

3 Steps to Patience

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Yesterday, one of my regular private clients walked in the door and said she needed something for patience. I design short meditations for her which she keeps on her iPod and she pulls them out during breaks at the office & before bed – often designing her own meditation by putting together ingredients from her now rather extensive “meditation menu.” But today, she needed one for patience.

There were many tasks that needed to be completed in her life & around her home – and just the sight (like of the newly finished floor which was now peeling due to shoddy workmanship) would leave her itching like crazy to get it all done yesterday. She knew patience was the way, but she didn’t know the way to patience.

I had just been considering **Taṇhā** (the Pali word usually translated as ‘craving’) – which the Buddha declared in was a necessary condition for suffering (and if we eliminate it – we eliminate suffering.) And as I listened to her need for patience, it struck me that patience was the opposite of **Taṇhā**.

So what meditation could I create, that could help one – on the spot – develop patience? And, of course, I’ve been trained to make sure that every meditation develops concentration, sensory clarity - as well as equanimity. But unlike other meditations I had created for her – I wanted this one to be in 3 easy steps – so that she could remember to do it during the day without the iPod – as our day inevitably offers up dozens of opportunities to practice patience. And I believe that those “mindfulness-on-the-fly” muscles are the ones that can make up a great part of one’s strength & flexibility – with all that life serves up.

So here’s what I came up with as a ‘formal practice’ and for ‘mindfulness-on-the-fly’:

for **FORMAL PRACTICE**

Sit in whatever position is comfortable – preferably where your spine is straight but the body relaxed. Allow the breath-in to help lengthen the spine, letting the head balance easily on top, and on the breath-out – allow the natural relaxation & release to help let go of any tension or holding in the face, jaw, shoulders, chest, abdomen.

Tune into this breath cycle – with special emphasis on the wave of relaxation & release on the breath out.

Notice the body. Now we're going to take a sort of inventory of body sensations. Allow your awareness to circulate throughout the body – noticing whatever sensations you are aware of. First, in addition to the breath, this may be tangible touch sensations of body on chair or cushion, hands, feet, clothes on skin.

Then you may notice sensations within the body – maybe from the functioning of the body – digestive or elimination systems – and maybe the subtle (or not so subtle) kinds of sensations associated with emotions, moods – like a spread of warmth across the chest, a tightening in the gut, a flush in the face, etc. etc. Even if there is the slightest hint of such sensations – just note them as part of your inventory. It is highly likely that any such sensations at this point will be quite subtle – if detectable – and probably a blend of pleasant & unpleasant. No need to determine what emotions may be present – just note the sensations.

Now, when I talk of noting sensations in the body – I mean to do it like a 4 year old exploring a new thing – with a fascinated investigation. Where is it? What's the Texture? Where are the boundaries? Is it the same consistency or intensity all the way through? Is there movement within it – or is it solid? How would you describe it to someone who has never had such a sensation? There is no need to identify the name or cause of the sensation. Just how it manifests.

OK – now all that was just foreplay. Preparing the soil.

Here are the **3 STEPS**:

But first: Imagine a situation that is a challenge to you at this time.

You may see an image – and maybe there are words that go with it – either what someone has said or what you want to say or whatever words come to mind. See the image, hear the words.

Now:

STEP #1

- **Look to the body.** What sensations have now arisen in the body that weren't there during our inventory? What do you feel where? There may be 2-3 different areas of the body that have intense and/or unpleasant sensation. (And chances are this is a familiar experience – especially if this issue has been around more than 24 hours.) Get very clear on what is different in the body now. We're not looking to make anything go away – we're simply noticing what's arising that we normally don't.

Don't get caught up in the story – of what emotions you are feeling and why – and what you need to do about it. You ARE doing what you need to do – *simply note the sensations in the body.*

Keep awareness of these sensations for the next two steps – as you will be noticing any changes or movement that may or may not take place with them.

STEP #2

- **Now take in the WHOLE body** – all the area OUTSIDE of and AROUND those locations. This will be more real estate – and mostly neutral. Feel that whole area – and especially notice the outside edges – those tangible, easy to detect sensations – like hands, feet, skin. This is very grounding and helps bring you into the present.

So now you have the original locations of sensation that arose from the thoughts of the challenging event – and some awareness in the larger area of the body that surrounds it. Hold them both in awareness. You may notice the contrast of these 2 different areas – the outer & the inner – or you may get a more specific idea of where the ‘hot spots’ are nestled within the outer whole body.

Have the initial ‘hot spots’ changed? Shifted? Are they still there? Just keep them in awareness – with the whole body around them.

STEP #3

- Now invite **RELAXATION into the OUTER area**. Especially on the breath out. Let your jaw drop, your shoulder’s relax back & down. Let the body settle. Let that whole body area go soft. And just notice what happens with all the sensations.

The original sensations may have shifted, moved, started to flow or dissipated, or maybe they just seem smaller – but again, no matter what happens – this is about noticing what does happen – not attempting to push or make anything go away – just notice.

There is an **OPTIONAL Step #4:**

(This could be used if dealing with a particularly difficult or gnarly situation or emotion.)

- And this STEP #4 would be *introducing a restful place to park the mind* (like dark/light blank field behind the eyes, or *introducing helpful, positive words* (affirmations, prayers, mantras) or *images that sooth* (nature, favorite places, people, etc.) But if you take the Optional 4th step – come back to the sensations in the body from 1, 2 & 3 – to notice how they were affected. This isn’t about leaving to go to your Happy Place. It’s about noticing how the place you live – becomes

unhappy by a habit pattern of tightening & holding – and introducing a different response to situations – by simply tuning in – with kindness – and encouraging relaxation.

for "**MINDFULNESS-on-the-FLY**"

For "Mindfulness-on-the-Fly" (i.e. life) – there will be no need to think of a challenge – it will be presented to you in the course of your day. You can practice on less challenging things – like anytime you feel yourself wanting to respond inappropriately, or notice a negative judgment about something – no matter how casual. No one needs to know you're doing it. You can do it while sitting, standing – even walking.

Just try STEPS 1, 2, and 3 :

1 = Look to the body. What's different? What are new sensations linked to this response.

2 = Take in whole body, as a grounded container.

3 = Add relaxation to the whole body

And watch what happens.And notice if/how your response changes.

That's my recipe or prescription for today – "**3 Steps to Patience**" (...and you might find it to be a great way of just processing emotions in general, but we can start with patience.)

Take as needed – and let me know how it works for you.