

A Few Random Thoughts on Learning Patience

Being a less-than-patient person myself, I've often noticed how quickly patience diminishes as medical training progresses. Yet patience has always been considered a great virtue by philosophers and theologians. Here is what the Chinese sage Lao-tze had to say about patience:

*Do you have the patience to wait
Till your mud settles and the water is clear?
Can you remain unmoving
Till the right action arises by itself?*

I wonder what Lao-tze meant by our "mud." A psychologist and expert in stress reduction, John Kabat-Zinn, believes that "scratch the surface of impatience and what you will find lying beneath it, subtly or not so subtly, is anger." What might we be angry about? Do we default to an impatient mode to justify or mask our anger? Does impatience help or hinder us in accomplishing our tasks? Thinking strategically, the 18th century British statesman Edmund Burke asserted that "***Patience will achieve more than force.***" Is it an oxymoron to "hurry patiently," or is there something of value in this idea?

Finally, in a helpful application of relativity theory, Einstein reminded us, "***The faster you go, the shorter you are.***" Next time you're on the wards, take a look around. Something to think about (.