

PATIENCE (KHANTI)

By Bhante Buddharakkhita, January 2, 2010, International Buddhist Society of Pennsylvania

This afternoon I would like to give a talk about Patience (khanti, or forbearance). It is one of the 10 Perfections (Paramis), qualities to perfect, to even become a Buddha. He never monopolized those qualities, so you too can become a Buddha! There are different levels of the Perfections. For example, generosity (dāna) is the first quality of mind. A higher level of it (upapani) is to give up our bodily organs to another being, such as donating a kidney. The highest level of generosity is to give up your entire life for another being.

How do we make these a part of our daily life? What do you want to bring into the New Year? Patience (khanti) is one of the Paramis. The others are generosity (dāna), ethical conduct (sīla), renunciation (nekkhamma), energy (vīriya), wisdom (pañña), truthfulness (sacca), determination (adhitthāna), loving-kindness (metta), and equanimity (upekkha). I wrote a book, “Drop by Drop,” using these qualities as a framework for daily life, moment to moment. Each time we choose to practice a skillful quality, it is like a drop in a bucket. But don’t underestimate them; drop by drop the bucket will be full – of a quality such as loving-kindness or equanimity. Also, never underestimate unskillful qualities. Similarly, drop by drop the bucket will be full of an unskillful quality, such as greed, attachment, misconduct, anger, and other imbalanced states of life. It is all up to us what we do. The Buddha gave us options.

In my kuti I sat one time, and there was a drop of water coming from my roof. I thought about the Dhammapada verse, what the Buddha said, about “drop by drop.” I wanted to see if the bucket would be full. And it was, after some time, so I used this water for humidity in the kuti, putting it on the stove. So like a scientist, to fulfill my curiosity, I put out a bottle with a small neck, so only one drop goes in, and all others around would fall outside of it. After I went out, I saw that the bottle was full! So similarly, even if we do *some* Dhamma practice, not all the time, still we can fill the bottle. A drop is the potential for us to do good. After a certain time, the drops fill the bucket. Similarly, mangoes only ripen when it is time.

Patience is a much needed quality, as people are so angry nowadays, about the economy and many other things. If you are full of patience that is good, but circumstances will come where you need to show patience by your example.

Recently, I went to Asoka’s office, and I sat with him there at the airport waiting for my ride for 45 minutes. Asoka gave me a seat and phone to make calls. Then some passengers came to him, demanding their luggage. I was so amazed how much patience he had. “Where’s our luggage, we’ve been waiting for one hour!” they demanded. Then another passenger came, saying “how long until my luggage will come?” impatiently, which is a sign of anger. It seemed to them that Asoka was responsible for the luggage not being there, locked in the plane. But he never lost his temper, never defended himself or even said “it’s not my fault.”

One time I was alone at an airport, with no one to pick me up, no money and no phone. I couldn’t call for the person who was supposed to pick me up. Six hours passed, and I just hoped that they would come. It was too late to call them at night, because people would be sleeping. So this is my practice of patience, I thought. I asked an airport employee whether I could go on

an alms round outside the airport. But then a lady came who said she would bring me food. But, she brought a sandwich with bacon, and I don't eat bacon. I thought, "should I tell her I don't eat meat?" I am allergic to bacon, also. So I just tossed the bacon out and ate. After 6 hours waiting at an airport, when someone comes to pick them up, most people would get upset and yell at him for forgetting about them. But, I thought, there is nothing to be angry about, because it is not personal.

So, what other types of patience should be practiced? Being *patient with the weather*. Many people complain about the weather. Especially at the airport, people get so angry, but it's not the pilot's fault if the flight is cancelled or delayed. If he flies, you won't arrive safely. Maybe the delay is due to weather. People say "Happy New Year," but we should know the difference between just saying something and really practicing it. For example, we know that a sign saying "joy" in front of your house and practicing joy are two different things. We should know the difference between saying we are patient and practicing patience.

We need to be *patient with pain or suffering*. Life is not without pain. We have to learn from the pain. Pain teaches us to practice patience; learning patience does not come just from reading about it in books. If you experience pain or suffering, think "what can I learn from it?" The Dalai Lama says, "if you lose something, don't lose the lesson." If we don't learn, then it's not worth it. If we learn, then we can advance. So next time if you have pain, see if you can learn from it to be more patient and loving. But don't ask for pain – don't invite it!

We also must be *patient with conflicts*. People may speak about something with a different view from yours. We may disagree, with a different point of view. For example, psychologists may disagree with me. But this teaches us patience.

We must be *patient with inner conflict*. If we have a crushing desire, we can learn from this conflict. Pay attention to inner conflicts; they manifest as outer conflict. We can find "what are my conflicting desires, goals, plans." Can I be patient going through these conflicts? Because our goals are not well defined, conflict is caused.

We need to be *patient with anger arising in the mind*. People sometimes tell me, "I'm not an angry person." And I think, "then you must be on the third level of Enlightenment, an anāgami (non-returner to the material world)." Everyone has anger unless you are at that level. Until then, we are going to have irritations. Sometimes we deny it, or have passive aggression – not wanting to take responsibility – which is a manifestation of aversion of anger. Aversion is a desire to get or a desire to get rid of. It is a feeling of something blocking my way, frustrating my efforts. It may be as subtle as an itch or as great as a rage. It is part of being a human. Hormones help us to survive – adrenaline arises and makes us take action when we touch a hot plate or see a bear. Aversion there helps us. The problem arises when we have excessive anger. But we can transform the energy of anger and channel it in a positive way to transform our life. We should be happy and not cause trouble to others. If we control our anger, happiness and loving-kindness result. It is not useful to give discourses or write about it; what is important is to know what causes anger, greed, and delusion, and to remove it.

Here is a **systematic method to deal with anger and be patient:**

1. **Recognition** – mindfulness, is the first line of defense. If you have a guest outside, you look out for the guest, and recognize that he is coming, and go to the door. We think, is he present or absent? Similarly, we treat a bad emotion as a guest. Recognize the guest is coming in to our home. Our mind is our home – if anything comes in, see it as a guest. For example, recognize that impatience is here. The guest coming is impatience. If we don't see the guest coming, we have a bog problem – the guest will not know where to go and will enter our master bedroom. So with recognition, we can direct the guest and understand him. Also, we recognize when the guest comes and leaves. So, recognition is very important.

2. **Attitude** – when the guest comes, don't react, don't freak out when greed, hatred or delusion arrives. Guests just show up. In Asian and African countries, guests come unannounced, so we don't react, we don't get upset that the guest came unannounced at the wrong time. If we react, such as by questioning him or getting upset, it makes it worse. The first reaction can make a problem. Instead, approach with understanding, loving-kindness, and patience. We should consider, are we responding (which is good) or reacting (which is improper)? If we react to anger, we get more angry, because of the hormone adrenaline – once it arises, it takes away our peace. When anger arises, adrenaline arises, which increases anger. If we don't react, then there is no adrenaline to escalate the situation by pumping our blood with fight-or-flight reaction. It is said that attitude is the difference between winners and losers. People become part of the problem, not part of the solution, if they react to the problem. Reaction includes thoughts like “he did this to me.” Impatience and anger leads to fear. Like a small fire that catches onto something becomes strong, anger itself causes fear (aversion to present danger), worry (aversion to past danger), and anxiety (aversion to future danger). In contrast, the attitude of responding is trying to understand the energy called anger. Unwise attention to, or focusing on, the irritation causes the anger to increase. When we focus on the anger itself, it disappears. When we focus on the object of the anger, it increases. Don't say “why me?” or “why did he do that?” Instead, focus on the mind state of anger. Or, think: “Are you trying to test me?”

3. **Investigation** – determine whether it is increasing, decreasing, or staying the same. Impatience, anger and aversion are all in the same family. Investigate it, try to know what your guest is. With curiosity and interest, investigate what the impatience is causing in the body, and in the mind. Maybe it causes worry or anxiety. These are multiplied effects of impatience. See if it is increasing or decreasing, or staying the same. Is the guest staying there all the time? Is he staying for 3 months or for 2 days? Think: “How unsatisfactory is that mental state?” How do you feel when your guest says he is staying longer, for 10 years- happy or unsatisfactory?

4. **Non-identification** – not clinging onto the emotion as “mine,” not identifying yourself with the emotion. Have an impersonality nature, insight into the non-self, the non-self nature of anger. Don't say “I am impatient” or “my anger.” Don't personalize the emotion, by saying “I'm an angry person.” Similarly, you don't say to a guest that he is a family member, that he is part of us. If the guest wants to go, let him go. Don't say “I am angry because I was abused.” Whatever past you have, don't attach it to the emotion. Just treat the emotion as a guest, let it come and go. Think: “It is not me, it is not my self.” People say that emotions are yours, your

property, and always think of themselves. Instead, depersonalize, let go of the impatience, and that way we get wisdom when we are dealing with the bad emotion.

5. **Replacement** – immediately replace impatience with patience; replace anger with loving-kindness. Think of compassion, gratitude, or appreciative joy. It is good in the morning when you wake up, to be grateful. This leads to happiness and decreases impatience.

6. **Reflection** – reflect on unskillful state of mind, the bad result of anger. Similarly, we think of getting a ticket from the police if we break traffic laws. Think of the “triple Ds”: (a) danger of the thoughts, (b) defiles the mind, (c) degrades the mind. Anger is one letter short of danger. Do-evil makes “devil.” The more impatient we are, the more degraded we will get, and people will see it.

7. **Redirect** the mind from the aversion/impatience/anger to the body. For example, taking a deep breath, feel the body touching the ground. Have mindfulness of the body. The body is always there, we can always redirect our mind to it. This is like rebooting – when the mind has many thoughts, come back to zero, turn off the computer. Or, we could redirect the mind to reflect on the Buddha, Dhamma and Sangha. We could go out in nature, do something physical, or chant.

8. **Retracing** – Think: “Why am I impatient? What is behind the impatience?” We find it is because of aversion to something. Why is there aversion? Because there is a desire which was frustrated. Why is there a desire? Because we are ignoring some facts, not paying attention. Psychologically we trace back where the fear comes from, where the desire comes from.

9. **Resolve** – (adhitthana, determination)- try to make an effort or resolution to do something which will reduce your worry and reduce others’ impatience with you. For example, resolve to pace yourself, so you will be on time. Use wisdom first, then resolve and willpower.

10. **Forgive** yourself and others. The words “forgive me” would save billions of dollars. The Buddha says, “one who forgives is wise.” If you don’t forgive, you suffer. Some people can’t say “I’m sorry” because of their pride or arrogance, and instead blame others. We should not forgive superficially – this is very important. We should not forgive conditionally “only if . . .” If a person is angry, he gets burned first. If someone says something with anger or expresses anger, be assured he is distressed, suffering. If he were happy, he would not express anger. So remember that he is suffering.

11. **Give** something tangible or non-tangible (for example, a smile). Give gratitude, a letter of appreciation, a loving-kindness thought. If someone upsets you, give him something, such as a book, then feel gratitude to him

12. **Analyze the person or object in terms of the elements.** If you feel anger at a car, think: a car is made of earth, water, fire and air elements – am I angry at one of the elements? If you feel anger at a person, think: “Am I angry at their skin? Eyes? Words? Feelings? Body? Feet?” We find there is none of those elements that we are angry with.

QUESTION:

What can we do about anger we have toward a person who abuses a loved one? Should we think about Karma, that the loved one has his own karma to endure?

Answer: Yes, each person has his own kamma, they are bound by their kamma, and we often cannot help the person who is hurt. We can reflect on the law of kamma. Even the Buddha was challenged with patience – the Buddha had kamma, too! Even an enlightened person was abused. We can reflect: I am the owner of kamma, born of kamma, related to it, live dependent on my kamma; whatever good and bad I do, that is my kamma. Kamma is volition; skillful or not, I get the result of it. This is the same for the loved one. He is the heir of his kamma, and you can do nothing about it. (By the way, almost everyone has been your loved one - it is very difficult to find someone who is not related to you, because we have had so many past lives; many people have been your mother before). But, this should not be the first solution. Instead, first you should first try to overcome the worry and have wisdom, knowing there will always be injustice in this world. What arises is not as important as how we relate to what is arising. Second, because it is easy to slide into not caring, not acting with compassion, it is better to redirect the mind. Focus only on positive qualities, the bright side, and ignore the negative. Replace anger with metta or compassion, gratitude, or appreciative joy.