

Deep Dive Into the 10 Paramitas | 6 Patience or Kanti

6. Patience (Kanti)

Having developed the energy and fearlessness of a warrior, we can now develop patience, or khanti. Khanti means “unaffected by” or “able to withstand.” It could be translated as tolerance, endurance and composure as well as patience or forbearance. Khanti helps us endure the hardships of our own lives as well as the suffering created by others even as we try to help them.

Patience should be fortified by reflection

“Am I wronged by others because of some residue of anger in myself? This residue I should remove.”

“A wrong-doer is a benefactor to me, for he or she is the basis for developing patience.”

“If there were no wrong-doers, how could I accomplish the perfection of patience?”

- Dhammapada

Patience

-Gil Fronsdal

In our busy lives, we may easily overlook the value of patience in our quest for accomplishment, efficiency, and fulfillment. When we recognize that clear seeing, peace, compassion, and love are quite different from, even incompatible with, compulsive behavior and reactions, the value of patience becomes apparent. Patience entails choosing not to respond reactively, allowing other possibilities to arise; it provides tremendous support for mindfulness practice. Gentle perseverance, patience under insult, and acceptance of truth are three traditional facets of patience that give strength to mindfulness.

The patience of perseverance keeps us from

succumbing to doubt, discouragement, and fear. In Buddhist practice, perseverance enables us to maintain our steady effort. When progress in practice does not meet our expectations, we can easily become discouraged. For example, practice often gives rise to pleasant states; if we assume we can sustain them at will, the reality of change can be quite unpleasant. Or, we may expect practice to develop linearly, with increasing concentration and peace, or steadily decreasing suffering. A period of ease and calm in practice might well provide the inner strength, trust, and sensitivity to confront long-ignored difficulties. It is much easier to sustain practice over the long term if we realize that it doesn’t always unfold in an even, expected way.

Perseverance can also be important when spiritual practice does meet our expectations. When things are going well, it is all too easy to become complacent. In the presence of happiness, calm, or ease, we might forget to maintain a steady dedication to practice.

Gentle perseverance allows us to practice unhindered by both the difficulties and rewards we experience. It is key to letting mindfulness practice sink deep into the marrow of our bones.

Patience under insult means not succumbing to anger, aggression, or despair when threatened. Instead, it means being mindful of our reactions and emotional responses, and perhaps finding wiser ways to respond.

Pausing, even for a moment, before reacting to a difficult situation is a powerful form of patience. A pause may give us a better understanding of the situation and our intentions within it. Sometimes, a pause allows for something wonderful and unexpected to arise, something that would not have happened had we rushed in to comment, react, or control.

Sometimes people find patience by changing their point of reference for understanding a challenging situation. Our understanding is often self-centered; other perspectives may be equally, if not more, appropriate. During the civil rights movement, for example, many people endured a tremendous amount of physical, mental, and emotional insult by understanding its role in a larger context than their own individual suffering. Struggling for civil rights gave their suffering a purpose that transformed the whole country.

The third form of patience is acceptance of truth. It is the willingness to see deeply, without resistance, the truth of the moment and the truth of the deepest levels of reality. Opening to what is, we can begin to let go of grasping to a self-conscious and fixed idea of how we think things should be. This requires a kind of patience because deep spiritual an inclusive spaciousness that allows insight. Most of us orient our lives around a limited view of ourselves; it can be quite frightening to let this view go. The patient acceptance of truth that allows us to let go is a personal strength developed together with the strengths of virtue, discernment, wisdom, resolve, and loving-kindness.

The ultimate perfection of patience does not come from endurance or a re-evaluation of a situation however. Rather it comes from the absence of our habitual, automatic triggers, and reactive hooks to the challenges of life. Fully mature patience is a way of being.

Once an angry man insulted the Buddha. The Buddha simply asked the man if people ever visited him in his home. Surprised at the change of topic, the man answered yes. The Buddha then asked if his visitors ever brought gifts. When the man replied yes again, the Buddha asked what would happen if he refused to accept the gifts? Who would the gifts belong to then? The man said that, of course, they would still belong to those who brought them. The Buddha then calmly and, I imagine, kindly said, "In the same way, since I do not accept your insults, they remain with you."

Since the ultimate patience is embodied, perhaps the opposite of impatience is not patience but rather contentment.

Shantideva on Patience

From A Guide to the Bodhisattva's Way of Life

- Shantideva

Translation Stephen Batchelor

Whatever wholesome deeds,
Such as venerating the Buddhas, and generosity,
That have been amassed over a thousand aeons
Will all be destroyed in one moment of anger.

There is no evil like hatred,
And no fortitude like patience.
Thus I should strive in various ways
To meditate on patience.

My mind will not experience peace
If it fosters painful thoughts of hatred.
I shall find no joy or happiness,
Unable to sleep, I shall feel unsettled.

A master who has hatred
Is in danger of being killed
Even by those who for their wealth and happiness
Depend upon his kindness.

Hence the enemy, anger,
Creates sufferings such as these,
But whoever assiduously overcomes it
Finds happiness now and hereafter.

Therefore I should totally eradicate
The fuel of this enemy;
For this enemy has no other function
Than that of causing me harm.

Whatever befalls me
I shall not disturb my mental joy;
For having been made unhappy, I shall not accomplish
what I wish
And my virtues will decline.

Why be unhappy about something
If it can be remedied?
And what is the use of being unhappy about something
If it cannot be remedied?

For myself and for my friends
I want no suffering, no disrespect,
No harsh words and nothing unpleasant;
But for my enemies it is the opposite.

The causes of happiness sometimes occur
But the causes for suffering are very many.
Without suffering there is no renunciation.
Therefore, mind, you should stand firm.

There is nothing whatsoever
That is not made easier through acquaintance.
So through becoming acquainted with small harms
I should learn to patiently accept greater harms.

Who has not seen this to be so with trifling sufferings
Such as the bites of snakes and insects,
Feelings of hunger and thirst
And with such minor things as rashes?

I should not be impatient
With heat and cold, wind and rain,
Sickness, bondage and beatings;
For if I am, the harm they cause me will increase.

Reflections and Practices

Reflections:

1. Patient perseverance: Reflect on what personal obstacles you might have that interfere with persevering with a challenging activity. What abilities and understanding do you have that help you to stick with doing something you have committed yourself to?
2. Patience under insult: How do you generally respond to anger and insults directed at you? Under what circumstances are you most reactive to anger toward yourself? What beliefs come into play when

you know someone is angry with you? What abilities, practices, and understandings do you have that helps you to be patient or nonreactive to anger and insult? What benefits come from being patient while being insulted?

3. Forgiveness: What attitudes do you have toward forgiveness? Under what circumstances are you willing to forgive someone? When is forgiveness difficult for you? Are there areas in your life where it would be useful to forgive?

4. Acceptance of the truth: Are there things which you are not willing to look at, to be honest about? Are there some things you believe are true which you resist? When can acceptance of the truth help you to be more at peace? Acceptance of the truth sometimes takes the form of surrendering to the inevitable. Have you ever found peace through such surrender?

Practices:

1. Choose a task which you regularly avoid doing or which you often procrastinate about. With resolve, engage in the task and stick with it until it is done. When you are done, reflect what that was like and what you could learn from doing it.
2. If you become angry, do your best to not do or say anything out of anger. What happens inside of you when you hold your anger in check? What do you have to do in order to keep your anger in check? What are the benefits and disadvantages in doing this?
3. Choose one person you are angry or irritated with, or who you feel hurt by. Spend some time reflecting on what it would take for you to be able to forgive this person.
4. During sitting meditation, at a time of unpleasant or what seems like uninteresting experience, focus on bringing the quality of patience to it. Notice any resistance to the experience and consciously bring the quality of patient kindness into the experience.