented in terms of the Four Noble Truths and the deepening understanding of the way this core teaching of the Buddha is practiced and unfolds through our meditation: understanding the truth of dukkha, the cause of dukkha—of stress, of suffering, of difficulty—and the cessation of it, and the path that leads to it.

Following from this, we can look at our process of meditation in terms of the unfolding of the Eightfold Noble Path and the three trainings in Sila, Samadhi, and Panya that comprise it—the trainings in ethical conduct, mind development, and wisdom.

There's a model that involves the path of purification in terms of stages of insight, progress of insight, successive stages of enlightenment. This focuses on ever-deepening understanding of what are called the three characteristics, these universal characteristics, common characteristics of all phenomena, all conditioned experience: the truths of anicca, change; dukkha, unsatisfactoriness; and anatta, the coreless, uncontrollable, selfless aspect of experience, of life.

Some traditions speak about discovering one's Buddha nature, resting in natural great perfection, connecting with this luminous purity of heart that I spoke about last week.

At different times we might find that one or another of these models for understanding our process seems to match our experience most clearly, most directly. This is just a natural part of the path. At different times we see different things.

There's another way that the path is described, which is in terms of the perfecting or ripening of what are called the paramis, or paramita in Sanskrit. I'm sure most of you have heard of these, maybe are quite familiar with these paramis—these ten noble or beautiful qualities, at least in the Theravada tradition. They're said to be ten beautiful, noble qualities that the Buddha developed and perfected over countless lifetimes as the Bodhisatta. These are mostly spoken about in a collection in the suttas called the Jataka Pitaka, the collection of Jataka stories, which are teaching stories, teaching fables you could say, that talk

about the previous lives of the Buddha. Often he's born as an animal in many of them—a deer or a goose or different animals. And often his chief disciples, Moggallana and Sariputta, are there in some supporting role in these different teaching stories.

You could say, if we look at the path in this way, that the culmination of the path, the quality of the fully awakened mind or heart, is when these paramis are brought to completion or brought to perfection, completely developed.

In the texts, there's a place where Sariputta is asking the Buddha a question. He asks, "How many qualities are there, Lord, that issue in Buddhahood?" And the Buddha answers, "There are, Sariputta, ten qualities issuing in Buddhahood. What are the ten? Giving, Sariputta, is a quality issuing in Buddhahood. Virtue, renunciation, wisdom, energy, patience, truthfulness, determination, loving kindness, and equanimity. These are qualities that issue in Buddhahood."

I'll read this list again—maybe new for some of you and a good review for the rest—and give you the Pali names for the paramis.

The first one is dana, which is usually called generosity or giving, sometimes giving of oneself. Sila is virtue or ethical conduct. Nekamma is renunciation. Panya is wisdom or insight. Virya is energy, effort, courage, diligence. Kanti is patience, and it has qualities of tolerance and forbearance, acceptance, endurance. Satya is truthfulness or honesty. Adhitana is determination or resolve. Metta is loving kindness. And upeka is equanimity.

We really can see our entire practice, the whole path in this way, as the cultivation, the strengthening of these wholesome qualities. This is something that's happening continuously as we go through our days here, no matter what's happening, just through our willingness to be present, to come back, to be present with our experience.

Seeing the path this way seems to be especially common in Asia and among Asian teachers. At least I've noticed this with many of my teachers in Burma and Thailand. They often relate to the path in terms of the ripening of paramis and speak about it in this way. This may have to do with a view they tend to hold where they see practice unfolding over lifetimes. They tend to take a very broad, long-term view of the path, and there's an understanding of rebirth which permeates the culture there.

But whether or not the idea of rebirth is meaningful for us, we can see this in terms of a single lifetime also. We go through so many different births just in a single day or even a single period of meditation, in a way. Our whole life, one lifetime, is a continual flow of births and deaths and rebirths. We can be born into a heavenly realm and drop to some pit of despair and anguish—and everywhere in between—in a single day, or sometimes even in a single hour of meditation. We can go through all these changes, these different births, you could say.

these different realms that we take birth in, even in a single life—through this ebb and flow, there's this

continual process of developing these noble, beautiful qualities of heart and of mind.

Sometimes we meet people who seem to have one or more of these qualities very highly developed. We're not all the same. We meet someone who seems to have just an abundance of energy, or they're very, very generous—they just seem to naturally be very generous, or kind and loving.

I was thinking about this when I was putting these notes together for the talk, and my mother came to mind—something I didn't notice about her when I was growing up. In thinking of my mom, she had this amazing abundance of energy, it seemed. She took complete care of the house. She did everything there, all the cooking. That was what people my mother's age did—they were the cooks. And she was a really good cook. She was a great gardener too. She made a beautiful flower garden in the yard. I grew up in the desert, so you had to water everything. She was always dragging hoses all over the place to water things. And she was a very good ceramic artist—she was a potter. She had a pottery studio at home and made all the dishes in our house. She made all her own glazes, burning things and making ash. She was part of a cooperative crafts gallery, so she had to work there as well. And then she was constantly volunteering. She taught sewing in poor communities, delivered meals to elderly folks who were homebound, and worked as a peace activist—all these things. And then she had friends, and she raised four children. The list goes on and on. She wasn't superwoman, but she was. And it never seemed like she was working too hard. It wasn't hyper at all. She did it all with a kind of grace and ease that was remarkable.

So she just seemed to have an abundance of this. She seemed to have somehow come in with this energy pāramī highly developed. And sometimes we meet people who seem to have all of them, or a lot of them, really highly developed. They seem to come in this way. And when they come to practice, if they come to this practice, they seem to be able to deepen very quickly. In Asia, the teachers would say, "Oh, well, their pāramī is very ripe." They would just see it this way, and there's this understanding that not everyone is the same in this way.

But sometimes we find the idea of cultivating or perfecting these qualities maybe a little challenging to relate to. We hear the list and it seems like a checklist of qualities we don't have. We get disheartened and discouraged and think, "Well, we'll never measure up. We're born the way we are and that's just it. We'll always be deficient in some way." We can actually feel this way. It might seem funny, but sometimes we hold ourselves this way.

But luckily, our minds and hearts are malleable. They aren't static. Nothing is set. Nothing is fixed. And where we place the power of our attention, where we bring our intention—this really matters. The Buddha spoke very directly to this in a very famous verse from the Dhammapada: "Mind is the forerunner of all things. Mind is their chief."

They are all mind made. If with an impure mind one speaks or acts, suffering follows like the wheel of the cart follows the foot of the ox. Mind is the forerunner of all things. Mind is their chief. They are all mind made. If with a pure mind one speaks or acts, happiness follows like one's never departing shadow.

There is such great emphasis placed on the power of intention, the power of the mind in this way. Through our practice we are strengthening these paramis, these beautiful noble qualities, just by showing up and beginning over and over. As we go through the days and bring our attention and intention to cultivating love and kindness and wisdom and understanding, we are also cultivating non-harming. We have this commitment to living harmlessly as much as possible, maintaining and keeping and refining the precepts.

But we can tend to overlook this part of the path at times. We get very focused on trying to do the practice, on trying to meditate, maybe trying to develop concentration. And we overlook and sometimes fail to even notice at all these other beneficial qualities that are being developed no matter what's going on—things like perseverance and energy and resolve and kindness.

I think it's really good to reflect on the fact that we are developing these paramis, to really bring this to mind from time to time, especially when the going gets rough and we feel like nothing's happening in our practice. We find ourselves wondering: What is it I'm supposed to be doing here? What is this all about? What good is this supposed to be? What does watching my breath have to do with anything? What does it have to do with liberation?

I've always really liked children's books. I liked them when I was little, and I like them now. There's something about how simple and direct they are that I find very appealing, and I like the pictures. So in the spirit of the Jataka stories, I'm going to read you a story. It's not a Jataka tale—it's from Frog and Toad. Some of you may know Frog and Toad. Those of you who've raised kids in the last thirty or forty years may know them. It's a level two reading-with-help book, which I thought might be about our speed. It's kind of my speed anyway.

So this is from *Frog and Toad Together*, and the story I'm going to read is called "The Garden." I wish I could show you the pictures because they're very good. Frog is pretty green, and Toad is kind of beige or tan. They have nice outfits, but their feet are bare, and they have really great feet.

So anyway, here they are. This is "The Garden":

Frog was in his garden. Toad came walking by. "What a fine garden you have, Frog," he said. "Yes," said Frog. "It is very nice, but it was hard work." "I wish I had a garden," said Toad. "Here are some flower seeds. Plant them in the ground," said Frog, "and soon you will have a garden." "How soon?" asked Toad. "Quite soon," said Frog.

Toad ran home. He planted the flower seeds. "Now seeds," said Toad, "start growing." Toad walked up and down a few times. The seeds did not start to grow. Toad put his head close to the ground and said loudly, "Now seeds, start growing." Toad looked at the ground again. The seeds did not start to grow. Toad put his head very close to the ground and shouted, "Now seeds, start growing!"

Frog came running up the path.

"What is all this noise?" he asked.

"My seeds will not grow," said Toad.

"You are shouting too much," said Frog. "These poor seeds are afraid to grow."

"My seeds are afraid to grow?" asked Toad.

"Of course," said Frog. "Leave them alone for a few days. Let the sun shine on them. Let the rain fall on them. Soon your seeds will start to grow."

That night, Toad looked out of his window. "Drat," said Toad. "My seeds have not started to grow. They must be afraid of the dark."

Toad went out to his garden with some candles. "I will read the seeds a story," said Toad. "Then they will not be afraid."

Toad read a long story to his seeds. And the next day, Toad sang songs to his seeds—he's standing in the rain holding an umbrella. And all the next day, Toad read poems to his seeds. And all the next day, Toad played music for his seeds.

Toad looked at the ground. The seeds still did not start to grow. "What shall I do?" cried Toad. "These must be the most frightened seeds in the whole world."

Then Toad felt very tired, and he fell asleep.

"Toad, Toad, wake up," said Frog. "Look at your garden."

Toad looked at his garden. Little green plants were coming up out of the ground.

"At last!" shouted Toad. "My seeds have stopped being afraid to grow!"

"And now you will have a nice garden too," said Frog.

"Yes," said Toad. "But you were right, Frog. It was very hard work."

You probably get my point. Meditation practice really is a lot like planting seeds in a garden. A lot of the time we're like Toad with his seeds—they don't come up fast enough for us. We start practicing and the first question we ask is, "How soon?" We begin and immediately we're looking to see if these seeds we're planting are starting to grow. And if we don't see results quickly enough for our taste, we start to yell at our seeds, or we yell at ourselves internally in some way. We must not be doing it right. We're doing something wrong. Maybe we try different strategies, like Toad with his poems and stories and songs.

Usually we're not quite as kind as Toad, though, when he thought his seeds were frightened. We don't read stories and poems to our seeds. We blame them, or we blame ourselves. We find fault with the teachers or

the teachings or something. We point here and there, placing the blame for our apparent lack of results.

Joseph said I could tell this story. It's from the early days of IMS, when it was first started here. They received a piece of mail addressed to the "Instant Meditation Society." It's funny, but we do want instant meditation. That would be great. That's what we want.

In the Saṃyutta Nikāya, there's a passage where the Buddha is talking about a hen trying to incubate and hatch her eggs. He says, suppose a hen has eight, ten, or twelve eggs.

If she doesn't cover them rightly, warm them rightly, or incubate them rightly, even though this wish may occur to her—"Oh, that my chicks might break through the eggshells with their spiked claws or beaks and hatch out safely"—still, it is not possible that the chicks will break through the eggshells with their spiked claws or beaks and hatch out safely. Why is that? Because the hen has not covered them rightly, warmed them rightly, or incubated them rightly.

So we have to sit on our eggs. It doesn't matter how badly we want things to happen quickly, how much we want things to happen on our timetable. If we don't sit on our eggs, they're not going to hatch. And sometimes it takes a while.

But we're very impatient as a society, here in the West especially, I think. We want everything to happen fast. We want quick results. We tend to lose interest if things don't happen as quickly as we think they should. We're always looking for a better way, and better equals quicker. There's got to be a shortcut somewhere. I think the teachers are holding out on us—actually there's a real quick way, but they want us to suffer.

I think part of the reason we have this impatience in our culture is because we tend to misunderstand what patience is about. Sometimes we might confuse it with an attitude of not caring so much about the results of what we're doing, as though it means we shouldn't be so committed, or as though we're indifferent—a lack of resolve or dedication, this carefree attitude of letting things run their course without any real commitment.

Or we might think patience is some kind of stoic quality where we grit our teeth and bear down, tough it out and make it through. But usually this leads to feeling tight and contracted. And we usually don't want to learn about patience because we usually have to do it when things are not going so well, when things are difficult.

It's pretty easy to be patient when we're having a good time, when things are going well, when our experience is pleasant. Do you ever notice yourself feeling impatient when things are going well in your practice? When you like what's going on or like what you're doing, it's easy. The issue doesn't come up. We don't have to be patient then—usually, maybe sometimes.

But without the quality of patience in life and practice, we're going to have a hard time. We're going to

suffer because things aren't going to go the way we want them to very often, if ever. And so patience is really invaluable, really essential for us in our practice and in life.

Things are not always going to go the way we want them to. We're going along, minding our own business, meditating along nicely, everything's going fine—and then all of a sudden it changes. On retreat, how often does this happen? Everything's pretty easeful, our minds are clear, we're relaxed and present, and then it just falls apart. We're confused and resistant and frustrated and angry. Often it just feels like this back and forth between these states.

It might be easier if it didn't change, you know—if it was just kind of a drag all the time, we might get used to it and it wouldn't be so bad. But then we have these moments when things are going well, when it's not too bad, when things come together—and then we lose it again and wonder what went wrong, what happened.

Last year on retreat, I remember starting and feeling that if I'd never meditated at all, ever, I would be just as good at it, if not better, than I was. I really had that feeling. Probably that's not true—I don't know. But we really do have to bring patience to our practice or we can get disheartened when we find things going that way.

The Pali word, as I mentioned in the list of paramis that I read, is khanti—patience. It includes all these different qualities of patience and acceptance, of forbearance, and really of compassion and gentleness and steadiness. All these qualities are mixed together in this word, khanti.

In the texts, there are a couple of places where patience is especially highly praised. One place it says: "No higher rule, the Buddhas say, than patience. No greater thing exists than patience." True patience really is imbued with these qualities of gentle, kind steadfastness—this willingness to stay with it as we go through the sometimes rocky terrain of what it means to be human, as we move through all the different changes that inevitably come in our practice and in our lives.

Sometimes I think we hold on to a secret hope, a notion that somehow we're going to reach a state where we only have pleasant experiences—that this is the goal of practice. We probably wouldn't admit it if someone asked us, but secretly we might be holding out some hope, as though we're tipping the scales, as though enlightenment equals a steady state of nothing but pleasant experiences.

This might be the case in some of the heavenly realms, if you believe in different realms of existence. It's said that in some of the deva realms, the experience is nothing but pleasant. This might sound pretty good to some of you about now—just to be in a realm of nothing but pleasure.

But it's said that the human realm is the best place to practice and realize the Dhamma. Because it's not too pleasant, so we have some incentive to practice, some inspiration. And it's not so difficult that we're crushed under the weight of suffering. There's this balance.

In his teaching, the Buddha was pointing to a freedom that doesn't depend on things being any particular way. Because true freedom can't depend on things being just one way, being a certain way. Conditions are always changing, and any peace we might find because of the conditions in our lives is not going to last. When they change, we'd be back where we started from. There's no real freedom there.

So we have to learn how to open to the whole thing—to our whole life when things are going well and when they aren't. We're going to be in for a really hard time of it if we make our happiness dependent on having things go a certain way, if we make our happiness dependent on things being pleasant.

Sometimes when we come to a retreat like this, we may have an agenda. We come to the retreat with an agenda to find some peace and calm, some ease. We sit down, and this is what we're looking for. But then we find this wild, uncontrollable mind that's full of resistance and pettiness—that's what we find there. And everything that we've ever repressed or denied or done our best to get rid of somehow, to forget, to push aside—all of it shows up. Maybe even not stuff that's so difficult, but just boring, repetitious, or embarrassing stuff. Every song we've ever heard and every stupid TV show we ever watched. It's all in there and it's all going to come up. We get to play that song one more time. Sometimes when I notice this, I start to really appreciate the value of a renunciate lifestyle—not having as much of that stuff in there.

But sooner or later everything is going to come up, and a lot of it might be difficult to see. It's not easy to be with. There's so much that comes up in our experience that we find unacceptable. There's stuff that we have managed to somehow compartmentalize in our hearts, that we put somewhere where we're not going to look at it. But if this is our strategy, we're going to be in for a hard time. This path is going to test us because we're going to have to look at it all sooner or later.

I was reading a passage when I was thinking about this talk—a chapter in a book remembering the famous Tibetan teacher Chögyam Trungpa Rinpoche, written by Jack Kornfield. He was describing an event in Berkeley, California, where Rinpoche was to speak to a large group that had assembled in a big hall to hear him. He tended to arrive late for things, and so he showed up quite late as usual. When he came in, he said, "If you want your money back, it's all right. Just go to the door and ask for it back. It's quite fine. In fact, if you haven't started the spiritual path, it's best not to begin. It's difficult. It's terrible. And you have to face all kinds of things that you won't like. As far as the ego is concerned, it's just one insult after another."

Sometimes it feels like this. We sit down and it just feels like one insult after another as we watch our mind doing its thing, going through these gyrations. We might keep some of it at bay for a while. We can create a temporary place of calm with concentration, or we can zone out in some way. But sooner or later we have to have a relationship with everything, with the whole of our being.

And this is where patience, this quality of patience, is an absolute necessity. We can feel like we have to get rid of some stuff in there, that we have to reach some kind of exalted, rarefied state, and then we can practice and explore the teachings. But it's right here and now, in the thick of it all, where the practice

happens—not in some future time, in some state of grace that we manage to pull together, but right now in this body, this mind, in this moment. This is where the Dhamma will reveal itself, right in the thick of the whole catastrophe.

Patience is our best ally in being with this, in practicing, because it allows us to be with this process with some stability and with kindness, gentleness, and strength of heart. We really need patience because we're going to get caught, and we're going to get lost and hooked, over and over. Sometimes it's going to be hard. It's going to be difficult and even painful. And we need to remind ourselves regularly, I think, that this is a path that takes time.

A lot of what we're doing is unlearning habits that we've been practicing for a long time—lifetimes, perhaps. It's going to take a long time to unlearn these habits. And the only way to do this is to stick with the practice, to be really resolute in what we're doing.

This is what ultimately makes the difference. Because until we're fully enlightened, there will be times of confusion. And if we're fighting and struggling against this process, fighting the way things are, we're going to suffer. We can create a situation where we're never good enough, never okay just as we are.

Sometimes we get opportunities to develop patience in life that we might wish we weren't getting. Usually we learn about patience by being impatient a lot of the time.

Over the last few years, my sister and I have spent a lot of time looking after my parents, who both passed away this year. They were both almost ninety-two. They'd been together for seventy years, which is a long time to do anything—a long time to breathe, let alone be with the same person, stay married to someone. It was a great practice in patience to be caring for them.

In the last few years, my mother had pretty severe dementia, especially in the final couple of years of her life. And it was difficult. We'd have the same conversation over and over. She'd ask me a question and I'd answer, and then as soon as I'd finished she'd ask that question again because nothing was staying in there. She was very confused a lot of the time.

My father—it was so hard for him, and his reaction was to try to demand that she not be confused. He would get angry and frustrated. That was all he could do; he couldn't do anything else. It was too painful. And he would have these very difficult reactions to her trouble.

For me, being in that situation, there were times when there was a lot of impatience—wanting them to behave like grownups. These are my parents, after all. But that wasn't possible. So I learned a lot about patience by being impatient.

If we just tell ourselves to be patient, to simply tolerate difficulties, we can sometimes get tight and think we just have to bear this, and tighten down. But we can really explore impatience, really get to know it. And this leads us to developing patience. We see how it feels in our hearts and in our bodies and our

minds when we're impatient. What are the moods? What are the thoughts that arise? What happens if we get identified with impatience? How often do we react out of impatience, lashing out in anger or frustration, and then really live to regret it?

I know with my father there were times when I spoke harshly from a place of impatience, and it was so painful—great learning for me there. My father had really refined the ability to push my buttons. Not intentionally, never intentionally, but this is what families are. They're just really good at it. We can feel really equanimous here on retreat, but if you want a reality check, go spend time with your family. More practice will definitely be required.

There's one thing that can really be helpful when we're trying to cultivate patience and work with impatience. One thing to examine here on retreat—I think it's a great opportunity—is to really look at our relationship to unpleasant experience. So often we relate to unpleasant experience as bad, as wrong, as something to get rid of. We can write off a whole day here on retreat because there was a predominance of unpleasant feeling tone in our experience.

We go into an interview and report, "Well, it's not going too well," or "I had a bad day yesterday," and what we describe is that there was an unpleasant feeling tone to a lot of our experience—in our body, or in our mind, in our heart. Conversely, we say, "Oh, it's going really well," and usually this means that a higher percentage of the time our experience had a pleasant feeling tone.

But if we relate to unpleasant feelings as wrong or bad, as something we've got to get rid of, then we're missing out on a real opportunity. We can write off a whole part of our life if this is how we relate to it. We can dismiss these times as though they had no value. But actually there's a lot we can learn right in the moment.

If we can reframe this experience and bring some interest and investigation in, we see there's something we can explore there. In that moment, even with something very difficult and unpleasant, our minds and our hearts can really open. There can be some acceptance of the truth of the way things are. Our whole perspective shifts, and we can start to touch a place of freedom right in the midst of unpleasant feelings.

This quality of investigation and inquiry at such times can lead us to a way of meeting our life more fully, more completely. When we let go of trying to make our experience meet our agenda, when we stop insisting that life live up to our expectations of how we think it should be or how it's supposed to be, we begin to meet our life just as it is. So much of the time, if we find ourselves struggling during the day, somehow in contention with our experience or with life itself, it's because things aren't living up to our expectations, aren't meeting our agenda.

Another useful thing to keep in mind in this process of cultivating patience is to remind ourselves that our practice consists of many small steps taken many times. If we try to be mindful for the whole day, or even for a whole sitting, we can set ourselves up for failure. We can get impatient and frustrated because it's

going to be hard to do. But we can be mindful just for one moment, and then for the next moment. We can make this light, manageable effort many times over.

I found a technical definition of patience that's quite interesting. It says: "Patience has the characteristic of acceptance. Its function is to endure the desirable and the undesirable. Its manifestation is tolerance or non-opposition. And seeing things as they really are is its proximate cause."

This quality of acceptance is really key. We accept the truth of things. We take our stand on reality. We acknowledge the truth of the moment—not what we want it to be, but how it is. This is not resignation. There's no sense of resignation here. Resignation is a state of defeat or collapse. But acceptance, real acceptance, is alive and very vital and connected.

And so this proximate cause for the arising of patience—I think this is so interesting—the proximate cause is seeing things as they really are, connecting with the truth of the way it is in the moment. We can focus so much on how we think things should be that we completely miss the way they are. We can always know: right now, it's like this.

There's a place in one of the suttas, the Buddha's discourse of advice to Rahula, where he was giving advice to his son. I'll warn you, this is slightly graphic—sometimes the Buddha spoke very directly about things. But he's speaking to his son and he said: "Rahula, develop meditation that is like the earth. For when you develop meditation that is like the earth, agreeable and disagreeable contacts will not invade your mind and remain. Just as people throw clean things and dirty things—excrement, urine, spittle, pus and blood—on the earth, and the earth is not repelled, humiliated and disgusted because of that, so too, Rahula, develop meditation that is like the earth. For when you develop meditation that is like the earth, agreeable and disagreeable contacts will not invade your mind and remain."

This doesn't mean that we just let things pile up on us. We don't become a doormat. There's no resignation, as I said. But it's this quality of being like the earth, where we're steady and firm, impartial and resolute. We sit like a mountain. It rains and snows, things walk on the mountain and do all kinds of things, and the mountain is not moved.

It says that the manifestation of patience is tolerance or non-opposition. This points to the aspect of patience that is not in contention with our experiences, not struggling or fighting against things. And at the same time, there's no wilting, no retreating in the face of experience. Patience has this ability to flow with the changes in life. It allows us to move with the changes that come inevitably, without struggling.

There's a great strength of heart that can come from this, because we don't falter in the face of what's difficult. We don't shrink away. We don't shrink in defeat. We don't withdraw either. We stay firm. Sometimes patience has this incredible quality of strength and courage and compassion. Sometimes there's great courage that arises in the form of patience.

I'd like to read this quotation from Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. This is from a Christmas sermon on peace,

given in 1967:

"We shall match your capacity to inflict suffering by our capacity to endure suffering. We will meet your physical force with soul force. Do to us what you will, and we will still love you."

We cannot in all good conscience obey your unjust laws and abide by the unjust system, because non-cooperation with evil is as much a moral obligation as is cooperation with good. And so throw us in jail and we will still love you. Bomb our homes and threaten our children, and as difficult as it is, we will still love you. Send your hooded perpetrators of violence into our communities at the midnight hour and drag us out on the wayside road and leave us half dead as you beat us, and we will still love you. Send your propaganda agents around the country and make it appear that we are not fit, culturally or otherwise, for integration, but we'll still love you. But be assured that we will wear you down by our capacity to suffer. And one day we will win our freedom. We will not only win freedom for ourselves. We will so appeal to your heart and conscience that we will win you in the process. And our victory will be a double victory.

There is incredible courage and strength in those words. And this quality of patience in a statement like that. I think one of the most beautiful aspects of patience is this courageous heart of compassion—a heart that knows suffering and understands the nature of delusion, knows what it is like to act from confusion, because we all have done this. We all have acted out of confusion, acted from a place of suffering. And so when we cultivate patience, we can bring kindness and compassion to bear in the face of this.

The poet John Ciardi had a beautiful description of patience that speaks, I think, directly to this. He said, "Patience is the art of caring slowly." The art of caring slowly. There's a deep inner strength that comes from this. This patient heart brings kindness and compassion and steadiness and strength to bear. And it can hold all of the joys and sorrows—the ten thousand joys, the ten thousand sorrows that life will bring.

And maybe one of the most important things to remember, and really to remind ourselves, is that worthwhile things in life usually take time to develop and to mature. The seeds that we plant now—they will sprout and grow and bear fruit in their season, in their time.

This is from Thanissaro Bhikkhu, Ajahn Geoff. It was from a series of talks he gave specifically about working with the breath, with ānāpānasati. So there are references to the breath here, but we could put anything in there. It's not just about meditating on the breath.

He said: "Good things always take time. The trees with the most solid heartwood are the ones that take the longest to grow. So we do the practice, focusing on what we're doing, rather than getting into an internal dialogue about when the results are going to come, what they're going to be like, and how we could speed up the practice. Many times our efforts to speed things up actually just get in the way. Our practice is pretty simple. Stay with the breath. Allow the mind to settle in with the breath and be friends with the breath. Allow the breath to open up and get more and more gentle, more and more porous, so your

awareness can seep into the breath. That's all you have to do. As for whether the results are coming as quickly as you'd like, or when they do come, whether they're going to stay as long as you'd like—that's going to depend on what you're doing right here with the breath. Our desire to have the results come and our desire to have them stay is not going to keep them here. The actual doing of the practice is what will make the difference."

I'll end tonight with a poem by Linda France, called "Dreaming the Real":

I'm lying down looking at the color of sky
falling through trees, dreaming the real,
tasting what it feels like to love it.

Why did it take me so long to let go,
simply exhale, so the day could breathe itself in
and open without me getting in the way?

How could I forget the grace of my own body,
strong as this blue, tender as the white
of the wild blossom, warm as midday light.

Let me practice a patience bold enough
to hold every weather, trusting the elements,
the beauty of rain, all its shades of gray.

I want whatever's real to be enough.
At least it's a place to begin
and to master the art of loving it
and feel it love me back under my skin.

Let's keep sitting quietly for a few minutes. Thank you for your kind attention this evening.

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