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Patience and Perseverance

The people of the Punjab have a song which goes like this:

The bulbul does not always sing in the garden,
And the garden is not always in bloom;
Happiness does not always reign,
And friends are not always together.

The conclusion to be drawn from this song is that we cannot expect to be always happy, and that to know how to be patient is most useful. For there are few days in our lives which do not give us the opportunity to learn greater patience.

You want to see a very busy man to ask him something. You go to his house. Already many visitors are there and he keeps you waiting a very long time before seeing you. You stay there quietly, perhaps for several hours. You are patient.

Another time, the person you wish to see is not at home when you arrive. You return again the next day, but his door is still closed. You go back a third time, but he is sick and cannot see you. You let a few days go by and then return once more. And if something new again prevents you from meeting him, nevertheless you are not discouraged, but renew the attempt until at last you see him. This kind of patience is called perseverance.

Perseverance is an active patience, a patience that marches on.

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The famous Genoese sailor Columbus set sail from Spain to cross the unknown seas of the West.

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For days and weeks on end, in spite of the murmurs of his companions, he persisted in his will to reach a new land; in spite of delays and difficulties, he would not give up until he had reached the first American islands. Thus he discovered the New World.

What did he ask of his companions? He asked them only to have patience, for they had simply to rely on him and quietly allow him to lead them. But what did he himself need to reach his goal? He needed the sustained energy and the unremitting will that we call perseverance.

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The celebrated potter, Bernard Palissy, wanted to recover the lost secret of beautiful old glazed china enamelled in rich colours.

For months and years on end, he untiringly pursued his experiments. His attempts to find the glaze remained fruitless for a long time. He devoted all he had to his search; and for days and nights together he watched over the kiln he had built, endlessly trying out new processes for preparing and firing his pottery. And not only did no one give him any help or encouragement, but his friends and his neighbours called him a madman, and even his wife reproached him for what he was doing.

Several times he had to suspend his experiments for lack of resources, but as soon as he could, he would take them up again with renewed courage. Finally one day he did not even have the wood he needed to stoke his kiln; so, disregarding the cries and threats of his household, he threw his own furniture, to the very last stick, into the fire. And when everything was burnt, he opened the kiln and found it full of the brightly glazed pottery which made him famous and which he had sacrificed so many years to discover.

What was it that his wife and friends lacked that they could not wait for his hour of success to come, without harassing him and making his task more difficult? Simply patience. And what...
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was the only thing he himself never lacked, the only thing that never failed him and which enabled him in the end to triumph over all difficulty and scorn? It was precisely perseverance, that is to say, the mightiest force of all.

For nothing in the world can prevail against perseverance. And even the greatest things are always an accumulation of small and untiring efforts.

Enormous boulders have been completely destroyed, worn by raindrops falling one after another on the same spot.

A grain of sand is nothing very powerful, but when many come together, they form a dune and check the ocean.

And when you learn about natural history, you will hear how mountains have been formed under the sea by little animalcules piled one upon another, who by their persistent efforts have made magnificent islands and archipelagos rise above the waves.

Don’t you think that your small, repeated efforts could also achieve great things?

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The famous sage Shankara whose name brought glory to the land of Malabar, and who lived about 1200 years ago, had resolved from childhood to become a Sannyasi.

For a long time his mother, although she appreciated the nobility of his wish, did not allow him to devote himself to that way of life.

One day mother and child went to bathe in a river. Shankara dived in and felt his foot suddenly seized by a crocodile. Death seemed close at hand. But even at that dreadful moment the brave child thought only of his great project and cried out to his mother, “I am lost! A crocodile is dragging me down. But let me at least die a Sannyasi!”

“Yes, yes, my son,” his mother sobbed in despair.

Shankara felt such joy that he found the strength to free his foot and throw himself ashore.
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From that moment he grew in learning as in years. He became a guru, and remained true to his great work of teaching philosophy to the very end of his wonderful life.

All who love India know the beautiful poem of the Mahabharata.

It was written in Sanskrit many hundreds of years ago. Until recent times, no European could read it unless he knew Sanskrit, and that was rare. A translation into one of the European languages was needed.

Babu Pratap Chandra Rai decided to devote himself to this work. In his own land he was able to find a learned friend, Kishori Mohan Ganguly, who could translate the Sanskrit book into English, and its hundred parts were published one by one.

For twelve years Pratap Chandra Rai went on with the task he had set himself. He devoted all his resources to the publication of the book. And when he had nothing left he travelled all over India to ask help from all who were willing to give. He received help from princes and peasants, from scholars and simple folk, from friends in Europe and America.

In the course of one of his journeys he caught the pernicious fever from which he died. During his sickness all his thoughts were turned towards the completion of his work. And even when it became painful for him to speak, he would still say to his wife:

“The book must be finished. Don’t spend money on my funeral rites if it is needed for the printing. Live as simply as you can so as to save money for the Mahabharata.”

He died full of love for India and her great poem.

His widow, Sundari Bala Rai, faithfully carried out his great wish. One year later the translator completed his work, and the eleven volumes of the Mahabharata were presented to the European public who could now know and admire the eighteen Parvas of the splendid epic poem. And reading it, they would
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learn to respect the great skill and wisdom of the profound thinkers who were the poets of ancient India.

Such are the fruits borne by the efforts of all those who, like Pratap Chandra Rai and so many other useful men, know how to persevere.

And you, brave children, will you not join the great army of men and women who never tire of doing good and never abandon their task until they have completed it?

In this wide world, there is no lack of noble work to be accomplished, nor is there any lack of good people to undertake it; but what is very often lacking is the perseverance which alone can carry it through to the end.