

# *Pāramīs* (6 of 10) Patience

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## **SUMMARY KEYWORDS**

*khaṇṭi*, hostility, forbearance, practicing, acceptance, perseverance, truth, perfection, renunciation, generosity, challenges, harm, teachings, insult, building, work, quality, ethical conduct, wisdom, experiential, benefit, not-self, recognition, impermanent, inconstant, mortality

## **Gil Fronsdal**

We start today with the sixth of the ten *pāramīs*. In English, it's generally translated as “patience.” It's important to appreciate how much the emphasis on patience as a perfection follows or builds on the foundation of the first five *pāramīs*.

First, there's generosity – what we learn from it and how it benefits and frees us in a certain way. From the benefit of generosity, then we build. The next step is to live a life of ethical conduct – ethical behavior. Not to cause harm in the world through our behavior, speech, and body, but to actually offer benefit. To have that conduct not be a source of obligation or restriction, but the opposite. In Buddhism, ethical conduct is meant to be another step toward learning how to be free.

Then there's renunciation, a beautiful quality of letting go of the things that harm us. We let go of the things that limit us and keep us from the higher good and the higher purposes represented by the *pāramīs*: the purposes of liberation and of living a life of compassion.

With renunciation we gain wisdom. Wisdom has a lot to do both with understanding what causes harm and not doing it, and with understanding what brings benefit and doing beneficial things. It doesn't take a Ph.D. in Buddhist studies or philosophy to understand what wisdom in Buddhism is. It's very experiential. But building on these earlier *pāramīs*, our understanding of harm and benefit becomes more and more acute and sensitive in a very important way. Then that understanding allows us to engage and to make effort – effort on the path to liberation and compassion.

But as we make effort, sometimes we need patience. That patience builds on the other *pāramīs*. It is supported by them. It's a patience that knows how to be patient without harming ourselves. It's being patient in a way that's compassionate. It's patience supported by really clear insight, understanding, and wisdom about why it's important to be patient.

There are three different aspects of the Buddhist teachings on *khaṇṭi*, a word which is usually translated

into English as “patience.” The first aspect is perseverance. There's a continuity of practice, a continuity of being engaged. Again, it builds on the other *pāramīs*.

This is not blind or foolish perseverance in which we're just hitting our head against the wall or persevering in such a way that we get exhausted and stressed out. It's perseverance that I call “gentle” perseverance. Perseverance that is wise and does the wise thing in order to keep the long-term goal of practice in sight.

Even though, as in the last meditation, the emphasis is so much about just being in the moment fully, doing the practice of being in the moment fully is not the end of the story or the beginning of the story. If the goal is to walk to the top of a mountain, you might want to be with each step one at a time. Part of walking is just to really be with that step. Sometimes that's all you can do. But the preparations to go on the hike, and the understanding of what the goal is, are all part of the picture.

This is a long-term vision – “Yes, this is worthwhile. I'm going on this path and I'm going to persevere.” For some people, perseverance is actually the most important quality supporting their Buddhist practice. They might not have a lot of concentration. They might not have a great capacity for mindfulness. But what

carries the day, what really supports them, is that they just keep practicing day in and day out.

Practice can be relaxed. It's like running a marathon. You can't sprint. But day in and day out, moment by moment, you keep coming back, practicing and practicing and practicing, holding the course.

Perseverance: to have the wisdom and the patience to persevere.

The second quality of patience is patience under insult. This is sometimes called “forbearance.” This means managing to go through all kinds of challenging, difficult things that are insulting to us and painful to hear. We learn not to give in to our own anger – not to pick up the anger – especially not to give in to the hostility we might feel because of it. Patience under insult is patience to not give in to hostility.

This doesn't mean that we don't take care of ourselves, tell people to stop or go away, or do whatever needs to be done. We have to be wise about the circumstances we're in. But we don't give in to hostility. This can be as simple as not becoming annoyed or hostile toward our devices if they're not working right. We can feel insulted, in a sense, when our devices are not working or the connection doesn't work.

There can be major problems in life. Persevering, and not giving in to hostility, despair, or discouragement, is not always so easy given the magnitude of human suffering and the challenges people have in their lives. This is especially true now with COVID-19, with people having the illness, losing loved ones to it, not being able to go visit dying loved ones due to fear of travel, or not being allowed to visit them in the nursing home.

There's unemployment, and huge economic challenges for a huge percentage of people in this country. How do we live through all of that without succumbing to our hostility, anger, or despair? Some of that has to do with patience – persevering, giving ourselves a continuity of practice, understanding the tremendous value of staying free, staying compassionate, and practicing along the path of liberation.

We see that *that – staying free with compassion, perseverance, and patience* – has probably the greatest value of anything, certainly a greater value than any good that can come from hostility. We don't give in to hostility. This is a very important principle in the teachings of the *pāramīs*. Sometimes it's called “forbearance.” The idea of forbearance is not a very popular idea in the modern West, I think. We often want to solve things and fix things quickly. But classically, in Buddhism, forbearance is a very important quality because of how it protects us from our own hostility.

Then the third quality of patience is the patient acceptance of the truth. Sometimes when we see what's really happening – what's true – we don't want to accept it. It's difficult to accept it. It's challenging to our very sense of who we are.

Some of the Buddhist teachings of not-self – not just the teachings, but some of the deeper insights that arise – are very hard to accept. It's hard to have the patient acceptance to be present for all the workings of our inner life which are a little bit out of our control. There's a not-self there – to find our freedom there.

For example, when sitting down to meditate there've been times when it has taken me a while to accept the truth that my mind was out of control. I had to be patient with that. I had to accept that this was the condition in which I was practicing. Only then, when I accepted that my mind was out of control – thinking sixty miles a minute, did meditation really begin. Any avoidance of what's true – pretending it's not there, or trying to override it, doesn't really work in terms of Buddhist practice.

This might mean an acceptance of the truth of what's going on in the world around us, in our family, in our relationships, or in our work. That acceptance – the way it's described – doesn't mean we condone it, or just

blindly go along with it as if we have to accept it and just continue with it. It's an acceptance that is a *recognition*. We accept the recognition that "this is what's true." Then, hopefully, we're wise about it. If it can be changed, we see what we can do to change it.

But I think the idea of patient acceptance of the truth means to accept the things that we cannot change. We cannot change how impermanent – inconstant – this life is. And we cannot change the march of time that some people are challenged by – especially as they get older, and see the end in sight – the acceptance of our condition, our mortality. There are things to be accepted that are true. If we fight that truth, we're actually going in the opposite direction from freedom and compassion.

So, the *pāramī* of patience. It's needed in the wake of effort, because as we make effort, sooner or later – usually sooner – we need patience to continue with that effort. We need perseverance. We need patient forbearance (patience under insult) so we don't give in to hostility. And we need the appropriate acceptance of what's true – at least a clear recognition of what's true. That becomes the starting point for how to find our way.

For the next twenty-four hours you might consider where and how you can have greater patience. What is your relationship to patience? Of the three forms of patience, which is your strength, and which do you have

challenges with? Which would you like to develop more, and which do you have questions and doubts about? Really engage in this topic of patience. Talk to friends and read about patience. For the next twenty-four hours, let the idea of patience really live with you. Explore it and get to know it.

That will be preparation for tomorrow. The next *pāramī* is truth. Perhaps there's something about patience that allows us to engage more fully, and to see more fully what is true.

Thank you very much, and I look forward to our time tomorrow.