Acceptance: Humility, Non-attachment, Patience

Introduction

These three concepts grow from a fundamental realization that we individually are a small part of the world and that our understanding and control are profoundly limited. As children we are totally self-centered; as we mature we (hopefully) broaden our perspective and come to understand and respect our limitations, and those of everyone else. We learn, in a word, acceptance.

We can start with humility, which is etymologically related to human and humus. From dust we have come, and to dust we shall return, as stated in Genesis.

Humility is a companion to curiosity, surprise, and delight. Spiritual humility is not about getting small. It is about encouraging others to be big. It is not about debasing oneself, but about approaching everything and everyone with a readiness to be surprised and delighted. This is the humility of the child. It is the humility in the spirituality of the scientist and the mystic — to be planted in what you know, while living expectantly for discoveries yet to come. -- The On Being Project

We are social creatures, evolved to work at improving our position in our social hierarchies. Humility does not come naturally.

Non-attachment is key to a Buddhist worldview. Attachment causes distress. Attachment is our desire that pleasant things remain the way they are; aversion is the negative side: our desire that unpleasant things change. But change is the nature of the world. Non-attachment is not indifference or self-denial; it is instead not allowing things in your life to own you. It is appropriate to have goals, but don’t let them own you. In the Bhagavad Gita, a primary Hindu scripture, we are enjoined to act in accordance with our nature, but not to be attached to the outcome, which is beyond our control.

Patience

Like humility, patience is not to be mistaken for meekness and ineffectuality. It can be the fruit of a full-on reckoning with reality — a commitment to move through the world as it is, not as we wish it to be. A spiritual view of time is a long view of time — seasonal and cyclical, resistant to the illusion of time as a bully, time as a matter of deadlines. Human transformation takes time — longer than we want it to — but it is what is necessary for social transformation. A long, patient view of time will replenish our sense of our capacities and our hope for the world. -- The On Being Project
Shared readings of quotes, poems, songs, etc., with time for comments

Acceptance

The Guest House
-- Jelaluddin Rumi

This being human is a guest house.
Every morning a new arrival.

A joy, a depression, a meanness,
some momentary awareness comes
as an unexpected visitor.

Welcome and entertain them all!
Even if they are a crowd of sorrows,
who violently sweep your house
empty of its furniture,
still, treat each guest honorably.
He may be clearing you out
for some new delight.

The dark thought, the shame, the malice.
meet them at the door laughing,
and invite them in.

Be grateful for whoever comes,
because each has been sent
as a guide from beyond.

Humility

Humility is the solid foundation of all virtues. -- Confucius

True humility is not thinking less of yourself; it is thinking of yourself less. -- Rick Warren

Humility is the foundation of all the other virtues hence, in the soul in which this virtue does not exist there cannot be any other virtue except in mere appearance. -- Saint Augustine

Humility, I have learned, must never be confused with meekness. Humility is being open to the ideas of others. -- Simon Sinek
“There is nothing noble in being superior to your fellow man; true nobility is being superior to your former self.”
— Ernest Hemingway

“If anyone tells you that a certain person speaks ill of you, do not make excuses about what is said of you but answer, "He was ignorant of my other faults, else he would not have mentioned these alone."
— Epictetus

“The biggest challenge after success is shutting up about it.”
— Criss Jam

Doubt is an uncomfortable condition, but certainty is a ridiculous one. -- Voltaire

Be humble for you are made of Earth.
Be noble for you are made of stars.
— Serbian Proverb

“Prayer of an Anonymous Abbess:

Lord, thou knowest better than myself that I am growing older and will soon be old. Keep me from becoming too talkative, and especially from the unfortunate habit of thinking that I must say something on every subject and at every opportunity.

Release me from the idea that I must straighten out other peoples' affairs. With my immense treasure of experience and wisdom, it seems a pity not to let everybody partake of it. But thou knowest, Lord, that in the end I will need a few friends.

Keep me from the recital of endless details; give me wings to get to the point.

Grant me the patience to listen to the complaints of others; help me to endure them with charity. But seal my lips on my own aches and pains -- they increase with the increasing years and my inclination to recount them is also increasing.

I will not ask thee for improved memory, only for a little more humility and less self-assurance when my own memory doesn't agree with that of others. Teach me the glorious lesson that occasionally I may be wrong.

Keep me reasonably gentle. I do not have the ambition to become a saint -- it is so hard to live with some of them -- but a harsh old person is one of the devil's masterpieces.
Make me sympathetic without being sentimental, helpful but not bossy. Let me discover merits where I had not expected them, and talents in people whom I had not thought to possess any. And, Lord, give me the grace to tell them so.

Amen”
— Margot Benary-Isbert

“In the course of my life, I have often had to eat my words, and I must confess that I have always found it a wholesome diet.”
— Winston Churchill

Non-attachment

“Your commitment is to action alone, not to the fruits of action. That must never be: you must not be motivated by the fruits of your actions. Yet you must not become attached to inaction. Perform your duties as a warrior and cast off attachment, Arjuna, indifferent alike whether you gain or gain not. This indifference is called yoga. Action is far lower than the rule of understanding, Arjuna. Seek refuge in wisdom. They are unworthy who are moved only by gain.
Lesson Two, verses 47-49”
— Bhagavad Gita

Take therefore no thought for the morrow;
For the morrow shall take thought for the things of itself.
Sufficient unto the day is the evil thereof.
-- Matthew 6:34; part of the Sermon on the Mount

You must love in such a way that the person that you love feels free. -- Thich Nhat Hanh

When despair for the world grows in me and I wake in the night at the least sound in fear of what my life and my children’s lives might be, I go and lie down where the wood drake rests in his beauty on the water, and the great heron feeds. I come into the peace of wild things who do not tax their lives with forethought of grief. I come into the presence of still water. And I feel above me the day-blind stars waiting with their light. For a time I rest in the grace of the world, and am free. - --Wendell Berry

You always own the option of having no opinion. There is never any need to get worked up or to trouble your soul about things you can’t control. These things are not asking to be judged by you. Leave them alone. -- Marcus Aurelius, 121 – 180
In Blackwater Woods by Mary Oliver

Look, the trees
are turning
their own bodies
into pillars
of light,
are giving off the rich
fragrance of cinnamon
and fulfillment,

the long tapers
of cattails
are bursting and floating away over
the blue shoulders
of the ponds,
and every pond,
no matter what its
name is, is
nameless now.

Every year
everything
I have ever learned
in my lifetime
leads back to this: the fires
and the black river of loss
whose other side
is salvation,
whose meaning
none of us will ever know.

To live in this world
you must be able
to do three things:
to love what is mortal;
to hold it
against your bones knowing
your own life depends on it;
and, when the time comes to let it go,
to let it go.
Videos
Secular Buddhism podcast: Understanding Non-attachment
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BDc6n-r7Abc  24:21
Secular Buddhism podcast: The Parable of the Raft (also the Parable of Helping the woman cross the river)
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UOEzXo0mlKA  18:21  [First story starts at 3:22; second story starts at 11:18]
Letting Go of Attachment
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Kv4Oq39FlDg  14:49
What is Buddhist Non-attachment?
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=avVf6LNx32E  14:25

Patience

It is very strange that the years teach us patience - that the shorter our time, the greater our capacity for waiting. -- Elizabeth Taylor (English novelist)

Have patience with all things, but chiefly have patience with yourself. Do not lose courage in considering your own imperfections but instantly set about remedying them - every day begin the task anew. -- Saint Francis de Sales (1567 - 1622)

Patience is the best remedy for every trouble. -- Titus Maccius Plautus (254 BC - 184 BC)

Patience is the companion of wisdom. -- Saint Augustine (354 AD - 430 AD)

Patience is bitter, but its fruit is sweet. -- Aristotle (384 BC - 322 BC)

May such calm of soul be mine, so as to meet the force of circumstances. -- Aeschylus  (523 BC - 456 BC)

Patience  -- Kay Ryan

Patience is wider than one once envisioned, with ribbons of rivers and distant ranges and tasks undertaken
and finished
with modest
relish by
natives in their
native dress.
Who would
have guessed
it possible
that waiting
is sustainable—
a place with
its own harvests.
Or that in
time's fullness
the diamonds
of patience
couldn’t be
distinguished
from the genuine
in brilliance
or hardness.

**Beyond the Question**

*by May Sarton*

The phoebe sits on her nest
Hour after hour,
Day after day,
Waiting for life to burst out
From under her warmth.
Can I weave a nest for silence,
Weave it of listening,
Listening,
Layer upon layer?
But one must first become small,
Nothing but a presence,
Attentive as a nesting bird,
Proffering no slightest wish
Toward anything that might happen
Or be given,
Only the warm, faithful waiting,
Contained in one’s smallness.
Beyond the question, the silence.
Before the answer, the silence.
Let Evening Come -- Jane Kenyon

Let the light of late afternoon
shine through chinks in the barn, moving
up the bales as the sun moves down.

Let the cricket take up chafing
as a woman takes up her needles
and her yarn. Let evening come.

Let dew collect on the hoe abandoned
in long grass. Let the stars appear
and the moon disclose her silver horn.

Let the fox go back to its sandy den.
Let the wind die down. Let the shed
go black inside. Let evening come.

To the bottle in the ditch, to the scoop
in the oats, to air in the lung
let evening come.

Let it come, as it will, and don’t
be afraid. God does not leave us
comfortless, so let evening come.

Shared experiences

Time to share reactions, thoughts, understandings, experiences, etc. related to these virtues.

Some seeds:
Does anything about these ideas strike you as undesirable?
What things in our life own us? To what are we firmly attached?
What stories in our culture relate to these concepts?
How do these concepts relate to raising children?

More group discussion

Why are these virtues important?
Why are they hard to live into?
Where can we improve in our own lives?