



The Art of Cultivating Patience

by GAIL M. CARROLL

Remember, patience can't be acquired overnight. It is just like building up a muscle. Everyday you need to work on it. ~ Eknath Easwaran

Hurry, hurry, rush, rush, rush! Where are you going in such a hurry? This is a question I ask myself on a regular basis. In a time when there is much discussion about mindfulness and being present in the moment, there is still such hurriedness and mindless behaviour happening each and every day. Where do you fall on this spectrum? It is a brand new year – Happy New Year! What resolutions did you make to start this new year? Maybe you haven't made yours yet or are still contemplating what they will be. Might I suggest you take a deep breath, slow down and enjoy your life and all that it has to offer.

There is tremendous wisdom in cultivating the virtue of patience. How often have we heard the expression “patience is a virtue?” Patience is a virtue; a positive trait or quality. Some of us have temperaments that are naturally easy-going, while others need to cultivate patience. Today, more than ever, we see people racing around with little time for anything. Tempers are shorter and anger flares! What is happening out there? I believe that technology, inter-generationality and today's fast-paced world have contributed to people just surviving the day and lacking patience with themselves or others. I wanted to write this article to encourage you to examine your capacity for patience and encourage you, if you haven't already done so, to take some time to cultivate this quality within yourself. It will greatly improve your life and help you become a role model for your colleagues and your students. Everyone will benefit from your patience.

First, let's examine where you are by answering the following questions:

1. Do you calmly approach things?
2. Do you go with the flow?
3. Do things bother you quickly?
4. Are you quick to react even to little situations?
5. Do you hold onto your emotions after the situation has passed?

6. Does your heart race or pound?
7. Do you feel angry, agitated or irritated over things (even little things)?
8. When things don't go as planned, do you feel out of control?
9. Do you feel panicked when you are running late or are going to be late for something?
10. Do you feel that patience would be wonderful but you don't have time to practice it?

The more yeses you answered from questions 3-10, the less patience you have. Let's talk about some of these issues. Many of us feel we don't have time to practice patience; the world is already in a hurry and so are we. The issue with this line of thinking is that we can't always control everything. As teachers you are tied to schedules and sometimes those schedules can be super tight. However, we can't always control unforeseen circumstances, i.e. a student gets sick or faints in class, two students fight on the playground, someone pulls the fire alarm...it could be any number of things. You have little control over the situation, but you do have control over how you respond. Take a deep breath, count to ten and then move forward. This one blip in your schedule can control and ruin your entire day if you let it, or you can decide that it is what it is – a blip in the road and carry on with your day.

Then there is your life outside of teaching. How scheduled is your life? How scheduled are your children's lives? We have fallen into the habit of scheduling most of our free time and our children's time. Planned activities are great, but if we are always scheduled, then we are always in “on” mode and that leaves little time to just loosen up and relax. Both our bodies and our minds need down time. It is not a waste of time to sometimes just sit and doodle or do absolutely nothing!

Being tightly scheduled or overscheduled leaves little room for error, upsets, delays or other things beyond our control. So let's say you are driving along and are supposed to be somewhere for 4 p.m., but there is an accident up ahead and the traffic has slowed. You recognize you are going to be late but there is no way for you to get out of this line of traf-

fic. You have a choice (remember that you always have a choice). You can get angry and huffy, but what purpose does that serve? How will that help you? How will you feel once you do arrive at your intended destination? You might be in the driver's seat, but you do not always have control. Take a deep breath and tell yourself that you are better arriving safe rather than sorry. Listen to some music while you wait. Just breathe! What's the worst that could happen if you're late? You may have to reschedule an appointment or miss something, but you will arrive safe and everything will be fine. Most times it is just an inconvenience. Apologize for your tardiness and then move forward.

Think about your time and how your work and life are currently scheduled. How much control do you have over your schedule? Take a very close look! Do you make time for yourself to just do things that you enjoy? If not, schedule it in. Start by making small changes and being patient with yourself as you allow more flexibility into your life and your schedule. Too much scheduling can cause frustration and lack of patience with yourself, your family and the world in general. Begin this year by asking yourself the following questions: What matters most to me? How can I spend more quality time with my family, friends and myself? How can I look at my life and my schedule and arrange it so that I do not feel so harried and hurried? What small changes can I begin to make? Now it's up to you. Make a commitment to yourself!

Here are a few tips as you build your patience muscles:

- Don't sweat the small stuff! Take a deep breath and decide whether this is worth the worry.
- Notice and appreciate the little things.
- Breathe and "be in the moment".
- Speak to yourself calmly and respectfully. Talk yourself down when your impatience is high.
- Situations that require us to have patience can be opportunities.
- What will this situation mean for you an hour, a day, a week, a month, a year from now? Let that be your guide on where to place its importance in your life. If it won't matter much in the short run then just let it go.
- Practice mindfulness and pay attention to your breathing. Remember to breathe!
- Learn something new. Take lessons in something. One way to cultivate patience with yourself is to learn a new skill.
- Notice small changes you are making and how this is changing you (and cultivating more patience).
- Listen to beautiful music.

- Count to 10.
- Be kind to yourself and others.
- Be patient with yourself while you are cultivating patience.

Stephen Covey advises us that "we see the world not as it is but as we are (or as we are conditioned to see it.)" With that advice we know we can be reconditioned to develop more patience with ourselves, with others and the world in which we live.

I leave you with this challenge. Now it is up to you. Have a happy and peaceful 2016!

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