**Perseverance**

By Frederic and Mary Ann Brussat

 

By perseverance the snail reached the ark.
— Charles Spurgeon

When you get into a tight place and everything goes against you, till it seems as though you could not hang in a minute longer, never give up then, for it is just the place and time that the tide will turn.
— Harriet Beecher Stowe

If you wish success in life, make perseverance your bosom friend, experience your wise counselor, caution your elder brother, and hope your guardian genius.
— Joseph Addison

"Not to give up under any circumstances" should be the motto of our life: I shall try again and again, and I am bound to succeed. There will be obstacles, but I have to defy the obstacles.
— Sri Chinmoy

Great works are performed not by strength, but by perseverance.
— Samuel Johnson

Perseverance is the essential requirement in the practice of yoga. It has to be done day by day, week by week, year by year, until the mind is brought to the "still point" where it is open to the grace of God.
— Bede Griffiths

We can do anything we want to do if we stick to it long enough.
— Helen Keller

Strength does not come from physical capacity. It comes from an indomitable will.
— Mahatma Gandhi

All the great persons of the world, whatever had been their mission in life, proved their greatness by this one quality: endurance. The enduring personality is like a ship that can stand storms and winds under all conditions, the ship that saves itself and others. Such blessed personalities, showing the strength of God have been called the saviors of humanity.
— Hazrat Inayat Khan

God is with those who persevere.
— The Qur'an

The solution is never about fixing but about staying . .  with the fear of helplessness and loss of control.
— Ezra Bayda



**PRACTICING PERSEVERANCE**

We all know people who have an intense commitment to what they are doing and are able to sustain this steadfastness even in the face of incredible obstacles and setbacks. There are also people who start a project filled with high hopes and spurred on by great energy, then somewhere along the way, lose focus, aren't able to deal with difficulties that arise, or just do not have the will power and stamina to see the project through to the end. What the former have and the latter need is perseverance.

Whether you are a practitioner of perseverance or a seeker who desires it, this ancient virtue beckons you to a fuller and richer life. We realized this when reading Margaret J. Wheatley's excellent book [*Perseverance*](http://www.spiritualityandpractice.com/books/books.php?id=20323); it encouraged us to consider not only what this virtue is, but what blocks it, and how it can be developed.

In Latin, the term means "one who sees through to the end" and "one who doesn’t yield." We need this quality of doggedness and determination for our daily labors and for the Great Work of saving the Earth, which is in deep trouble thanks to our irresponsible behavior and short-sightedness. Sri Chinmoy has observed: "Patience and perseverance are of supreme importance on any spiritual path."

Obstacles arise when we start to practice perseverance — from little daily challenges to entrenched tendencies. The first is distraction. Our consumer culture with all its so-called technological necessities gives us many ways to get off-course: cell phones, electronic games, DVDs, iPods, iPads, and the like. It is hard to stay focused on anything when there are so many chances to turn away from the task at hand.

Another roadblock to perseverance is fear, which depletes our energy so that we give up on ourselves or on the project we have committed ourselves to do. We need to become fearless as spiritual warriors.

Stress and fatigue can also weaken our bodies and take us out of the game. The antidote is to stay physically fit and to eat wisely.

Boredom is another challenge we have to face as we repeat activities. Many of us don't have the emotional make-up to do the same thing again and again. A complicated project can even lead us to an experience of the dark night of the soul. When we are weighed down with the anxieties that come with a large project, we are grounded and buoyed by the spiritual practice of patience, which is like a loving sister to perseverance.

So recognizing these roadblocks, how do we cultivate perseverance? Here are some spiritual practices that can help.

• **Enjoy Persevering at One Thing.** In [*Zen Miracles*](http://www.spiritualityandpractice.com/books/books.php?id=4331), Brenda Shoshanna offers this perseverance practice:

"Pick one activity that requires a great deal of perseverance and do it for a designated amount of time each week. Whether or not you are in the mood to do it, do it anyway. When the time is over, put it down. Then pick it up the next day. See what happens as a result of this to you, and to the activity."



• **Do Sit-Ups.** In [*Zen 24/7*](http://www.spiritualityandpractice.com/books/books.php?id=2757) Philip Toshio Sudo writes:

"When the Japanese samurai wanted to knuckle down and make a serious effort at something, they would say, *Hara o kukuru*: 'Tie the guts.'

"In doing sit-ups, we show the same resolve. The act of sitting up from flat on our back builds spiritual strength — pulling oneself up off the ground through a force of will. 'Seven times down, eight times up,' goes the Japanese adage.

"Whatever slips we make on the path, we have to get up and carry on. Sit-ups help build that kind of perseverance and character."

Find a physical exercise that will spur you on as you try to achieve the firm resolve needed to persevere.

• **Find a Hero.** "We can do anything we want to do if we stick to it long enough," Helen Keller said. She demonstrated, along with others such as Nelson Mandela, Jackie Robinson, and Civil Rights marchers, that perseverance is able to bring about change in both our private lives and the public arena. Choose a perseverance hero to honor and emulate this week, someone who has shown you the value of this positive and powerful virtue.

• **Cultivate equanimity.**. "Equanimity is the ability to experience the changes in our lives, circumstances, and feelings and still remain calm, centered and unmoved. The image most often used to illustrate the quality of equanimity is that of a mountain. The mountain sits there as the sun shines on it, the rain drenches it, it is covered with snow and struck by lightning. Through it all, through all the changing conditions, the mountain remains unwavering. As we cultivate equanimity within ourselves, we learn to be more like the mountain, finding that place of strength and courage within ourselves that enables us to withstand the slings and arrows of being human without feeling overwhelmed by fear." So writes Wayne Muller in [*Legacy of the Heart.*](http://www.spiritualityandpractice.com/books/books.php?id=5668) In your imagination, see yourself as a mountain, remaining calm and steady despite changes swirling around you. How does this feel? Return to this image whenever you need to persevere through challenges.

• **Say Affirmations.**. Affirmations can be a great help in developing your capacity to persevere. Here are eight affirmations from Nola Drazdoff, the creator of the [Path Positives affirmations programs](http://www.inspiredpath-store.com/pathpositives.html). (To learn more about her approach, see ["Working with Affirmations-Secrets for Success"](http://www.inspiredpath-store.com/wowiafsefors.html).)

1. I take one small action at a time and move steadily toward my desired outcome.
2. I keep my focus set on the task in front of me at this moment.
3. Each small accomplishment inspires me to take the next step right NOW.
4. My motivation and enthusiasm increase as I do what is mine to do.
5. I pace myself for the long haul to ensure that I make it to the finish line.
6. Even when the going gets tough, I keep going.
7. Each day I give myself credit for the progress I have made.
8. My positive attitude and dedication easily moves me through any frustrations or obstacles in my path.

• **Find a Symbolic Reminder.** Josh Billings says: "Consider the postage stamp. Its usefulness consists in its ability to stick to one thing until it gets there." Use the postage stamp — or find another symbol — to remind you to stay focused on a project or a dream. A little tool like this can be very helpful when you feel stopped by inertia or too many distractions.

• **Say a Mantra.** A final spiritual practice to insure perseverance and push aside distractions is the use of a mantra, a key word or short phrase that is meaningful to you. We find this one helpful. It's by the French theologian Pierre Teilhard de Chardin: "Trust in the slow work of God."