

## Notes and Quotes for September 17, 2023 *Dharma Reflections*:

### What's On the Path?

#### *Part Six:*

### ***The Kṣānti Pāramitā (Perfection of Forbearance, or Patience)***

One facet of each “Perfection” is how they work in our lives as *antidotes* to the *kleshas* (Skt.: kleśa, Pali: *kilesa*), or defilements, that obstruct our clear seeing or right action. We first contemplated how practicing dānapāramitā (the perfection of generosity) can start to pry us free from attachment, and can dilute miserliness or stinginess. Last month, we explored how aspiring toward and living out of śīlapāramitā (the perfection of ethical thought, speech, and action) can help us to give up self-centeredness and thereby not cause harm to ourselves or others.

Who among us has not displayed the klesha of *anger* (which covers a spectrum from vexation, to pique, to irritation, to annoyance, to impatience, to exasperation, to resentment, to outrage, to wrath, to rage, and past fury)? Who hasn't seen the damage (even wreckage) wrought by acting on the impulses of this defilement? Who hasn't hung their head in regret over such failings, and promised, “Never again!” How, though, can we avoid falling into this trap? Is there a potion we could drink to rid us, once for all, of its depredations?

There is. The cure is *kṣānti*. From <https://www.learnreligions.com/ksanti-paramita-perfection-of-patience-449609> we read:

*Ksanti* means "unaffected by" or "able to withstand." It could be translated as tolerance, endurance, and composure as well as patience or forbearance.

Some of the Mahayana sutras describe three dimensions to ksanti. These are the ability to endure personal hardship; patience with others; and acceptance of truth.

Notice that the development of this perfection doesn't imply that we can remove or avoid the irritations that cause us irritation; rather, it means that there is a way to condition ourselves not to be so affected by such stimuli that we blindly react in response to them.

Let's dive in more deeply....

“Although there are many ways to cultivate patience, to begin I will explain the meditation on the benefits of patience and the faults of not being patient. The benefits are set forth in the *Bodhisattva Levels*:

Initially, bodhisattvas consider the benefits of patience. They think, ‘Persons who have patience will not have many enemies later on and will not have many separations from those to whom they are close. They will have much happiness and contentment. They will have no regret at the time of their death, and upon the disintegration of their bodies they will also be reborn among the deities in the happy realms of high status.’ By looking at such benefits, they too are patient. They engage others in upholding patience, and they also praise patience. When they see patient persons, they are delighted and filled with joy.”

- *The Great Treatise on the Stages of the Path to Enlightenment (LAM RIM CHEN MO)*, Tsong-Kha-Pa, The Lamrim Chenmo Translation Committee, Snow Lion, 2004, p. 153.

“Thich Nhat Hanh has a very beautiful thing to say about what I have called ‘getting to know’ our anger:

Treat your anger with the utmost respect and tenderness, for it is no other than yourself. Do not suppress it—simply be aware of it. Awareness is like the sun. When it shines on things, they are transformed. If you destroy your anger, you destroy the Buddha, for Buddha and Mara are of the same essence. Mindfully dealing with anger is like taking the hand of a little brother.

“The most important reason for getting to know our anger is that its source is a precious energy that becomes anger only when it is caught up in complex egoic patterns. This energy needs to be freed and transformed as opposed to distorted, removed, or destroyed. Depression, collapse, loss of aliveness, dependence, inability to be autonomous—all of these can result when we are unable to acknowledge and feel our anger.”

- *Opening to Oneness – A Practical & Philosophical Guide to the Zen Precepts*, Nancy Mujo Baker, Shambhala, 2022, p. 112. Thich Nhat Hanh quote from a talk at a Buddhist Peace Fellowship retreat in 1983, quoted in Robert Aitken Roshi’s *The Mind of Clover: Essays in Zen Buddhist Ethic*.

“*Kṣānti*... is the helpful attitude toward accepting and working with the difficulties of existence. Basically, patience is simple: it means waiting.... Patience is flexible, open, and ready to respond to the world before us. When the world presents hardships, when we are stuck in misery, trying to force ourselves out of the situation may only embed us more deeply. Patience allows us the space to see some other option. But we must be willing to wait.

“In Buddhist meditation, we explore patience by learning to maintain upright posture and attitude in the midst of our fears, confusions, and anger. We do not need to react, to deny or vanquish the turmoil. Developing patience, just continuing, we gradually can see through such emotional upheavals and even befriend parts of us that are used to being impatient....

“In Buddhist cosmology, this world in which Śākyamuni was the Buddha is called the world of endurance, *sāha* in Sanskrit. This is considered an auspicious place to practice. Living in this difficult place, filled with situations of apparent suffering, cruelty, injustice, we can develop our capacity to endure, to be patient with our life, to learn how to respond appropriately and helpfully, without feeling overwhelmed or compelled to react compulsively.

“People and situations that hassle us are our great teachers.... When we are engaging in bodhisattva practice, those who give us a hard time are in some ways our great friends, showing us areas we can grow in our practice. We might appreciate them as bodhisattvas aiding us, whether or not their difficult lessons are intentional.

“The fundamental patience or tolerance is for the constant changing and ungraspability of all phenomena. This tolerance is technically named patience with the unborn, unconditioned nature of all things (*anutpattika dharma kṣānti* in Sanskrit). It is the intersection of wisdom and patience. Realizing that all things change, and that all things are totally conditioned by everything else, we must be patient with the fact that we cannot ultimately rely on any separate, particular thing, person, approach, or teaching. When we try to hold on to any limited entity or idea, we cause suffering. Wisdom naturally inspires patience, and patience lets us stay calm and available to the arousal of wisdom.”

- *Faces of Compassion—Classic Bodhisattva Archetypes and Their Modern Expression*, Taigen Dan Leighton, Wisdom, 2012, pp. 69-70.

“Kshānti, translated as ‘forbearance and endurance,’ is the Third Pāramitā. This is not merely control of impatience, but the virtue that appears in the absence of hatred, repugnance, and malice. Like the other Pāramitās, it is an attitude that arises from Bodhichitta rather than from guidelines posed from outside.

“Kshānti has three aspects: gentle forbearance, endurance of hardship, and acceptance of truth. Gentle forbearance is the spirit of forgiveness. Injury is forgiven and the occasion is used as an opportunity to reveal the essential harmony of all beings. There are no exceptional circumstances that would justify other kinds of responses....

“In Chinese the ideograph for Kshānti is formed with a sword over the heart. This emphasizes the Pāramitā as endurance of hardship. We live even in our most joyous moments with the sword of Damocles dangling above us by a single hair....

“Not only is life short; it is also hard. Here is the response of the poet Bashō to hardship. He has taken shelter during a storm in the rude dwelling of a frontier guard while he was on pilgrimage:

*Fleas, lice,  
The horse pissing  
Near my pillow.*

“Writing of this poem, R. H. Blyth comments, ‘Bashō’s verse is to be read with the utmost composure of mind. . . . Sometimes, not by any means always, the simple elemental things, whether lice or butterflies, the pissing of horses or the flight of eagles, have a deep significance, not of something beyond themselves, but of their own essential nature. But we must lodge with these things for a night, for a day, for three days. We must be cold and hungry, flea-ridden and lonely, companions of sorrow and acquainted with grief. Bashō’s verse is not an expression of complaint or disgust, though certainly he felt irritation and discomfort. It is not an expression of philosophic indifference nor an impossible love of lice and dirt and sleeplessness. What is it an expression of? It is the feeling ‘These things too...’ But anyone who tries to finish this sentence does not know what Bashō meant....

“The final aspect of Kshānti is acceptance of truth. This is the way of working out Bodhichitta. It involves difficult, sometimes painful practice, a self-imposed limit upon the appetites and a drastic avoidance of ordinary worldly distractions. ‘Gradually purify yourself’ Wu-men wrote, ‘eliminating mistaken knowledge and attitudes you have held from the past.’ Step by step you

eliminate your ideas of a permanent soul, clarifying the oneness of life and death as you come to understand the unity of inside and outside. This is not just a philosophical practice and it is not just ‘working on yourself’ in a psychological sense, though the intellect and the psyche have important roles....

“There is no natural Shakyamuni.... Practice is essential and it is ascetic, that is, it is willed self-discipline. The perfection of discipline is the peak experience of dropping off body and mind and there are many steps in preparation. This is not, of course, the asceticism of staring at the sun from a bed of nails, but it is rigorous nonetheless....

“All this may sound unreasonably demanding, but it is not. Leisure is part of practice. Our ideal is the royal ease of Kuan-yin and this is not something merely for the future....Leisure, sleep, vacation—these are practice too.”

- *The Practice of Perfection—The Pāramitās from a Zen Buddhist Perspective*, Robert Aitken, Pantheon Books, 1994, pp. 47 – 52.

“However, if you do encounter others  
Speak peacefully and truthfully.  
Do not grimace or frown,  
But always maintain a smile....  
  
To help guard others’ minds,  
Forsake all disputation  
And always be endowed with forbearance.”

- *The Book of Kadam—Core Texts (Attributed to Atiśa and Dromtönpa)*, Translated by Thupten Jinpa, Wisdom, 2004, pp. 330 – 331.

“Patience is the ability to endure, through faith, compassion, or understanding emptiness, all the suffering and misfortunes we might encounter, whatever their cause. These might be inflicted on us directly or indirectly, by beings who err because of dualistic illusory appearances, by ignorant beings bound by the notion of ego, by our own minds overpowered by afflictions, or by interruptions or obstacles opposing our own Dharma practice.

- *Luminous Mind—The Way of the Buddha*, Kalu Rinpoche, Wisdom, 1997, p. 145.

“Indulgence in anger and all its dreadful manifestations is like a darkness that throws a pall over every joy and happiness, hardening the mind and making it pitiless and cruel. The creeping tendrils of every type of evil spread out from it: killing, striking, wounding—acts that propel the agent into one of the hell realms whence there is no escape. Those who fear the prospect of falling into hell are careful never to give the slightest rein to thoughts of anger. As it is said in the *Bodhicharyavatara*:

No evil is there similar to anger,  
No austerity to be compared with patience.  
Steep yourself, therefore, in patience,  
In various ways, insistently.

(VI, 2)

“The mischiefs that flow from anger are boundless. Just as it is impossible to remove the briars from a forest of thorns (so that the only way to escape harm is not to go there), it is impossible to halt the onslaught of adversity. It befalls us constantly and without reprieve. Irritated and dismayed by what we do not want, we experience impulses of anger and resentment that are hard to control. Everyone’s mind is infected in this way. The first thing to occur is the perception that a given object is in some way unwanted, and then feelings of displeasure arise. If, however, we are able to bring the impulse under control before it hardens and becomes established, the arduous practice of patience will prove a good friend. As the proverb says, ‘Hit the pig on the nose; clean the lamp while it is still warm.’...

“When we are criticized by someone, our hearing faculty and consciousness all interact so that the statement produces a strong feeling of displeasure.... Our habitual way of thinking, which identifies the word with a thing, takes the words as genuinely harmful, and the interplay of the assailant and the assailed is set in motion. Thus we are disturbed and suffer.

“In our present situation, all the causes of physical and mental suffering—beating, fighting, robbing, slander, and the like—seem to come from other people. But the cause of them all is ourselves. They are like booming echoes returning to their source. Indeed, if we had no ego-clinging, there would be no one for the enemy to attack, so we should reflect how situations of conflict are called forth by our own past actions. Moreover, if we think about it, we can see that patience can only ever arise in adversity, which is consequently not negative but extremely beneficial!...

“As regards patience in connection with ultimate reality, it is important to reflect on the following point. If one investigates closely to see where the injury lies—in the aggressor, in the action

itself, or in the victim of aggression—one will discover that it cannot be found anywhere. As we have explained, when different circumstances coincide, it is the mind, with its tendency to construct existential situations, that fabricates the problem there and then. And if one examines the mind, it will be found not to possess any constant and immutable characteristics. When one tries to trace a design on water, the pattern dissolves in the very instant of its drawing. In the same way, as soon as the violence of a hostile thought is allowed to subside (for it is incapable of remaining on its own, unsupported by other factors), a totally pure and spacious state of mind appears—the primordial great emptiness free from concepts. To preserve this state of openness, this simple presence, which is not something to be lost or gained, accepted or rejected—to preserve this without being distracted by other things is called, on the profound path of the Madhyamika, the ‘purification of defilement in ultimate reality.’

“In conclusion, the arduous practice of patience has three phases: the earnest embracing of hardships, the patient tolerance of the wrongs done by others, and the patience that is fearless in regard to ultimate reality. If the last kind of patience is lacking, the other two can never rise above the worldly path. On the other hand, if these two are absent or weak, then however much one may wish to acquire the qualities of the path and fruit, through the practice of generosity and the other five paramitas, it will be difficult to achieve the object of one’s aspirations. It is comparable to the difficulties encountered in trying to go somewhere, all alone and without an escort, following a path that is haunted by enemies, robbers, and wild beasts. Therefore, we should summon up our courage and train in patience, cultivating strength of heart.”

- *Treasury of Precious Qualities—Book One: Sutra Teachings*, Revised edition, Jigme Lingpa, Translated by the Padmakara Translation Group, Shambhala, 2010, pp. 319 – 322.

“Some people think that practicing fortitude and being compassionate means our external actions must always be passive and pleasing. That is incorrect. In certain circumstances, passive behavior can be harmful—for example, not interceding to stop harm when it is possible to do so with a good motivation. Refraining from anger does not mean we don’t protect ourselves or that we allow another person to do dreadful actions. The point is that it is not necessary to be angry in order to divert harm. We should use our creative abilities to think of solutions to problems rather than flying into a rage....(p. 60)

“Usually we think that suffering has no benefits at all. However, although we definitely should not deliberately bring misery to ourselves, when it does arrive unasked, contemplating its benefits helps us to avoid increasing our suffering by falling into anger and despair. For example, suffering can strengthen our determination to be free from samsāra because we understand that as long as we’re in samsāra, such suffering will occur. Suffering also can dispel conceit and make us a kinder and humbler person. While crushing our arrogance isn’t necessarily pleasant, it is beneficial—as we’re happier and have better relationships when we don’t consider ourselves above others.

“Undergoing misery also opens our hearts in compassion to others who are in similar situations. We understand them better, and sharing a common experience, we feel closer to them. We begin to care about their suffering as much as we care about our own, and in our heart we begin to understand that suffering is to be eliminated; it doesn’t matter whose it is.... (p. 65)

“Understanding the vast and profound meanings of the Dharma is not easy, but cultivating the fortitude of gaining certitude about the Dharma... makes it easier. This fortitude gives us the ability to happily continue to learn and practice for however long it takes in order to fathom the Dharma’s deep and detailed meanings.

“Meditation on emptiness challenges the very root of our self-grasping ignorance, which puts up a fight when its sovereignty is challenged. It is said that when one first has a glimpse of the emptiness of true existence, fear arises in the mind and one wants to withdraw from that experience. It is important at this time not to capitulate to the fear and to continue meditating on emptiness.

“The fortitude of practicing Dharma brings appreciation for the bodhisattvas’ activities and strengthens the wish to become bodhisattvas ourselves. Fear and resistance may arise all along the path because the Dharma challenges our dearly held but afflictive assumptions, preconceptions, and prejudices. It takes fortitude not to retreat into habitual emotions and behavior that are the very source of our misery, and instead to arouse courage and continue to practice.” (p. 67)

- *Courageous Compassion (Volume 6, The Library of Wisdom and Compassion)*, The Dalai Lama with Thubten Chodron, Wisdom, 2021.

“The supreme of all hardships is practicing patience. Thus, for bodhisattvas who desire to engage in a vast wealth of virtue, whatever brings harm, such as enemies or suffering, is like the



bursting-forth of an inexhaustible treasure in your own home, a great field of rare precious jewels, difficult to find, that you did not know about. Therefore, without even the slightest thought of anger or ill will toward anyone who inflicts harm, you should practice the three types of patience.”

- *A Guide to the Thirty-Seven Practices of a Bodhisattva*, Dzatrul Ngawang Tenzin Norbu, Snow Lion, 2020, p. 143.

“Patience involves learning to be present and upright with all our experiences without turning away or touching. It is our capacity to accept how things really are, and it is necessary for buddha’s wisdom. Developing the capacity to tolerate relative truths warms us up to tolerate ultimate truth.

“... When we can be present with heat or cold, tiredness and sleepiness, or with people attacking us, we develop our capacity to also be present with the emptiness of phenomena. If we are patient, we don’t move toward emptiness, and we don’t turn away from it. We don’t try to control ourselves to prevent turning toward or running away from anything....

“Sometimes people confuse patience with self-control. Someone told me that when he feels something unpleasant, he wants to try to control his reaction to it. Sometimes he thinks he is protecting others from his anger in that moment. However, I do not recommend attempting to control ourselves or others. If we think it is a good idea to control ourselves, we may also think it would be a good idea to try to control others. This is not the practice of patience. I recommend instead that, when we find ourselves attempting to control our feelings of fear, anger, or frustration, we remember our wish to be generous, ethical, and patient in our dealings with ourselves and others. Instead of attempting to control ourselves or others, we return our aspiration to express an appropriate and compassionate response. Trying to control people and situations is stressful and draining. Being aware of our energy level may help us to notice when our care slips into trying to control. Patient compassion is not draining.”

- *Entering The Mind of Buddha—Zen and the Six Heroic Practices of Bodhisattvas*, Reb Anderson, Shambhala, 2019, pp. 53 – 55.

“We can’t become patient, tolerant people simply by thinking we should be patient and tolerant. We have to train ourselves, starting with how to handle small irritations. Once these become easy to deal with, we’ll be better equipped to be patient in more difficult situations.

“...Our thoughts, feelings, and reactions come about due to a vast number of interdependent circumstances. When the perfect circumstances converge for you to have a particular reaction, it’s almost impossible not to have that reaction, at least initially. As a result, no matter how long you’ve practiced, it’s very unlikely that nothing will bother you anymore. It isn’t realistic to think you’ll be exempt from getting frustrated or losing your temper. The mark of a true practitioner is not what arises in your life and mind, but how you work with what arises....

“The process begins with your willingness to take a chance. Rather than having everything absolutely clear and predictable ahead of time, you have to be willing to go into the unknown.”

- *Peaceful Heart — The Buddhist Practice of Patience*, Dzigar Kongtrul, Shambhala, 2020, p. 39 & p. 43

## Possible Discussion Points:

1. Which seems to cause you more difficulty at this point in your life: hardships, abuse from others, or the deeper implications of the Dharma?
2. The verse from the *Book of Kadam* (page 5, above) says, “To help guard others’ minds,... always be endowed with forbearance.” What do you think of the implications of practicing patience to benefit *others’* minds?
3. “Treat your anger with the utmost respect and tenderness, for it is no other than yourself.” Thich Nhat Hanh’s quote on page 2 is quite lovely. Discuss.
4. Talk about how actually sitting zazen has helped you develop patience.... “In Buddhist meditation, we explore patience by learning to maintain upright posture and attitude.” (page 3)
5. Aitken Roshi (page 4) says (When) “injury is forgiven... the occasion is used as an opportunity to reveal the essential harmony of all beings.” (Fleas, lice, the horse pissing...). On page 8, the Dalai Lama lists several benefits of suffering. What do you think?
6. Discuss the nuances of handling the energy of provocation without “controlling” ourselves or our reactions (Reb Anderson, p. 9).
7. On page 6, Jigme Lingpa reminds us that the causes of physical and mental suffering is ourselves. Difficult to accept?