

Ksanti

Guy Mokuho Mercier

Ksanti : Patience (Nin in japonais) by Guy Mokuhô Mercier

All the difficulties and sufferings of beings have one cause. To resolve them or free oneself from them, we need to take the time to examine ourselves, study ourselves. This is Buddhist practice explained by Buddha in his first sermon at Benares, on the Four Noble Truths. The practice of the paramitas is inseparable from the fourth Noble Truth, which describes the stages of an eightfold path leading to the end of suffering.

In the texts, it is said in relation to patience, that it can bear all torments, destroys anger and enmity, and brings good to oneself and others. The disposition of the Bodhisattva towards this virtue is such that it cannot be satisfied while there is still one being left to save. The completion of this vow seems so far off that it can't be imagined or seen. This vow, which the bodhisattva is always disposed towards, as his patience is infinite.

In these texts we can distinguish three great patience.

- The patience to bear criticism, insults, hate and evil deeds of others and adversity. For this reason, it is the cause of maturing of beings.
- Patience to accept unhappiness, grief and pain. Patience towards oneself. This virtue is the cause of the emergence of the quality of Buddha, for it bears without recoiling many different painful situations, cold, heat, hunger, thirst and other disagreeable feelings in both the physical and psychic body.
- Patience in contemplating the Dharma, universal Truth, emptiness, the foundation itself of the practice of meditation and regrouping. It gives birth to clear vision, allowing us to see things as they truly are, in their 'thusness.' For this reason, it is the support of the two previous ones.



If patience is a part of the group of pure practices of the bodhisattva, it's also because, despite its apparent simplicity, it touches the very foundation of our habits and conditioning. It concerns the function of 'me' (thus of Samsara) and suggests calling into question the desire we have to control, to impose ourselves, to be right, to be unassailable, to constantly validate our self- image , the one that we would like other people to believe in.

The play of 'me' in its scenarios and plans, impulses, is, in the end, a way of trying to escape the finality of existence, which is death. This disappearance, which we know we have no choice about, is even more insupportable when we identify with our bodily form and our discriminating mind, while at the same time we have a confusing inner sense of eternity.

“The person who is sick, declared Vimalakirti, should reflect on this: ‘ The sickness which is affecting me today is just the product of my negative emotions, and these result from erroneous notions and distortions that I have accumulated in the past and during my previous lives : they aren't real at all! So, who is sick?’”

To observe and understand how this 'me' is constructed, since childhood and even before demands a great deal of sincerity, and a lot of patience and perseverance. Without a lot of patience, this examination can't end, since every day brings us new dissatisfaction, makes us re-imagine insults, demands of us again that we change our paradigms and to find in ourselves other responses than our hyper, and often violent, reactivity.

Recognition of our fragility in the face of everyday and continuing manifestations of impermanence and interdependence, gives birth to patience. This appearance can start in meditation, naturally, without any effort of our personal will. Zazen is the very place where we learn patience.

Being sick, we recognise our sickness and will become patient!!

A '**Patient**' etymologically is '*a person who suffers, endures adversity without complaint, setbacks, and bears the faults of others.*'

The patient who recognises his sickness should put his trust in the best of doctors, a title which the Buddha willingly accepts for himself. The medicine which he prescribes leads to recovery , that is to say, to the end of attachment to desire, Nirvana.

The patient, still sick, lying in his hospital bed, has to face existential pain, the mystery of existence and fear of death, so often ignored. Without the virtue of patience, this face to face with life and death is deprived of its beauty and of the unveiling of its revelation.

Patience reveals attachments to 'me', its neurotic and reactive habits. It's the beginning of a real labour and a possible healthy change, as it leads to better listening, better feeling, better observing and better expression of feelings. Patience helps to tame our natural reactivity, our anger and violence and to see their causes. Patience gives rise to great humility once we see that everyone is a prisoner of his conditioning and his compulsive and unhealthy reactions. We need application and discipline in this apprenticeship of patience.

Patience can only give birth to a deep acceptance which leads to revelation. The same acceptance as Christ on the cross "May your will be done and not mine" Zen translates this surrender as "stripping away of body and mind" To disidentify with the ephemeral and thus to penetrate into the Real. 'Me' gives up the fight, relinquishes its supremacy and its role as judge and dissolves into the cosmic Me. We call this awakening! It's as if we arrive in an unknown land which is none other than our own mind.

We learn patience in meditation itself. Time stands still, freeing the mind from the need to project itself into scenarios, to fixate on objects, and attach itself to points of view. The distance created by patience from the phenomenal world does not mean we must deny it. Patience allows us to put things back in their place. Life includes problems, conflicts, hardships, sorrows and to wish that everything would slide into an imagined or dreamed perfection is an illusion and unwise.

"It is only the sickness that we should suppress, not phenomena, Vimalakirti taught.

Teachings are meant to cut off evil at the root.

What then is the root of evil ? asked Manjushri.

Grasping, declared Vimalakirti.

Grasping what?

Grasping the three worlds (*which are Samsara, the cycle of death and rebirth, the world of desires of the illusory 'me' and its functioning.*)

How to stop this grasping?

In seeking what cannot be found, as there is no grasping there.

What cannot be found?

The end of duality.

What is duality?

The vision of an inside and an outside, which cannot be found, concluded Vimalakirti."

Some commentary on this exchange:

" Grasping ' is the way in which the mind loses its unlimited grandeur and reduces itself to a thought, a desire, a reaction, a material or immaterial object.

'To end this grasping by seeking what cannot be found' is the very merit of zazen, where there arises a natural inclination of our vision towards its Source which cannot be found. For That which sees cannot see itself and therefore must always remain That which cannot be found. This is the secret of zazen. There is no awakening other than melting into regathering, the non – temporal and still Presence of That which sees, The Treasure of the Eye.

"What cannot be found" is the end of duality, for That which sees, feels, and contemplates cannot be divided. One sole consciousness observes the interior and the exterior without ever being able to separate them. There is neither inside nor outside!

So today how can we exercise patience in the face of these exceptional circumstances over which we have no real control?

A little patience, as it deepens, becomes a universal practice. It is that short time that we place between an event and our response to it, whether by a thought, a word or an action. It is a real inner work which cures us of selfishness and opens the way to giving up that neurotic 'me.' It is also one of the gateways to compassion.

It is in the thousands of small things of our daily life that we can exercise patience and help it to ripen for our inner well-being and that of others:

- Listen to the silence behind sounds, thoughts, the noises of the world.
- Listen to the other person without immediately allowing a judgement to come in between.
- Neutralise our passion for ourselves and our aversion to the other person.
- Stop taking out our difficulties on others.
- Feel our inner emotions without immediately covering them with words or excuses.
- Accept not knowing, whilst waiting with trust and silence.
- Do not allow ourselves to be polluted with the flood of contradictory information, or even avoid it.
- Do not jump on an opinion to validate one we personally hold.
- Be aware that our attitude conditions that of others.
- Perform daily tasks that we find ineffective or useless with love.
- Recognise human misery from our own state of imperfection.
- Truly give ourselves time to listen to a child's stories.
- Truly taste the food that is offered to us, right to the last bite.
- Truly observe nature, mountains and valleys, the burst of spring.
- Take the time to do everything with attention and delicacy.

In order to become universal, our patience requires our consent and personal commitment, for in our life such as it is, we remain ourselves and the other persons also remains themselves. Patience allows us to see that the other person is animated by the same motivations as ourselves and that they operate under the same illusions as we do ourselves. This observation will straight away cause compassion to arise in us and capacity to find in the first instance the response in our heart, as we lean into the immanent wisdom of all beings.

Buddhist life is simple. It demands, however, that we abandon our false beliefs and attachments. All our attachments are rooted in fear that only patience can illuminate so we are capable of seeing the inconsistency and emptiness of them. And on this path we must avoid creating new illusions which will make us fall into an institutional Buddhism, which profits from fear.

Patience leads us to see grasping in ourselves, which imprisons our mind and deprives it of its fundamental freedom. Even grasping Buddhism. Right at the moment when we realise there is nothing to grasp and no one to grasp anything, that patience only exists because of our ignorance and once ignorance ends in the heart of our own mind, we find once more the space of the luminous Presence which we never left: Prajna, The Great Wisdom.

Guy Mokuhô.