To bear disgrace and insult is the most important virtue a person can possibly cultivate, because the ability to forbear is enormously powerful, since a moment of anger can destroy an entire lifetime of merits. In today's society, people often mistake forbearance for cowardice. Therefore, the inability or unwillingness to forbear anger has become a source of social and family violence. Spousal abuse, child abuse, and drive-by shootings result from the inability of people to control their emotions. If we want to have peace and order in our lives, reason must prevail over negative emotions.

What does it mean to forbear? It is not very difficult for most of us to endure a moment of hunger or thirst. It is not very hard for most of us to bear the heat of summer or the cold of winter. However, it is very difficult for most of us to forbear anger. Even great men and women of history have succumbed to such a fate. By losing control of their emotions, many lost their ability to perceive things clearly and made irreversible mistakes that changed the course of history and profoundly impacted the lives of many generations. Therefore, the decision to forbear or not to forbear is a determining factor in one's ultimate success or failure. If we wish to be successful in our undertakings, we must learn to hold back our emotions and be as thoughtful as possible in our actions and reactions.

To forbear is indeed an act of courage and not a symbol of cowardice. It takes great effort and resolution to endure pain and hardship. It requires tremendous confidence to bear insult and disgrace without a hint of retaliation or self-doubt.

In order for us to practice the virtue of forbearance, we must have strength, wisdom, and compassion. We must be willing to settle differences or disputes by means of reason and kindness. We must believe in tolerance and restraint as signs of goodness and bravery. Therefore, if we want to succeed in life and bring about a more peaceful world, we must learn to control our emotions and not to be affected by a moment of anger.

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First, I want to congratulate everyone that participated in the Path of Freedom class and graduated last spring.

As you know, the Path of Freedom offers you learning tools to make different decisions that can help benefit your life (if you choose to) while you are there and when you get out. Now, I thought it would be a good idea to review the section on Holding Your Seat. When our environment gets cold (or hot) and uncomfortable, we are more apt to lose our patience and get triggered. Remember how we discussed being triggered?

How do you know when you are triggered? Check out your body and your mind. Are you agitated? Are you breathing rapidly, feeling tense or upset? Just think of the word trigger. It implies that you are on the edge, waiting to pull the trigger and then away you go; straight into the reality of unwanted consequences. If you notice that you are becoming triggered, take a breath and hold your seat. Don’t retaliate.

Tell me about your first few days in prison. What was your state of mind? I was sitting in a county jail cell in Missouri facing a possible life sentence. I finally hit a wall. Everything that I had not been dealing with hit me like a ton of bricks. I’d let down my teacher, my community, myself, but I’d be doing what was expected of me by my family, my son and my mom. I’d left them with nothing. I spent seven months in jail going through trial and sentencing. It was a time of terrible fear, darkness, and despair.

What were the conditions like? It was an incredibly chaotic environment. Five two-man cells, a concrete floor, and everything else welded steel: ceilings, walls, bunks, urinals, sinks. The cell’s all one piece—no windows, just a steel door with a meal slot. There was almost no room to walk. Prisoners could have radios and televisions, so they would keep these going twenty-four hours a day. There was a crew that stayed all night watching movies, another that watched cartoons in the morning, and another that watched soap operas in the afternoon. Constant noise. People yelling and screaming, fights, people badly beaten. It was very much a hell realm. And my mind was just nuts. I couldn’t sleep.

Eventually I was sentenced to twenty-five years without parole. Even with good time, if I stayed out of trouble, I knew I would be in for fourteen years, and that felt like an eternity. There was really no light at the end of the tunnel.

And in this situation you began to meditate. Did you have any doubts that you would continue to practice in prison? None. I was so devastated by what I had done that at first, I was determined to make amends, to be a better person, to become a better person. I had become intense over-prosecuted. But I did discover a walk-in trash closet. I would clean it up, set all the mops and brooms and trash barrels outside so somebody could get to them, and I would sit in the closet on a folding chair. Prison is a world of anger, and I certainly had mine. I had a lot to be bitter about: Some close friends had turned me in; I felt that I had been intensely over-prosecuted. But I was committed not to go there. I did not want to end up an angry and bitter person. It was not who I wanted to be. I really worked on transforming all that and on cultivating an attitude of lovingkindness.

I was scared to death of what lay ahead, of being trampled under, of unshed tears, of hearing all the commotion surrounding me, but my mind wasn’t being pulled by any of it. I’d had many experiences like this in intensive meditation retreats, but never in the midst of such chaos. I really saw for the first time that this would be workable. I had a practice. I was scared to death of what lay ahead, but I knew I could survive. I eventually came out of the darkness, determined to mature in my practice and to eradicate any kind of negativity from my life.

What was your practice? When and where would you sit? My basic practice was samatha-vipassana meditation [calm abiding and insight meditation]. In the county jail, I would sit on my bunk. I would sit at night or early in the morning—in part because the jail was extremely hot. In the summer, sometimes they had to hose down the walls because of the heat.

Then I moved to a maximum-security federal prison. For the first two years, I lived in a dormitory room with bunk and mattresses. It was claustrophobic, filled with bodies and noise. I would sometimes do my practice late at night, when it was quietest, but I also discovered a walk-in trash closet. I would clean it up, set all the mops and brooms and trash barrels outside so somebody could get to them, and I would sit in the closet on a folding chair.

Prison is a world of anger, and I certainly had mine. I had a lot to be bitter about: Some close friends had turned me in; I felt that I had been intensely over-prosecuted. But I was committed not to go there. I did not want to end up an angry and bitter person. It was not who I wanted to be. I really worked on transforming all that and on cultivating an attitude of lovingkindness.
Across
1. Beyond the blame game, above the line, taking 100% accountability for our lives.
2. Another word for coins.

Down
1. Your meditation ally, in and out, from birth till death.
2. A word we can say to ourselves to stop looping thoughts.
3. Tylenol can cure this, meditation can too.
4. Circumstances are
5. The transformed form of the persecutor in the Empowerment Triangle.
6. Choosing not to hold on to resentment & bitterness.
7. Deep breathing has many healthy benefits.
8. Paying attention, in the present, without judgement.

Call for Submissions:
Please send us your visual art! If you have any drawings, paintings, cartoons or sketches that you’d like to see published in a future issue of this newsletter, please send it to us for consideration.

The art should be small enough to fit into an envelope that you can mail to us, unless we choose your art for publication, please let us know if you would like it to be published anonymously, or with your first name.

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