Patience

Greg Scharf · Notable Dhamma Teachers — Three-Month Retreat (IMS 2012) · 50:31

This path and the unfolding of our practice and meditation in the spiritual life has been described in a number of different ways. Different traditions use different models or frameworks for describing the spiritual path, and the Buddha taught in different ways at different times, depending on his audience and the situation. He had a real genius for seeming to be able to offer what was most useful to any particular audience at any time.

Sometimes we hear the path described in terms of the unfolding of the Four Noble Truths and understanding of this core teaching—the truth of suffering, the cause of it, the cessation, and then the Eightfold Noble Path—this training in sīla, samādhi, and paññā that leads to the cessation of suffering. Sometimes it's spoken about in terms of what's called the progress of insight, this deep seeing into the characteristics of anicca, dukkha, and anattā through stages of insight and stages of awakening. Sometimes in terms of discovering our Buddha nature, resting in natural great perfection, touching into this luminous quality of the mind and heart that's already awake and never has been any other way.

At different times, one or another of these ways of looking at things may resonate with us more or seem to be more clearly paralleling our experience in any particular moment. It may be useful to hold our practice in one way or another at different times. But there's one description which I think is always useful, always appropriate, and can be a very powerful way of looking at the unfolding of our practice. This is in terms of the ripening of pāramīs, pāramitās—these ten beautiful qualities of mind and heart that it's said the Buddha perfected over countless lifetimes.

If we reflect on the spiritual life in terms of the ripening of these beautiful qualities, it really opens up the breadth of what we relate to as practice, which can sometimes get very narrow. We think of it as the time sitting on the cushion, formally engaged in meditation. But the pāramīs offer a very broad way of looking at the spiritual life and are really helpful, I think, at any time.

This perspective helps us cut through the tendency we have so often to be judging and assessing and evaluating our experience and our practice in meditation. So often we fall into looking for evidence of progress. We get caught up in mentally comparing ourselves with our projections of what's happening for other yogis on retreat. We look to see: Is it working? Am I doing it right? Am I getting it? It's so easy to fall into those mind states—judging our experience, then judging ourselves based on our perception of that experience.

And we can overlook a lot of good qualities that are actually getting strengthened, getting developed, just because we're willing to keep at it, to show up again and again, to come back and begin again. Just through

that, we're developing a lot of good qualities: perseverance and energy, determination.

This way of viewing the path in terms of the ripening of pāramīs is really common in some of the Buddhist countries in Asia where I've spent time. The path is spoken about this way a lot in those cultures. So often my teachers would speak of the spiritual life in terms of ripening pāramīs, relating to it in that way. I think this has at least something to do with the very broad view they hold of practice unfolding over lifetimes, the understanding that these qualities are nurtured and strengthened over a long period of time, reflecting the understanding of rebirth that permeates those cultures in a very deep way.

Whether or not the idea of rebirth is meaningful for us—there's no requirement that it be meaningful or that you adopt it as some kind of belief—we can see it in terms of one lifetime or just in one day. How many different births do we take over the course of a day? Even in a single meditation period, we can take birth in heaven realms of bliss and pleasure, and we can take birth in dukkha realms of deep, difficult states—despair and anguish—and everywhere in between in just a single sitting period. So we could see our whole life, a whole day, as a series of births and passings away and new births. Moment by moment, we can look at our life in this way. And throughout this ebb and flow of change—of births, lives, passings away, rebirths—we're strengthening and developing these beautiful qualities of the pāramīs, whether we notice that or not.

It's so interesting. We meet people sometimes who seem to just have one or more of these qualities of the pāramīs highly developed. They seem to have come into life that way. It seems like they were just born with these qualities. They may have a lot of natural kindness or generosity or energy.

I think of my mother in this way. She had a lot of these beautiful qualities very highly developed. She was a really cool person, my mom. I think of energy, for example. I didn't really notice it when I was growing up, but she had so much energy. She took care of the house. She planted a garden. She was a really great cook and did all the cooking. She was a potter—pretty much all the dishes in the house she made, really beautiful stuff. She worked in an artist cooperative gallery, helped run it, sold her things there. She had lots of friends. She raised four kids.

She did all kinds of incredible volunteer work. When I think about it, list this all out, I don't know how she did it. There just don't seem to be enough hours in the day. And it was all done—it wasn't this hyper, driven energy. It was just my mom, the way she was. It was done with such real ease and grace, very naturally. She just had a lot of energy. Some people do seem to just be that way, to come into life that way.

And we meet people who just seem to deepen and progress in their meditation very easily. In Asia, the teachers would say, "Well, their paramis are very ripe." They would just say that's the way it is. There's an understanding that we're not all the same in this regard.

So I brought one of my favorite books—this is the show-and-tell part of the talk. Some of you have heard me read from this before. It's called *Frog and Toad Together*, and it's a level-two reading-with-help book.

That's kind of my speed some of the time. I'm going to read a story called "The Garden."

There are good pictures. I love kids' books with great pictures, which I can't share with you. But Frog is green, and Toad is kind of brownish and warty, and they're really good friends.

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.

All the next day, Toad sang songs to his seeds. And all the next day Toad read poems to his seeds. And all the next day Toad played music to 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 might have gotten the idea of my point here. Our practice really is a lot like planting seeds. We use this image a lot, but it's a good one. It's actually a really useful image—to hold our practice in this way, understanding that our job is just to plant those seeds.

But a lot of the time we're like Toad with his seeds. They don't come up fast enough for our taste. And the first question we ask when we start practice is, "How soon?" We start to look. Is it working? Are they growing? We don't see results. And then, like Toad, we start to yell at our seeds. We yell at ourselves internally a lot of the time. We're not doing it right. And then maybe we try all kinds of strategies like Toad with his seeds—reading them stories and playing music and all the rest of it.

But often we're not that kind. We don't do those things. He played the violin for them in the picture there. But we don't read stories or poems to them. We blame them, or we blame ourselves. We find fault with the teachings or the teachers. We look outside and point around to place the blame for our apparent lack of results.

Here's another story. This is from the Saṃyutta Nikāya. It's a story the Buddha tells about a hen incubating her eggs.

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

And so no matter how much we want things to happen on our timetable, if we don't sit on our eggs, they're not going to hatch. We need to let these seeds we're planting sprout in their own time. And sometimes it takes a while. We're so impatient as a society. We have a lot of impatience.

We want everything to be done fast. We want quick results. We lose interest if things don't happen quickly. We always think there must be a better way, and better always means quicker. We want to find a shortcut—there's got to be a shortcut. It's like that story of the letter that came here addressed to the "Instant Meditation Society." Someone mentioned we want instant meditation if we can get it, like a packet we could open and mix up.

And because we're so impatient, we often misunderstand what patience really is, what it's about.

Sometimes we can confuse it with an attitude of not caring about what we're doing or about the results of our practice—some kind of indifference. Or we think patience means a stoic attitude where we grit our teeth and bear down and make it through. But we can come out of that with a lot of tightness and contraction in our hearts and bodies and minds.

We don't want to learn about patience because we usually have to practice it when things are difficult. It's easy to be patient when things are going well. If we're having really pleasant, nice, easy experiences, the issue of patience doesn't even come up. We generally don't feel, "I have to be patient with this lovely, blissful mind state." But without the quality of patience in life and in our practice, we're really going to have a hard time. We will suffer without this because things aren't going to go the way we want them to all the time. Patience is essential in our life, in our practice. And we're going to face challenges no matter what—that's just part of the deal. When we take birth, there will be challenges.

We're here on retreat, sitting, minding our own business, everything going well. And then it just changes for no apparent reason. We see this in our meditation. It's easy and clear. We feel relaxed and present. We're connecting. Everything is just flowing along. The practice is doing itself. And then all of a sudden, it just falls apart. We're filled with resistance. We're angry and frustrated. A day can feel like the movement between these kinds of extremes—it's going great, and then it turns into a train wreck, and what did we do wrong? And then it gets better again.

It might be easier if it just didn't change so much. If it was kind of a drag all the time, maybe we'd get used to it. But there are times when it's not too bad, when it feels like it's actually going okay. Things come together, and then we lose it again. It seems like we must have done something wrong—we blew it somehow. I was recently on a retreat, and at one point I thought, "If I had never done this, I'd be just as good, if not better, than I am at it now." That was my perception. I thought if I'd never done it, it would be going better. We have moments like this.

And so we really need to find and cultivate qualities of patience and acceptance, forbearance, the kind of compassion that Susie spoke about last night—which is an aspect of this patience—gentleness, steadiness. All of these qualities are part of this *pāramī* of patience. *Khanti* is the Pali word for patience, *khanti pāramī* . It includes all these qualities I've just mentioned. We need to really cultivate this to help us. It's one of our best allies in practice.

True patience has this kind, gentle attitude—compassionate, caring—this willingness to stay with it, to stay steady as we navigate the ups and downs and the rocky terrain of a life, of our practice, and what it means to be human.

Sometimes I think we have this idea, this notion, that the goal or the result of our practice is going to be reaching a state where we only have pleasant experiences. None of us would admit that if someone asked us outright, but secretly we're holding out some hope that that's the trajectory—that somehow we're tipping the balance in that direction where, a little longer, and it's just going to be really nice all the time.

As though enlightenment were some kind of steady state of nothing but pleasant experiences and pleasant feelings in the body and mind.

And it's said that there are some deva realms, some heavenly realms where it's like that, where it's only pleasant. That might be sounding kind of good right about now to some of us. But the human realm with this mix is said to be the best place to practice and to realize the Dhamma. This is the best realm for that. These realms of pure pleasure offer not much motivation for practice. It's not too pleasant here, so we have some motivation. And it's not so difficult that we're just crushed under the weight of suffering. We get some of both, and it's said this is the best place to practice.

The freedom the Buddha was pointing to is a freedom that doesn't depend on things being a particular way. It doesn't depend on it being pleasant all the time. A true freedom cannot depend on things being any particular way because conditions are always changing. Enlightenment doesn't mean we somehow suddenly get control over conditions—conditions are always changing. And any peace we find that's dependent on conditions being in some particular way, it won't last. It's not a real freedom.

In our practice, we have to learn to be able to open to the whole thing, to the entirety of our life—when things are going well and when they're not, when it's easy, when it's difficult. If we only open up when things are going the way we like, when it's pleasant and flowing easily, then what are we learning? There is no real freedom in that. If our happiness depends on life going only the way we want it to, we're going to be in for a hard time of it. We're setting ourselves up for frustration, for suffering.

We come to a retreat like this, and maybe sometimes we come with a bit of an agenda. We want to find some peace, some calm, some ease—nothing wrong with that. Or sometimes we come and there's something we want to fix in ourselves, fix in our lives, or figure out. We have an idea that we're going to get something we don't have already, or find something that will make us happier. We sit down, just hoping for a little ease and calm, and we start paying attention to our experience. What do we find there? This wild, uncontrollable mind. So much of the time, it's full of resistance and pettiness. Everything we've ever repressed or denied or done our best to forget shows up. Even the stuff that's not difficult is just boring or repetitious or embarrassing. Every song and jingle and stupid TV show we ever watched—we start seeing reruns of all that. It's all in there. Sooner or later, everything is going to come up, and some of it's not that easy to be with.

There's so much in our experience that we put into the category of unacceptable, isn't there? How much that we experience, that unfolds over the course of a day, gets tossed into the unacceptable bin? All the stuff that we put in a little hidden compartment—not going to look at that—and put it away. But this is not ultimately a good strategy because it's all going to come up at some point. The path is going to test us in different ways at different times, and we're going to have to look at it all sooner or later.

I once read an article describing a time someone had been to an evening teaching given by the very famous Tibetan teacher Chögyam Trungpa Rinpoche. This was an event in Berkeley, California, and a lot

of people had come. He was very famous and popular—a big hall, and everyone was there waiting. He tended to arrive late to these events, so he was quite late as usual. Finally he shows up, and this is what he said to start:

"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, 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 that's what practice feels like over the course of a day—just one insult after another.

But we really do have to develop a relationship with our entire being. And patience is absolutely necessary for this—it's a total necessity in this process.

We can have the idea that we have to get rid of certain things in our lives, in our experience, in order to practice properly or achieve some special state for the practice to unfold. But right here, right now, in the middle of it all, right in the midst of it, is where the practice happens. It's not in some future state of grace. It's right here in this body, in this mind, in this moment. This is where the practice happens. This is the Dhamma unfolding. It reveals itself right in the middle of this mess.

And patience really is, as I said, one of our very best allies as we walk this path. Patience allows us to navigate this process with some stability, with some ease, with kindness and gentleness. We can stay steady with the ups and downs, and it helps us find that willingness to begin again.

So much of the practice is this willingness to begin again. We're not going to get anywhere without a willingness to start over. If there's any single key to it, it's that willingness to begin again. We're going to get caught. We're going to get hooked by things. Even when we've seen through them from all sides, we'll get caught again and again. Sometimes it's going to be difficult.

And we really need to remind ourselves that this is a path that takes time. Much of what we're doing, you could say, is unlearning old, deeply conditioned habits of mind and heart. We've been practicing them for a long, long time—maybe for lifetimes. And it's going to take time to unlearn those, to loosen those patterns. The only way this is going to happen is to stick to it, to stick with the practice, to be resolute in what we're doing. This is what's going to serve us and will really be the thing that makes the difference.

Until we're fully enlightened, there are going to be times when we're lost in confusion, struggling in different ways. And if we're fighting against that, fighting against this process, we'll suffer and create a situation where we're never good enough, where we're never okay just as we are.

Sometimes life presents us with the chance to develop patience that we might wish we weren't getting. Usually that's the case. We mostly learn about patience by being impatient.

My sister and I were very much involved in caring for my parents in the years leading up to their deaths.

They died close to one another, about ten weeks apart. Both of them were nearly ninety-two, and they'd been together for seventy years, which is a long time to do anything at all, let alone stay married to the same person. And they still even liked each other. They were very sweet. One of my friends came to visit when my parents were in their late eighties, and they were sitting on the couch holding hands. She was really amazed by that—they still liked each other after being together for that long.

But it wasn't easy. My mother, in her later years, had kinds of dementia where her mind really wasn't functioning very well. I would visit, and we would have the same conversations over and over and over. I know many of you have friends or relatives where you've been around this kind of situation. Great patience was required, and sometimes I didn't have a lot of it. My father had real trouble with my mother's decline. It was very, very difficult. There were many times when I didn't have much patience.

Spending time with our families—that's really where the rubber meets the road, isn't it? It's easy to be wise and equanimous in a meditation center. But go hang with the family and see. That's where you find out more practice is required. Definitely.

And if we just tell ourselves to be patient, to tolerate difficulties in our practice, we can get into this kind of bearing it—we can get tight. What we really need to do at times like that is to take a good look at impatience, to explore the quality of impatience: how it manifests in our heart, in our mind, how it manifests in the body. What are the thoughts, the emotions, the stories that come up? How does it affect us? What happens when we get identified with that quality of impatience?

How many times have we reacted out of impatience, lashed out in some way, or spoken from a place of frustration, only to regret it afterward? I remember times of speaking harshly to my father during those difficult years, and the pain of having done that—doing my best afterward to make some kind of amends.

There's a Chinese proverb that says, "One moment of patience may ward off great disaster. One moment of impatience may ruin a whole life." We can think of situations where a moment of impatience leads to some act that can alter the entire course of a life.

One strategy that can help with cultivating patience is to examine our relationship to unpleasant experience, to unpleasant feelings—which I've been touching on already. This helps us both to develop patience and to work skillfully with impatience, both sides of the coin.

How often do we relate to an unpleasant feeling tone in our experience as problematic, as bad, as wrong, as something to be gotten rid of? We can write off a whole day here on retreat because there was a predominance of unpleasant feeling tone to our experience. We just write it off. We find ourselves reporting, "Oh, it's not been going so well," or "I had kind of a bad day yesterday." And if we look, often what we're really talking about is that it was unpleasant—my experience had an unpleasant feeling tone, a higher percentage of that. And when we report, "Oh, it's going really well," what do we mean? Often it's simply because it feels pleasant. A higher percentage of moments where there's a pleasant feeling.

If we relate to unpleasant feelings only as wrong, bad, problematic, something to get rid of, we're missing out on a real opportunity. We're dismissing a big part of our life as being without value. But there's actually a lot we can learn there if we're willing to look into it, if we can reframe our experience and bring some interest and investigation, seeing it as something we can explore.

In that moment, if we do that—even in the midst of something really difficult and unpleasant—things can open up. Our mind and heart can open in powerful, beautiful ways. We really start to see that our experience is conditional, that it's subject to change, that it's impersonal, that things arise due to conditions and causes, and change when those conditions change. We can start to touch a place of freedom and ease right in the middle of something that's unpleasant and difficult.

Patience allows us to meet our life more fully, more completely. Rather than trying to make life meet our agenda, live up to some expectation we might have about how it should be or is supposed to be, we meet life just as it is right now—just like this, however it is.

Another useful consideration in developing patience is to remind ourselves that our practice consists of small steps taken many times. If we wake up in the morning with the thought, "I'm going to be mindful for the whole day," or we sit down thinking, "I'm going to be mindful for this whole sitting," or even "I'll be mindful for the next five minutes," we may set ourselves up to fail and find frustration and impatience arising because we're not able to do it.

But if we say, "I'll just be mindful for this moment"—well, that's all we have anyway. We can't be mindful for the next five minutes. We can only be present for this moment. If we're still there, we'll do the next one. If we get lost, then whenever we come back, we'll do that one. So we take one step at a time. We do this moment, and then the next moment, and then the next one. This little step, over and over. And that's really manageable, sustainable, if we hold it in that way.

There's a technical definition of patience from the classical texts that offers some useful considerations. Sometimes I like to bring these definitions in. It says that 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—the condition for it to arise.

This quality of acceptance is really a key aspect of true patience. This acceptance, this acknowledgment of the way it is—we're taking our stand on reality with that. We're acknowledging the truth of the moment, not in terms of how we want it to be or think it should be, but how it really is. We stand on the truth of things.

It's important to remember that this quality of acceptance is nothing like resignation. It's not resignation—"It's like this" with a defeated, collapsed attitude. Resignation is a deflated, collapsed state. But acceptance is alive and vital and connected.

Acknowledging: no, it's like this now.

And this points to what was defined as the proximate cause for the arising of patience—seeing things as they really are. So often we're focused on the way we think things should be that we lose sight of the way they actually are, right here and now. If we take our stand on that reality, this can allow patience to flower in the moment.

That definition said the function of patience is to endure the desirable and the undesirable—you could say the pleasant and the unpleasant, the agreeable and the disagreeable, the acceptable and the unacceptable. There are different ways we might express this.

There's a sutta in the Majjhima Nikāya, the Greater Discourse on the Buddha's advice to his son Rāhula. In that long teaching, one part advises Rāhula to 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 there."

Patience allows us to remain firm and steady like the earth itself—this impartial, firm, resolute quality. We sit like a mountain. The mountain is not moved. All kinds of things can happen.

Usually we don't think of desirable things as something we have to endure. I think this points to a relationship with impermanence, with the quality of impermanence. We endure the desirable, the pleasant, in that we know it won't last—that it's subject to arising and passing like everything else. We endure the desirable in that we don't hold onto it. We let it be there, knowing that it will pass away. And so there's a balanced relationship to the changes, the ups and downs that we inevitably encounter in our practice.

The definition also said the manifestation of patience is tolerance or non-opposition. This is an aspect of patience where we're not in contention with our experience—we're not struggling against it. Patience has the ability to flow with change, to ride these changes without fighting against the times when it's difficult. This tolerance, this non-opposition. We really build great strength of heart with this. We don't falter in the face of what's difficult. We don't shrink in defeat or withdraw from challenging times. We don't struggle and fight either, which just exhausts us. We find a place in the middle—we don't fight to the point where we simply give up. This quality of non-opposition is an aspect of patience: not in contention with the truth of things.

Sometimes the quality of patience manifests as an incredible strength and compassion and courage. This is an excerpt from "A Christmas Sermon on Peace" by the Reverend Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.—a beautiful sermon he delivered at Christmas time:

"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 some 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 and otherwise for integration, but we'll still love you. And 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."

I think this speaks to one of the most powerful aspects of the quality of patience—this courageous heart of compassion that knows suffering, that understands the nature of confusion, knows what it is like to act from that place of pain and suffering and confusion, and is able to bring kindness and compassion to bear in the face of that. There is incredible strength in that quality of patience.

The poet John Ciardi had a beautiful short description of patience that I really love. It speaks to this quality. He said: "Patience is the art of caring slowly."

Patience is the art of caring slowly. A deep quality of connection and care is part of this.

One thing worth remembering as we walk this path, as we engage in the spiritual life, the meditative life—something to remind ourselves of regularly—is that most worthwhile things in life take time to develop and grow.

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 the results—when they're going to come, what they're going to be like, and how we can speed up the practice. Many times our efforts to speed things up actually just get in the way.

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 and now. Our desire to have the results come, 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 short poem by Linda France. It's 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 standing in the way. How could I forget the tender 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, and 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, feel it love me back under my skin.

Thank you for your kind attention this evening.

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