The Benefits Of Perfecting Patience

The aspect of patience is vital for the practice of Awakening. There is an interesting difference of meaning between the Pali word for patience, khanti, and the Sanskrit word, ksanti. In researching for this article, I found excerpts from a book entitled “Linguistic Approach To Buddhist Thought” by Genjun Sasaki that can clarify this distinction beneficially. To paraphrase Sasaki’s work, *khanti* can be understood as *willingness* or *inclination*, while *ksanti* is understood as *forbearance*, which is closer to patience in meaning than willingness.

Khanti can easily be associated with the Parami of *persistence*, *kiriya*, the ongoing application of benevolently organized energy, which was explored during the recently posted talk of June 28. It can also be associated with another Parami, *determination*, which will be discussed in an upcoming posting. The Parami of *equanimity* is key to developing patience also; this will be discussed in an upcoming posting. In this understanding, khanti is a willingness or inclination towards perfecting the qualities of mind conducive to Awakening.

Patience functions primarily to counter urgency, which is an essential characteristic of craving. Most often, patience counters aversion, that is, the urgency of unpleasant feelings and thoughts. This impulsive reactivity is experienced as impatience, and may be related to being confronted with a social situation, such as when someone’s behavior is counter to my expectation. It can also be experienced as boredom, which often arises when a person is understimulated, that is, a situation that isn’t providing a convenient distraction. The frustration that arises when a customary routine is interrupted is experienced as impatience.

What skillful means can be applied to cultivate patience? The Four Noble Truths can be a guide:

1. Identify the experience of impatience as dukkha, that is, distress and confusion.
2. Recognize the frustrated expectation as the cause of dukkha, that is, craving associated with clinging to a particular view of “how life should be”.
3. Cultivate a quality of non-reactive present moment awareness that diminishes the tendency to impulsively act out on the craving and clinging, through:
4. Practicing the Noble Eightfold Path, particularly Right Effort, Mindfulness and Concentration.

Right effort relates to a previously discussed Parami, Renunciation. The routine training to notice what draws attention away from the breath for a longer period of time than is necessary to recognize the distraction, then channeling attention back to the breath in a nonreactive, nonjudgmental way cultivates dispassion, which supports patience. Dispassion is the reduced urgency of an intrusive process involving craving and clinging that is promoted by refusing to give in to the impulse towards acting out regarding the distraction. Right Concentration cultivates samadhi, (stable attentional focus) and passadhi (internal serenity and nonreactivity), which creates a “buffer” inside, providing opportunities for dispassion and patience to arise.

Practice through making a commitment to put yourself into inconsequential situations that typically produce impatience. Remind yourself that it is not a test, but a chance to mindfully recognize the nature of craving and clinging and renounce reactivity. A very simple and effective practice is to notice the urgent, impulsive drive regarding an itch, without scratching the itch. Notice the sensory quality of the itch precisely—is it experienced as a burning sensation, a tingling, biting or other sensation? This investigation tends to amplify the conditions of craving and clinging regarding the sensation (the second Noble Truth). Redirect attention back to the breath sensation, which activates desensitization to the urgency over time, which cultivates dispassion. This procedure can be generalized to other episodes of craving and clinging, because a routine of channeling attention away from the urgent feeling can also be applied to other moments of impatience.

Impatience also relates to wanting something pleasant as well. It is beneficial practicing contemplating the experience of craving and clinging associated with something delightful, such as a delicious treat or entertaining program. In this regard, the Parami of Determination (to be discussed in a future talk) is beneficial. Once again, picking an attraction to work with that isn’t very consequential is helpful, as is the realization it isn’t a test, but useful for developing the Parami of patience and of renunciation.