



American Expression E2050 By and by

IOTS Publishing Team
International Online Teachers Society
Since 2011

"By and by" is an idiomatic expression in English that refers to a period of time in the future, often with a sense of vague or unspecified timing. This phrase has been used for centuries and is still prevalent in contemporary language, allowing speakers to discuss events or actions that will occur at some point, though not necessarily immediately. The origins of "by and by" can be traced back to Middle English, where it was initially used to indicate something that would happen at a later time. Over the centuries, it has become an established part of the English language, maintaining its meaning of "in the future" or "after a while."

The phrase "by and by" suggests that an event or action will occur at an indeterminate point in time, without specifying when exactly it will happen. It can convey a sense of patience, anticipation, or the idea that time will eventually bring about the desired outcome. In literature, "by and by" is often used to create an element of suspense or to suggest that something significant will occur in the narrative, but the exact timing remains uncertain. For example, a character in a story might say, "I'll find the answer to this mystery by and by," indicating their determination to uncover the truth but leaving the timeline open-ended.

In everyday conversation, "by and by" is employed in various contexts. It can be used to refer to future plans, aspirations, or expectations. For instance, if someone is asked about their career goals, they might respond, "I hope to achieve my dreams by and by," implying that they have long-term ambitions that they aim to realize eventually.

Additionally, "by and by" can be used in a more reflective or nostalgic manner to discuss events or experiences from the past. When reminiscing, someone might say, "By and by, I realized how important those childhood memories were to me," indicating that with the passage of time, they came to appreciate the significance of those moments.

The phrase "by and by" is versatile, and its meaning can be nuanced depending on the context. It can convey a sense of patience, gradual progression, or the anticipation of a future outcome. It is often used when the exact timing of an event or action is less critical, emphasizing the idea that things will unfold naturally or in due course.

It's important to note that "by and by" may not always be the most precise way to express timing, as it lacks specificity. In cases where a more exact timeframe is required, alternative phrases like "soon," "eventually," or "in the near future" may be more appropriate.

In conclusion, "by and by" is an idiomatic expression used to refer to a future period of time that is generally unspecified. It conveys the notion that something will happen or be realized at some point, without pinpointing the exact timing. This phrase has been a part of the English language for centuries and remains a useful way to discuss future events or aspirations with a sense of anticipation or patience.

Questions for Discussion

1. How does the idiomatic expression "by and by" contribute to storytelling and narrative suspense when authors use it to hint at future events without specifying exact timing?
 2. Can you share a personal example where you or someone you know used "by and by" to discuss long-term goals or aspirations? What was the context, and were those goals eventually achieved?
 3. In what situations might using "by and by" be more appropriate than specifying an exact timeframe when discussing future plans or expectations? Are there cultural or social contexts where this phrase is commonly used?
 4. How does the phrase "by and by" compare to other expressions that convey the idea of something happening in the future, such as "eventually" or "in due course"? Are there subtle differences in their usage or connotations?
 5. Have you ever encountered a story or piece of literature where the phrase "by and by" played a significant role in shaping the narrative or character development? How did its usage impact your interpretation of the story's events or themes?
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