

Dawn Scott

*The Steadying Power of Patience*

Part 3: "Patience as Gentle Perseverance"

July 17, 2021



Hello and welcome to our third week in this four-part series on the steadying power of patience. We're looking at the second facet of this beautiful gem with which we're adorning the heart and mind. This beautiful gem is patience.

We looked at the first facet of patience as forbearance, and now we're looking at patience as gentle perseverance. I learned the framing of this practice from Gil Fronsdal. I love this phrase: "gentle perseverance." The "gentle" speaks to the attitude with which we fill the perseverance. We fill it with inner ease, openness, and flexibility to help us let go of striving, as striving can creep into our practice and start to move into the corners of our daily lives and enter into our patterns.

We can get really clear, and have some discernment around when striving comes in, noticing how it feels in the body, the constellation of thoughts that are a manifestation of striving and over-efforting in our heart-mind. Then, once we recognize it, we can start to relax it with this gentle perseverance.

Sometimes, it can be helpful to start your stationary practice (whether you do it sitting, lying down, or standing) or your walking or movement practice with just a word, a phrase, an image, or even a poem that helps to foster this inner attitude of relaxation, ease, and gentleness. I want to share the first few lines of a poem with you, and the poem is called "A Spontaneous Vajra Song." It's really helped prime my own heart and mind to just rest and receive and bring in this gentleness.

"Happiness cannot be found through great effort and willpower but is already present in open relaxation and letting go. Don't strain yourself. There's nothing to do or undo."

You can hold this in your heart as a reminder of resting back, bringing in gentleness. And this gentleness can be active—it's a gentleness that fills perseverance. We're very clear about the direction that we're heading.

There's a lot of discernment in the heart-mind: curiosity, interest, and aliveness and alertness. All of those qualities have a gentleness to them, a kindness, an openness, a spaciousness, a relaxation.

So when we start to let go of willing, powering through, and striving, happiness and other wholesome mind states actually have a chance to arise in the heart-mind and start to bless our practice, the heart, and the body with some ease and perhaps even moments of contentment.

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We can come to practice with very deep longings and very high aspirations, and inherent in these aspirations and these longings is a nobility. Some time ago, I was on the phone with a friend, and she was having a really difficult time with someone that she really cares about. She said, "You know, I just want to find the gold within our connection and nurture that and let go of everything else." She wanted to let go of everything that wasn't connected with the gold of this connection that she wanted to foster.

I love that because I feel like that attitude can be applied to our longings and our aspirations. In our longings and our aspirations for practice is gold. It might be the wish for profound peace, or to be a safe space and a refuge for all of life, or to experience the highest happiness.

There's no need to actually banish our longings. There's no need to hold tight to our aspirations because we can recognize the gold and the beauty at the center of our longings and aspirations, and when we relate to them wisely, they can actually fuel our practice. They can be an inspiration for our practice. They can be onward leading.

That said, if we're not mindful, if we forget to invite this openness, this gentleness, and this kindness, our longings and our aspirations can fuel tension or over-efforting, and it's as if our internal systems of striving end up usurping our aspirations and the gold within our longings.

And then we start to shame and blame ourselves when our practice doesn't match up with our aspirations, when there is a huge gap between our aspirations and how the practice is unfolding at the moment. And that's when the inner critic can come in and start to make our inner world feel so untenable and so oppressive that we don't even want to practice. So we want to protect our aspirations. We want to protect our longings and the gold within them, making sure that they're not hijacked by the inner critic and over-efforting.

There are some ways that we can cultivate this gentleness within our practice: simply spending time in nature, looking out the window here at the hillside and the garden. Sometimes, early in the day, we have birds that swoop in. They're building nests right now. So just spending time in nature and attuning to the rhythms of nature can bring in this gentleness. Walking outside and taking in the vastness of sky can help prime this inner attitude of spaciousness and gentleness.

So we bring a gentle attitude to the perseverance—flexibility, easiness, and a spacious attitude to the steadfastness of purpose. This is another way of framing perseverance. It's as if the perseverance actually comes out of a steadfastness of purpose.

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Our intention ends up fueling perseverance, and it sees us through the vicissitudes of our practice, the highs and lows of practice, the seeming obstacles of practice. When we practice, we do encounter obstacles and delays, the hindrances, aversion, greed, delusion, or comparing mind that may result in envy or jealousy, reactivity, impulsiveness.

This gentle perseverance can help us reframe our attitude towards these seeming obstacles and delays. We start to let go of our ideas of the practice and what it's supposed to be at the moment. We might be impatient to actually experience a particular state or to repeat some meditative experience.

But when we see these obstacles and delays as gateways and vehicles, it can be so freeing because they're the means by which we cultivate other beautiful qualities. When a hindrance arises in the mind, we can see it as a gateway, a vehicle, a means by which we can cultivate mindfulness—we can bring mindfulness to the hindrance, get to know it, and understand the conditions that gave rise to it. We cultivate investigation, energy, and other wholesome mind states that then carry us along this path toward freedom or whatever our aspirations for practice may be.

So it's true, there are these seeming obstacles and delays within practice, these vicissitudes within practice. And this perseverance, perseverance that is fueled by intention and purpose, keeps us steady through the inevitable highs and lows of practice.

In fact, one of the functions of complete patience as gentle perseverance is to actually help us live through the desirable and undesirable without falling into these extremes of reactivity, keeping our balance, because when we experience what our heart-mind deems as a low within practice, we can start to take it personally. We can fall into despair. We can just give up and give in to the inner turbulence that we're experiencing at the moment.

But it's also interesting that one of the functions of complete patience as gentle perseverance is to help us live through the desirable. When you think about it, when you practice, you see sometimes there is a tendency to fall out of balance in regard to the desirable. We experience something that the heart-mind deems as desirable or beneficial, and we can be blown sky high into exuberance.

We might start to experience a little complacency within our practice. We get a little too relaxed. When we find our heart-mind starting to fall into either of these extremes, we can actually steady ourselves and come back into balance by touching into the nobility of our aspirations and intentions, which fuel this gentle perseverance.

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It can be so helpful in those moments to just touch in. Our intentions are like a touchstone: Why am I practicing? "Oh yeah, I want to be a safe space and a refuge for all beings. OK, how can I actually use this seeming obstacle as a means to move closer to becoming a safe space and a refuge for everybody?"

In the first video, I shared with you a text that I got from my friend, "Have a magical retreat with your teacher. The conditions for awakening are there. Believe it's possible." We can actually awaken within the conditions of our lives, the conditions of what's desirable and undesirable. However long it takes is OK. And this is another boon of patience. This is another gift of gentle perseverance, letting go of timelines regarding our practice, letting go of timelines regarding living into our aspirations.

There's a phrase that has served as a reminder for me, that has helped me to let go of timelines when I feel myself starting to get impatient with my practice. I learned it from Andrea Fella, who learned it from Kamala Masters, who learned it from her teacher, Munindraji.

Here's the phrase: "When the fruit is ripe, it'll fall from the tree." So simple, right? When the fruit is ripe, it'll fall from the tree. But we don't necessarily practice as if that's true. We don't know when the seeds of our practice will bear fruit, so it's really none of our business to be checking every two minutes to see: Am I concentrated yet? Am I closer to Buddhahood (or whatever your aspirations around practice are)?

That's not to say that it's not helpful every six or 12 months to take stock of our practice to see: Are the paramis actually strengthening? How is the practice actually developing and maturing? That feels like a mature way of reflecting on our practice. That's not impatience. We're actually bringing some mature reflection to our development and starting to assess, like "The parami of truthfulness or the parami of patience is really strong in me, but maybe I want to work with renunciation, and I'm noticing that that's a little challenging for me these days."

Taking stock of our practice is very, very helpful. But we're cultivating gentle perseverance. It manifests as this steadfast purpose, intention, aspiration, and perseverance that sees us through the highs and lows and the plateaus of practice. And this practice is filled with gentleness, inner ease, openness, relaxation, and kindness, all in support of letting go of timelines. When the fruit is ripe, it'll fall from the tree.

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Thank you for your attention, thank you for your time, and I look forward to practicing with you during our last session, where we look at patience as accepting the various truths of our lives.

Take good care.