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A Reflection on *the Voice of the Silence*, No. 19

“KSHANTI, patience sweet, that nought can ruffle.”

—*The Voice of the Silence*

Early in the third Fragment of *The Voice of the Silence*, we are introduced to the six Paramitas, those golden keys which unlock the portals to the other shore. Mahayana Buddhists also refer to them as the Six Perfections, one of which is Kshanti, whose meaning includes not only patience but forbearance, tolerance, endurance, and acceptance. To explore the distinctions between these nuances of meaning would require more space than a single page, so what follows are a few random musings.

We live in a time when worldly conditions are not conducive to the cultivation of patience. On all sides we are beleaguered by calls to act—and to act quickly—whether it pertains to advancing one’s career, solving the world’s problems, or finding spiritual enlightenment. There’s a tacit assumption that those who practice patience will be left behind, an opinion perhaps best expressed by the Nike trademark, JUST DO IT. Those enamored by the Gospel of Instant Gratification are likely to dismiss statements such as this one from Bishop Joseph Hall (1574-1656): “Perfection is the child of Time”; or this from *The Voice of the Silence*: “Long and weary is the way before thee...” *Do it and do it now*, is the siren call of the day.

The annals of history record numerous examples of powerful, self-driven individuals who ruthlessly pursued their personal ambitions, seemingly without a moment’s pause for quiet introspection. When he died at the age of 32, Alexander the Great had conquered virtually the entire known world, an empire stretching from Macedonia to India. Five centuries later, Flavius Arrianus Xenophon, a student of Epictetus, wrote: “The splendid achievements of Alexander are the clearest possible proof that neither strength of body, nor noble blood, nor success in war . . . can make a man happy, unless he can win one more victory in addition to those the world thinks great—the victory over himself” (*The Anabasis of Alexander*).

So how does one develop Kshanti, a perfection easier to conceive in the abstract than to realize in daily life? St. Teresa advises us to “Let nothing trouble you, nothing frighten you. All things are passing; God never changes. Patient endurance attains all things.” Others find it through a reverential intimacy with Nature. In her book *Dakota—A Spiritual Geography*, Kathleen Norris describes this alchemical process: “The silence of the Plains, this great unpeopled landscape of earth and sky, is much like the silence one finds in a monastery, an unfathomable silence that has the power to re-form you.” Prolonged contemplation of God, either in its transcendent aspect or as it manifests through Nature, is a powerful palliative for those afflicted by impatience.

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