

On Patience

Patience is perhaps the most invisible virtue. We know we own it completely when we don't feel it at all. The instant we are aware of it we are in danger of losing it. Patience contains its own contradiction: to feel its tug is to know its stock is dwindling, perhaps to nothingness.

Patience places its heaviest tax on those who keep skipping into the future, anxious souls who want so badly for today to be tomorrow they sacrifice both. Yet it feels impossible to live without goals, without an arc into the unknown future, if only to reduce its terrors. If you think it's easy to live in full awareness of your own aimlessness, you haven't tried it recently. So we have to project some future, some vision of salvation, and then not ache for it.

It may be instructive to examine why patience is so easily exhausted over short-term irritants – turn that damn radio *down!* – yet seemingly possesses the elasticity to stretch over decades when the aspirations it hosts are elemental, vital parts of our character. It seems the harder the question patience asks, the more it informs us that gratification will again be skipping your stop; and so it refills its reservoir because to not do so is to give up hope all together.

And so the small eruptions, the fissures in the crust of personality caused by harboring a mother lode of patience like a gallstone. When all fuses seem to come from the factory pre-shortened, some deeper ache to be elsewhere, to time travel *now*, dammit, percolates beneath. Sometimes patience loses the war with heartache, creating a seam in the soul, releasing energies long suppressed.

Perhaps we are wired to better maintain our patience regarding big-picture achievements because our designers live outside of time and wanted to provide us with a mechanism for coping while waiting here in tick-tock time for our angels to appear. Patience is like a valuable token; alone it may seem worthless, but in the right place at the right time it can be redeemed for rewards you never dared expect.

We want to be good. We want to be honest. We want to be brave. But we don't want to be patient. Not really, because if we are patient it means we still have wants, wants that grow in significance and scope as we experience temporal life on the accelerating treadmill of life's passage. Patience, un-nurtured by diligence, unescorted by knowledge, can sour into the acrid temperament of those certain their ships have sailed.

Patience carries dreams on its back like a mother carries her young. Dreams can grow heavy and patience can grow weak. No virtue, especially not one as meek as Patience, can bear the burden of life's hopes alone. Of all the helpmates Patience requires during what may be a long journey, the most essential is forgiveness. We all hold ourselves guilty for crimes we did not commit. Take the time every day to forgive yourself. It is the portal to gratitude, without which Patience won't have the strength to make it to the dawn when its services will no longer be required.

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