

Being Imperfect Together – 08-20-15

Patience Now! Part 1

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Patience is such a revered quality, appearing as it does across virtually all faith traditions and in philosophical teachings. For example, the Bible in Thessalonians says that we should "Be patient with all. See that no one returns evil for evil; rather, always seek what is good for each other and for all."

Be that as it may, that doesn't make it any easier to be patient, either with others' or our own faults and shortcomings. There's not a person I've met (including myself) who hasn't proclaimed, "It's so hard to be patient!" We want what we want, and we want it NOW! Sometimes what we want is for the other person to do, think, or be what we want them to.

Think of patience as our ability to endure under difficult circumstances. This can take the form of delay, as when we don't get what we want (the test results, the clear answer, the job offer, e.g.) soon enough. Patience can also mean the capacity to endure provocation or irritation without giving in to negativity such as annoyance or anger, and blowing up or acting out in some other way.

There's an intimate link between patience or impatience and our expectations. When someone violates our expectations for how they should be, we feel it as "off," or uncomfortable. We want them to comply with our inner "shoulds." The conflict creeps in when we demand or insist they comply with our often-unspoken preferences, especially without ever talking about them.

When I can, I try to think of difficult people as "patience teachers." They're just doing what they do, whatever annoying thing that might happen to be. It's so tempting to say or think things like, "If they would just_____, we wouldn't be having this problem!" And you might be right; things would be different if they were different. But, that's not what's really happening, and remember that acceptance is the first step in handling the problem. Anything else and we're resisting, which is basically arguing with reality.

Funny thing is, reality always wins.

So what can we do to be more patient? More about that next time. (Yes, you have to be patient!).

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