

The themes for this week were **ethics** and **patience**.

Before I get into more general considerations, I think back to an early experience that influenced my understanding of patience - and presence:

I was traveling across the Western U.S. by freight train - that is, not as a passenger, and without knowing the schedule of the train I was on - if it even had one. Often the train would just stop in the middle of some vast expanse and just wait ... for how long I could not know. There was nothing to do but wait... and during that waiting, dropping all thoughts of control, or even second-guessing what was to come, I noticed how pleasant it could be just to look around and enjoy the scenery. This was also true, of course, while the train was moving. And it increased the immediacy and presence of the experience to have no traveling compartment or window - I was actually IN the scenery. Perhaps the most poignant of these episodes was a time when I awoke to find that the rail car I was in had been disconnected from the train and was sitting on a rail siding in the middle of a vast desert - with dry brush and cactus stretching out almost to the horizon of distant purple mountains. I sat on a platform for hours, with no idea when/if another train would come .. watched the sun go down in the west, and experienced a feeling of timelessness... that was eventually interrupted by the sound and then the headlight of an approaching train.

From <http://unfetteredmind.org/translations/perfections.php> I see:

For morality, nothing to do,
Other than stop being dishonest.

For patience, nothing to do,
Other than not fear what is ultimately true.

Based on experience, more than scholarship, I believe the modern western concept of virtue is more "external" than either the archaic / traditional western or eastern concept. By "external" I mean, further from Being, further from Essence, more about observables like behavior and appearance.

One of the translations of the word [paramita](#) is "beyond the boundary." I interpret this as meaning "beyond Form", or in other words, something that has to be a quality of Being or Essence, not contained within any specific form or behavior. That's the nature of Qualities - they are not measurable properties, but emerge from the Whole.

Thus, virtues are not something you can "do", but they are qualities of one's Being, which can be developed through practice. Thus, you can't act virtuously or ethically - instead, virtuous action is the natural action of a virtuous person.

One may be able to "cultivate" a quality through intentional thinking and action - this is Practice. As we know, practice doesn't itself constitute "perfection", but may lead closer to it through development. Any discussion of virtue or development thus has two facets, a "state" or Being view, and a "process" or Practice view.

When people import the external viewpoint into the realm of the mind, it looks like an effort to control the form of one's own thoughts - for example, "having a positive attitude." This self-manipulation falls short if it doesn't connect with self essence, and true conditions of the world. On the other hand, mental actions have their place in a whole sequence of development:

Sow a thought Reap a Destiny

Perhaps these archaic and modern ideas about virtue are coming back together in the concept of a "virtuous cycle", which is the positive equivalent of a "vicious cycle" - the idea that actions change the nature of a system over time. The modern word would be "process", but when personalized and given an aim, it would be called "practice".

In view of this, what is **patience**?

Opposed to patience is boredom, the inability to be fully present with what is.

Nor is patience a an attitude of forbearance or toleration.

The Being view of patience is well stated by the Milarepa quote above: "Nothing to do, other than not fear what is ultimately true". I would add that "not fear" means, moreover, to be fully present, open, and engaged, which some people might call Love.

The Virtue of patience is the state, quality, or capacity of a Person to be fully present with what is.

The Practice view of patience then, is - what is happening when a person has the aim and will to be fully present with what is, and lets that inform their awareness and action.

Having said this - I feel compelled to add:

"What is" may include changing things, not just passive acceptance.

... because for some reason, in discussions of ideals and virtues, people often react as if the ideal were a prescription to be one-sided. I'm not sure why that is; I suppose **balance** would be a good topic for a separate discussion, but for now:

A whole, developed self maintains a dynamic balance of many qualities and virtues.

As a final comment - given that we humans live for a long time as unfinished, but practicing, humans, there's a quote I like by Rilke:

"I want to ask you, as clearly as I can, to bear with patience all that is unresolved in your heart, and try to love the questions themselves, as if they were rooms yet to enter or books written in a foreign language. Don't dig for answers that can't be given you yet: you cannot live them now. For everything must be lived. Live the questions now, perhaps then, someday, you will gradually, without noticing, live into the answer."