

Patience

What is the meaning of patience?
Why does patience lead to happiness?
How can we become more patient?

To practice patience is to taste the power of the mind. Life is full of uncomfortable experiences, from minor irritations to major confrontations and setbacks. When they happen, we have a choice about how to respond. We can either become agitated and upset, or we can stay calm and relaxed. Patience is the ability to control our reactions and retain our peace of mind. It is about having the flexibility to cope with whatever we encounter.

Patience doesn't make us passive or resigned, or take away the ability to respond appropriately to difficulties and harm. On the contrary, patience makes it far more likely we can respond in an appropriate way, because we retain the ability to think clearly. Patience demands serious insight and active discipline. Having the courage to be patient can bring us great dignity and power.

Impatience often leads to anger and discontent. Nobody benefits, least of all ourselves. When we are feeling impatient, it's difficult to think clearly or make good decisions. However when we practice patience, we are less likely to say or do something that will cause harm to someone else. We have a much better chance of responding skillfully to whatever is going on.

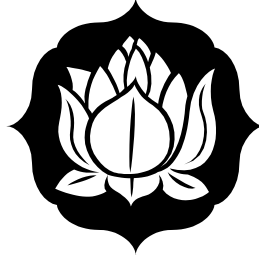
Patience is open-hearted. We are kind and respectful to people around us. Practicing patience and tolerance toward others is a small yet very significant way to contribute to peace in the world. It is the antidote to unnecessary, and ultimately meaningless, conflict. If we can show patience, we gain the rare ability to create a tiny space where peace can take root. This may inspire other people to behave with patience as well.

Some people seem to be born patient, just as others seem to have a tendency to get angry. However, it is also possible to cultivate patience. We can remind ourselves of the damage that is caused by uncontrolled anger. We can accept that an injury may not have been intended. We can remember that the situation will change. Patience is a learning curve that lays the foundations for a happy life.

The real work of patience happens in the quiet moments: when we have removed ourselves from the person or the situation that upsets us; when it's possible to take a deep breath and let go of tangled feelings; when we can find the space and honesty to admit that we may have acted unskillfully ourselves.

It helps to spend time on a regular basis looking into how we can be more patient and the benefits this will bring. Such reflection will gradually condition us against getting unnecessarily angry or upset. In time, we can change our 'reactions' to challenging people and situations into calm and considered 'responses.' Genuine patience is a wonderfully expansive state of mind.

[Excerpted and adapted by S. Anderson from: The 16 Guidelines, 2006-2012.]



Patience is the companion of wisdom. – Saint Augustine

We cannot learn real patience and tolerance from a guru or a friend. They can be practiced only when we come in contact with someone who creates unpleasant experiences. According to Shantideva, enemies are really good for us as we can learn a lot from them and build our inner strength. – Dalai Lama

The training of patience is the training of keeping one's love and compassion in the face of those difficulties which come from other people. – Thrangu Rinpoche

We can suppress anger and aggression or act it out, either way making things worse for ourselves and others. Or we can practice patience: wait, experience the anger and investigate its nature. – Pema Chödrön

Do you have patience to wait till your mud settles and the water is clear? Can you remain unmoving till the right action arises by itself? – Lao Tzu

Being able to wait is so hard that the greatest poets did not disdain to make the inability to wait the theme of their poetry. – Friedrich Nietzsche

To lose patience is to lose the battle. – Mahatma Gandhi

The years teach what the days never know. – Ralph Waldo Emerson

If you are irritated by every rub, how will you be polished? – Rumi