

Patience as it relates to other Paramis

When we are impatient, we tense up, contract, our energy gets stuck, our resolve to be mindful disappears, our sense of equanimity is lost, we become reactive, our intention to be generous and kind toward others and ourselves takes a back seat to our need to get what we want, in the way we want it and at the time we want it. All of these conditions can lead to our sila/ethics being compromised, in our harming self and/or other and in our wisdom being displaced by delusion.

When this happens, it is good to remember that this kind of domino effect acts in both directions. When one Parami becomes weak, it can weaken other Parami. The opposite is also true. When one Parami is strengthened, it can strengthen others too. I was reminded of this recently when I was taking what I thought was going to be a hike with a friend. As our hike progressed, my friend was stopping to take more and more pictures and at times, taking several pictures of the same thing from different angles. I noticed my impatience growing. The restlessness in my body and mind felt unpleasant. I realized I had an expectation of what our hike would look like, which was different from what my friend envisioned. I was reminded of Ajahn Sucitto's description of what it looks like and feels like to be with the difficult instead of run away from it; "...the restraint of holding the heart still in the presence of it's suffering until it lets go of the ways in which it creates that suffering." Yes, I could certainly see how I was contributing to my unease. Although I could have asked my friend to take less pictures, I decided to simply appreciate being with my friend and the beauty around us. When I did this, my body relaxed, my energy began to flow again, my sense of equanimity returned. I felt good about my ability to offer a more spacious and generous presence to the moment and to my friend.

Ajahn Sucitto's chapter on Khanti or patience is entitled, *Bearing With Life*. As I reflect on this, I appreciate the many ways in which the term, bearing, can be viewed. One definition relates to a person's ability to be with something difficult. Another definition relates to bringing forth as in a wholesome action bearing fruit. A third definition relates to one's position or direction as in losing or gaining one's bearings. When I become impatient with what's difficult, I get lost in ignorance and delusion and lose my way, lose my North star. The path that leads to freedom gets covered over and I stew in frustration and unease. Where did my resolve to be patient go I wonder. Ajahn Sucitto offers us wise words on how practice with our impatience. "The reality of Dhamma practice is that, as much as we would like to be pure and free, we have to learn to develop patience with our attachments and passions, and our views and opinions about them." I can

feel the qualities of compassion, kindness, generosity and wisdom coming forth and bearing fruit in this beautiful description of patience practice.

Patience under Insult and the Worldly Wind of Blame

The three traditional aspects of patience are perseverance, patience under insult and acceptance of truth. Some years ago, when I first read that patience included patience under insult, I thought; "What, why would I be patient with someone who is standing there insulting me?" Over time, I have come to respect this form of patience practice even though it is quite challenging. The following is one of my favorite stories in the suttas (SN) about how the Buddha practiced patience under insult.

"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."

Recently, I had an opportunity to practice patience with a loved one under what I think of as a cousin to insult, blame. Thankfully, I had been reading about patience these past few months, so my intention and resolve to be patient was strong. As I listened to my loved one's perspective of what happened, I could feel the unpleasantness of blame penetrate my mind, body and heart. I noticed fear arising and the reactive mind wanting to defend, to protest, to interrupt the words coming my way. It felt like what Ajahn Sucitto describes as, "standing under" the Dukkha, as in the Dukkha needs to be under-stood. As difficult as it was, I began practicing mindfulness of body, noticed my shallow breathing, and noticed my stomach tied up in knots. I made my best effort to listen not only to the words, but also to the emotional tone of what was being said. This was a good beginning in the practice of patience, of non-reactivity. What followed was unplanned. I noticed this person also had shallow breathing, seemed tense, uncomfortable and frightened. When I saw this, my heart melted and empathy softened the whole experience. Instead of interjecting and responding to what was being said, I chose to wait for whatever needed to be said, and ALL that needed to be said. There were many moments of silence, followed by a continuation of his sharing. As time went on, I learned more about what was underneath, at the root of the initial blaming material. It seemed this person discovered this as well as he spoke. I felt grateful I was able to be present for this process. When it came time for me to speak,

I was able to do so in a less reactive manner. Nothing was resolved in this conversation. In fact more questions arose. Upon reflecting about this experience the following morning, I was reminded of the popular Rilke poem:

“Have patience with everything that remains unsolved in your heart. Try to love the questions themselves, like locked rooms and like books written in a foreign language. Do not now look for the answers. They cannot now be given to you because you could not live them. It is a question of experiencing everything. At present you need to live the question. Perhaps you will gradually, without even noticing it, find yourself experiencing the answer, some distant day.”

— Rainer Maria Rilke, Letters to a Young Poet

It also helped me to reflect on the fact that this blaming behavior is part of the human experience. It's ok. The Buddha understood this as he was blamed too. He says:

“They blame one who remains silent, they blame one who speaks much, they blame one who speaks in moderation. There is no one in this world who is not blamed’ (Dhp. 227).”

Quotes on patience from various sources:

“If I could summarize nonviolence in one word, it would be: patience.”
—Khan Abdul Ghaffar Khan

“Only the inner protection of patience can keep us from experiencing the turmoil of negative thoughts and emotions.”
—Dalai Lama

“Patience is a form of wisdom. It demonstrates that we understand and accept the fact that sometimes things must unfold in their own time.”
— Jon Kabat-Zinn

“Patience is not sitting and waiting, it is foreseeing. It is looking at the thorn and seeing the rose, looking at the night and seeing the day. Lovers are patient and know that it takes time for the moon to become full.”
—Rumi

“When I run after what I think I want,
my days are a furnace of stress and anxiety;

If I sit in my own place of patience,
What I need flows to me, and without pain.”
— Shams-i Tabrizi

Reflection and Writing: After reading the above quotes, what lines or phrases resonate with you the most and why? What do you notice being averse to, if anything? Are there other quotes on patience you find inspiring? If yes, what are they? We invite you to write down your reflections and/or talk to a friend about same.

Reflection and Writing: Take a moment to reflect on a recent situation in your life, or your sitting practice, in which you noticed impatience arising in you. What other Paramis or qualities did you notice also weakening? Were you able to overcome your impatience? If yes, what did that look like, how did you do so? If no, would you do anything different next time a similar situation arises? We invite you to write your reflections on this and/or talk to a friend about same.

Practice: The practice of patience involves being curious, investigation. The next time you feel blamed or insulted in some way, practice being curious about what’s happening in your **direct** experience. What is happening in the body, what is being believed, what is your relationship to what happening, how is your energy? How does it feel to focus on curiosity and investigation versus the object i.e. blaming and insulting statement and your reactions to same.