

Patience and Compassion  
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Alameda Sangha, April 12, 2020

### Guided Meditation

Bring attention to how your body feels now that it's come to rest. Let physical stress melt away from the top of your scalp, down the front and back of your head, along all sides of your neck and around your shoulders, down your entire torso and legs to your feet and the tips of your toes. Feel the totality of this body at rest, breathing easily, calm, having released all that physical stress.

Now bring attention to your mind. Maybe it's an open space with little bits of thought and images floating through it. Maybe it's like hands hanging on to one or more thoughts sticky with some dukkha-filled emotion. Let it all pass through.

Whatever is going on in your mind, let it be. Have patience with it as it flows, or lurches, through your awareness. It can't really do any harm. It's just thought, states of mind. Let the space through which the contents of the mind flow open and hold it all with compassion, like the kind arms of the universe. Agitation or peace, clinging/aversion or non-attachment. It's all OK. Let it just pass through without reproach.

Just watch whatever the mind shows you. Stand back enough to let it pass. It is not "You." If it starts to feel personal, invite your attention kindly back to the body, patiently breathing. Let your attention sink into the peace of just being in this body here and now.

Repeat this shifting of attention over and over, exercising mindfulness enough to watch the mind with patience and compassion, then whenever the attention gets stuck, returning to concentration on the body, and then back to observing the mind.

### Dharma Talk

This talk is about patience and compassion. Everyone seems to be exercising these a lot more lately, out of necessity. Do you feel like these are trying times, having to stay at home to avoid a deadly illness? Just the strangeness of it is a challenge: the empty streets, seeing people only from a distance or online, deciding how to open delivery packages or groceries. Families with kids, laid-off workers, separated families, especially around Easter and Passover; all have struggled with serious frustrations and anxieties. And then there are those who've

been touched directly by this Covid-19 plague, getting sick or having loved ones sicken or even die.

Carla & I sometimes feel like shopping is a major endeavor, an ongoing challenge to “get what we need.” Fresh produce, toilet paper, little luxuries. I’ve been confined to the house with a broken ankle in a cast, so Carla has had to venture out into this new, unfamiliar world to get stuff while I’ve battled with online shopping. And of course, we connect with friends and family hoping they are all still well.

How do we hold it all? Now that you’ve meditated with the support of your sangha, take a moment and feel all the stress of this coronavirus and the social distancing required. How does it feel? Can you open to it with compassion for yourself, and for all humanity?

This is an historic pandemic. Never before has so much of the world collectively shut down in an effort to save lives. It’s not just for ourselves that we’re sheltering in place, but for all of us, for all beings vulnerable to this disease – including lions and tigers and other unknown species. So along with the frustrations, there’s a lot of compassion, even if you haven’t identified the experience of it.

I think of the frustrations we normally live with like being locked in by traffic. Maybe at a train crossing, or a drawbridge. It’s a Tony Soprano moment: What are ya gonna do? Add a broken ankle you can’t put weight on for a month and patience becomes an attitude you really, really want to have. Patience is SO much more peaceful than frustration.

I remember the moment I went down after my foot rolled while I was gardening. The pain was so intense I thought, this is going to be bad. I had to crawl up two steps and across my deck on hands and knees to call for help, each step excruciating, and I did it calmly. I went completely Tony Soprano.

When I spill something, I often exclaim out loud in frustration. But not when my ankle broke, and not with this shelter in place. I mean, what are ya gonna do?

It’s normal to think of patience as something we have to learn, like someday we’re going to read the manual for some complicated device we’ve bought. It doesn’t seem like fun. Well, we’ve all been given a major opportunity to develop patience. If you haven’t taken advantage of stop lights to summon up patience, then hey, now’s your chance to get familiar with it. It’s easier than learning Zoom.

In Buddhist thought, patience comes in three forms. There’s the patience of perseverance, which is vital in establishing a regular sitting and daily life practice. Or reading poorly written

directions. The patience of perseverance is sticking to social distancing despite our desire to go be with other people, because we know staying home is for the welfare of ourselves and others.

Then there's patience under insult, not being reactive to the bad behavior of others (like in traffic), or getting knotted up inside over the slings and arrows of ill fortune. The corona virus has presented us with some major slings and arrows. If you look at the worldwide statistics, Covid-19 is more deadly than many major causes of death. But it's more of an insult than that. If we didn't do what's so counter to our usual lives, it could become The Major cause of death. The Spanish Flu a century ago eclipsed the death toll of World War I, because people didn't know how to contain it.

Patience under insult requires mental spaciousness. That spaciousness can be acquired by meditating daily, especially practicing Wise Effort, which means choosing to turn the attention away from thoughts and emotions that lead to internal suffering, and toward beneficial states of mind. This might be called "snapping ourselves out of" our reactivity to things we don't like.

You may have wondered where compassion comes in. Well, right here. It's a really good state of mind to substitute for anger, hatred, or hurt feelings. The sensitivity to suffering we were born with can soothe the sting of others' hurting us, or of changes we vehemently dislike, like being immobilized, or confined. This shelter in place order comes bundled with compassion, because we're doing this for ourselves *and* for others. For many people compassion comes more readily toward beings other than themselves. Well, when you feel compassion for the way others are suffering during this pandemic, just hold the intention to extend that feeling to yourself. Or the other way around.

Patience under insult takes a little mental effort, but less than the patience of perseverance. Each of these three types of patience requires less effort than the last, until the third form is mostly effortless. I think of it as the queen of patience. It's the patience of acceptance – seeing things as they are and being at peace with it all. Once we have accepted "this is how it is," it frees up a lot of mental and emotional energy, which we can use to deal with the situation, to find ways to go on living in *this* world, now.

We've all done this, with varying degrees of thoroughness. We've been sheltering in place for a while now, and there's another 'while' to get through. There are times when we lose our acceptance. I'm talking about those afternoons when we're out of sorts, maybe weepy or fatalistic or just lethargic. Times like that happen, especially when more 'insults' are added to the situation. The patience of acceptance will return in time, and just remembering this can ease those unpleasant periods when Tony Soprano's attitude escapes us.

Compassion is like oil on the hinges of patience. It lets us turn from being controlled by dukkha into a state of mental ease. Compassion holds all the things we'd change if we could, until we *can* change them. It gives us that re-assuring pat on the shoulder. Compassion reaches out to all the beings who suffer as we do, and enables us to feel *their* support in return, knowing that they too are doing what they can to make things better. Maybe the best thing about patience and compassion is that they have this wonderful capacity to nurture the noblest parts of our nature – our wisdom and our love.