

Whichever of the Two Occurs, Be Patient

Whether a joyful or a painful situation occurs, whatever happens to you, your practice is not swayed by it, but you maintain continual practice and continual patience.

From Training the Mind & Cultivating Loving-Kindness by Chogyam Trungpa ,

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Today's slogans are instructions on how to communicate from the heart. The emphasis is on how to keep one's heart open for the juiciness and richness of the big squeeze. One of the slogans is "Whichever of the two occurs, be patient." Whether it is glorious or wretched, delightful or hateful, be patient. Patience means allowing things to unfold at their own speed rather than jumping in with your habitual response to either pain or pleasure. The real happiness that underlies both gloriousness and wretchedness often gets short-circuited by our jumping too fast into the same habitual pattern.

Patience is not learned in safety. It is not learned when everything is harmonious and going well. When everything is smooth sailing, who needs patience? If you stay in your room with the door locked and the curtains drawn, everything may seem harmonious, but the minute anything doesn't go your way, you blow up. There is no cultivation of patience when your pattern is to just try to seek harmony and smooth everything out. Patience implies willingness to be alive rather than trying to seek harmony.

A hermit well known for his austerity had been practicing in a cave for twenty years. An unconventional teacher named Patrul Rinpoche showed up at the cave, and the hermit humbly and sweetly welcomed him in. Patrul Rinpoche said, "Tell me, what have you been doing in here?" "I've been practicing the perfection of patience," the hermit answered. Putting his face very close to the hermit's face, Patrul Rinpoche said, "But a pair of old scoundrels like us, we don't care anything about patience really. We only do this to get everyone's admiration, right? We just do this to get people to think we are big shots, don't we?" And the hermit started getting irritated. But Patrul Rinpoche wouldn't stop. He just kept laughing and patting him on the back and saying, "Yeah, we sure know how to dupe people, don't we? We really know. I'll bet they bring you a lot of gifts, don't they?" At this point the hermit stood up and screamed, "Why did you come here? Why are you tormenting me? Go away and leave me in peace!" And then the Rinpoche said, "So now, where is your perfection of patience?" So that's the point. We can create the ideal situation in which we have a very high opinion of ourselves, but how do we do when it comes to the big squeeze?

From Start Where You Are : A Guide to Compassionate Living by Pema Chodron,

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If you become utterly destitute and are suffering greatly, consider your previous karma. Without being resentful or depressed, take up all the sufferings and evil of others and work hard at ways to clear away evil actions and obscurations. If you find yourself very happy and comfortable, surrounded by great wealth and servants, don't succumb to carelessness or indifference. Use the wealth for virtuous projects, use your power constructively, and pray for all sentient beings to have the same comfort and happiness. In short, whichever occurs, happiness or suffering, be patient.

*From The Great Path of Awakening : An Easily Accessible Introduction for Ordinary People
by Jamgon Kongtrul, translated by Ken McLeod.*

Whichever of the Opposites Occurs, Be Patient

The polarities referred to in this fourth practice are good fortune and misfortune. When we meet with good fortune, we tend to respond with attachment to the situation. Getting a raise or a promotion, being praised or coming into wealth, all commonly produce a sense of self-inflation. A more beneficial response to good fortune is not allowing our mind to come under the domination of the eight worldly concerns of momentary pleasure and pain, gain and loss, praise and blame, good and bad reputation.

The point is to respond with a greater sense of inner stability and equanimity. Of course, we enjoy the good fortune. Being a Buddhist does not require being a spoil-sport with a glum face. But avoiding attachment, conceit, or a sense of superiority does require patience in the face of good fortune. Patience in this context sounds odd in English, but it entails the same clarity and calmness of mind that helps us to avoid getting flustered in the face of adversity.

Likewise for the opposite polarity. It is easy when we meet with misfortune, poverty, loss of reputation or status in our job, or a calamity such as the loss of a loved one, to lose enthusiasm for dharma in the depths of our disillusionment. But instead of succumbing to despair in the face of adversity, seek to cultivate that inner strength which is really what patience is about: inner courage as ballast for your vessel of life.

Related to this is the tendency to judge our dharma practice superficially, on the basis of external circumstances. When life is treating us well, we feel that dharma is good. We might give it half an hour every day religiously, and think that the job is done because the rest of our waking day is going well. A dharma practitioner should view the pleasures of a good job, a healthy family situation, comfortable living circumstances, and a sound economy, with suitable delight, as we would look at a very pleasant painting balanced upon a structure of match sticks. This is happiness due to pleasant external stimuli, which by and large are beyond our control. A Buddhist response is not in any way to begrudge these mundane pleasures, but at the same time not to use them as a substitute for dharma practice. This is not so obvious during the good times, but it becomes very apparent maybe a little too late, during the bad times.

*Excerpted from: The Seven-Point Mind Training (first published as A Passage from Solitude :
Training the Mind in a Life Embracing the World), by B. Alan Wallace.*

Endure Whichever Situation Arises, Either (good or Bad).

Whether we encounter difficulties and are deprived of opportunities or whether we obtain everything we need, we should patiently tolerate both by recollecting the constant fluctuations of cyclic existence. When wealth abounds and we enjoy a good reputation and health, instead of immersing ourselves completely in this opportune situation we should

recall the impermanence of all things. We cannot rely on mundane perfections. Rather we should apply ourselves to the Dharma that is trustworthy and deeply beneficial. At other times, when we meet with misfortunes that may deprive us of even the basic necessities of life, we should not become despondent; instead, we should firmly resolve to gain complete release from this deceptive round of existence by generating the awakening mind.

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Bear whichever the two occurs.

Through faith in the Three Jewels and the practice of generosity, it could happen that, by way of karmic fruit, we become rich, gain a high position in society and so on. This might lead us to think, "I am rich, I am important, I am the best, I have come out on top." If we practitioners have this kind of arrogance, our clinging to this life will increase and a demon will enter our hearts. If, on the other hand, we manage to enjoy happiness, possessions and influence without pride, we will understand that they are nothing but illusions, insubstantial dreams, all of which will one day fade away. For as it is said of all compounded things, "what is accumulated will be used up; what is raised up will fall; what is born will die; what is joined together will separate." "Who knows," we should tell ourselves, "perhaps tomorrow I shall have to say goodbye to all of this. Therefore, I will offer my teachers and the Three Jewels the best of my contentment and possessions. May they accept it with joy and bless me so that I might have no obstacles on the path. All of it is just a pleasant dream, but may all beings experience such happiness as mine, and even more." On the other hand, when we are in such poor shape that we cannot even practice, that we have strong emotions and feelings of irritation, fighting and quarreling with everyone, we should reflect, "I know that everything is illusory; I will therefore not allow myself to be carried away by my feelings. I will not be a coward! I will shoulder the weakness, poverty, illness and death of other beings." To put it briefly, we should be able to think that, provided that the precious Bodhicitta does not decrease in us, who cares if we have to go to the lower realms, who cares if we lose our possessions? Come what may, like beggars with a precious jewel, we will not forsake Bodhicitta.

From Enlightened Courage, by Dilgo Khyentse Rinpoche