Patient Forbearance

Bhante Bodhidhamma · Notable Dhamma Teachers — Bhante Bodhidhamma · 19:29

Namo tassa Bhagavato Arahato Sammā-Sambuddhassa.

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Homage to the Buddha, the blessed and noble, self-enlightened one.

So last month we did courage, which doesn't actually come up as a separate item in the ten perfections, the ten virtues to be perfected. But I suppose you could fit it into *adhiṭṭhāna*, which means resolute resolution. We'll do that another time anyway. But what we talked about was courage is doing something, achieving something, even though it's very difficult one way or the other. But there's a passive side to courage, which is, of course, patient forbearance.

Now, the Buddha is very big on that. He encourages us to develop it. So this is what he says: "Patient endurance is the supreme austerity. Whoever endures abuse, assault and imprisonment without animosity, and who has forbearance as one's strength, as one's mighty army, I call a Brahmin." So a Brahmin in the Buddha's understanding is someone who's achieved something. He was always poking fun at the Brahmins who were pretending to be the spiritual leaders of society. Many of them were a bit corrupt, I think. I'm sure there were some good ones there.

"He who holds back rising anger like a rolling chariot, him I call a real driver. Other people are but holding the reins." And there's a verse here from the *Theragāthā*, which is the collected verses of the elders – this is the senior monks, not the nuns: "Forbearance is the highest virtue, forbearance is the highest self-control, forbearance is the highest happiness."

So there's a lot going on for this virtue of forbearance. And we'll look at one or two areas: all those areas where we feel insulted, slandered and all that sort of stuff. Then there's the hardships and adversities that come to us through life. Then we're cultivating patience with others. Then there's this inner bearing with reactivity, letting go of our inner reactions to things. And finally, patience with the spiritual path. And in so doing, we build up this inner strength and resilience. When everything falls apart, there's that ability to bounce back.

So the first one: dealing with insults, criticism, slander. It's important for us to face these things when they come up instead of retaliating, becoming upset. You have to develop this patience and maintain equanimity, which is difficult, of course. I mean, often the best thing is to approach the person who's done this to you and have a little discussion with them. That's before you hit them.

Now, there's an occasion here where the Buddha is actually abused by somebody. So I shall read out this little bit. At one time, the Buddha was staying near Rajagaha in the bamboo grove, the squirrel's feeding ground, and the Brahmin Bharadvaja the Rude heard a rumour that a Brahmin of the Bharadvaja clan had gone forth from the lay life to homelessness in the presence of the ascetic Gautama. So remember, that's his family name, Gautama. Angry and displeased, he went to the Buddha and abused and insulted him with rude and harsh words.

And when he'd spoken, the Buddha said to him, "What do you think, Brahmin? Do friends and colleagues, relatives and family members and guests still come to visit you?"

"Well, sometimes they do, Master Gautama."

"And do you then serve them fresh and cooked foods and savouries?"

"Sometimes I do."

"And if they don't accept it, Brahmin, who does it belong to?"

"Well, in that case, it still belongs to me."

"In the same way, Brahmin, when you abuse, harass and attack us, who do not abuse, harass and attack, we don't accept it. It belongs to you, Brahmin, it still belongs to you. Someone who, when abused, harassed and attacked, abuses, harasses and attacks in return, is said to eat the food and have a reaction to it. But we neither eat your food nor do we have a reaction to it. It still belongs to you, Brahmin. It still belongs to you."

Now, the Brahmin mistakes the Buddha's assertive forthrightness for aggressive bluntness. And he says, "The king and the retinue believe that Master Gautama is a perfected one, and yet he still gets angry." So one of the signs of somebody who's perfected, of course, is that they don't get angry – or at least when they do show anger, they're only putting it on.

Anyway, the Buddha replies, "For one free of anger, tamed, living in balance, freed by right understanding, one who is composed and at peace, where would anger come from? When you get angry at an angry person, you just make things worse for yourself. And when you don't get angry at an angry person, you win a battle hard to win. When you know that the other is angry, you act for the good of both yourself and the other if you're mindful and stay calm. People unfamiliar with this teaching consider one who heals both oneself and the other to be a fool."

Anyway, this seems to have convinced Bharadvaja – he's practically bowled over because he then says, "Oh, excellent Master Gautama." And before you know it, he's taken refuge in the Buddha, his teaching, and the order. And he wants to become a monk. So then he receives the going forth, the ordination in the Buddha's presence. And not long after the ordination, the Venerable Bharadvaja the Rude, living alone, withdrawn, diligent, keen and resolute, soon realized the supreme end of the spiritual path in this very

life. He lived having achieved it with his own insight, the goal for which people rightly go forth from lay life into homelessness. And he understood: "Rebirth is ended. The spiritual journey has been completed. What had to be done has been done. There is no return to any state of becoming." And the Venerable Bharadvaja became one of the perfected ones.

So I don't know how you handle when you feel angry about what somebody's done or said about you. But if somebody has been angry with me, I've learned to listen to what they say rather than – even though there's a reaction here, I put my whole attention on actually what they're saying. And in so doing, I then reply to what they're saying and maintain at least an outward sign of non-anger, non-reactivity. And that normally allows them to cool down a bit. And then hopefully there's some discussion before anything gets worse.

And that leads us, of course, to having patience with others. Also, we meet people who just get up our noses. And somehow we have to cultivate this acceptance, this patience with them. So, of course, responding with a certain understanding and compassion.

Now, there was a case at Kanduboda, which was where I stayed for quite some time. A schizophrenic came – at least he told us he'd been diagnosed as a schizophrenic. And he'd obviously stopped taking the pills. And he was doing some very funny things, like, for instance, meditating in the nude, which in the East is a bit off, and sometimes showering – public showering where you go to the open well and pour water over yourself. And he was doing some other silly things that were disturbing people.

So the people there – I didn't know this was going on because the place was a little bit far away from my own hut – and so they went to the abbot and complained about him. But the abbot did nothing. Eventually, in a bit of desperation, they came to see me. And I said, "Well, I'll go up and see the Venerable Upalian and see what he'll do." So I went up and expressed their annoyance, well, the fact that they felt their practice was being heavily disturbed. And he didn't do anything.

Now, I never knew whether it's because he didn't want to confront this man or whether it was a teaching of just bearing up with what is unpleasant. And it's usually the unpleasant which disappears. Usually it's the opposite – somebody disturbs you and we tend to move away. But actually, if you just hang on in there, they usually give up and disappear. So this was a big teaching for me.

The second one, of course, is endurance in adversity – when things fall apart. When you have an illness or something like that, or you lose a close friend or a family member or somebody at work leaves whom you had a good relationship with. All those things, just the ordinary adversities of life that just come our way. Just being able to accept them. This is the way it is. That's the big phrase, isn't it? Just to accept it.

And sometimes I found it helpful to write out the situation so that I'm clear as to what's actually happening. And that allows this – whatever has arisen: anger, disappointment, grief, despair, all that sort of stuff – it just eventually burns itself out.

I mean, as you know, recently I had some really bad trouble with a slipped disc, which gave me – which stopped me from walking actually, the sciatica. And funnily enough, having accepted the situation this year, this is the first time I've actually walked around the meadows twice a day and really enjoyed the way that nature's come alive over the spring. So it's not been that heavy.

And it all comes down to this basic acceptance: this is the way it is. If you keep saying that to yourself, just banging it into your head – "this is the way it is" – and then just letting the heart relax around that. "This is the way it is." And then the possibilities usually turn up. I mean, we went through that very strange period of lockdown, that was really weird. And for many people, it was just an opportunity to do stuff they always wanted to do. Now they can't do what they usually do. So take up new hobbies and writing and music and stuff like that. So it is very much a case of bearing with it. And it begins with this acceptance. And then, of course, we find that it's not so bad.

However, there can be situations which are very painful. And there's a discourse here called the Parable of the Saw. I'm sure many of you have heard it. And this is the Buddha says: "Monks, even if bandits were to sever you savagely, limb by limb with a two-handed saw, he who gave rise to a mind of hate towards them would not be carrying out my teachings. Monks, even in such a situation, you should train yourselves thus: Neither shall our minds be affected by this, nor for this matter shall we give vent to evil words, but we shall remain in full concern and pity with a mind of love, and we shall not give in to hatred. On the contrary, we shall live projecting thoughts of universal love to those very persons, making them, as well as the whole world, the object of our thoughts of universal love – thoughts that have grown great, exalted, and measureless. We shall dwell radiating these thoughts, which are void of hostility and ill-will. In this way, you should train yourselves."

That's a bit of a demand, isn't it? In fact, when I once said this in a talk, somebody said, "Well, the Buddha had a great sense of humour."

So bearing up with things just gives us that sense of resilience.

Now, when it comes to our inner practice, I mean, this is also to do with how we react to what's happening to us on the outside. But of course, it also has an effect of how we react to ourselves within ourselves. And all this comes under that quality of reactivity. And here again, there's an importance to be able to bear with ourselves, to bear with our own thoughts and emotions, sensations and stuff like that, just so that we can develop a clarity of mind.

I was here reminded of Brian Keenan. Some of you remember this. So he was captured by Shiite militiamen – 1990, that's when he wrote the book. And luckily, he had another person, John McCarthy, who shared the cell with him. And for four years, they lived in this really horrible imprisonment state. If you read the book, *An Evil Cradling*, it really is a shocker. And he came out of it, from all intents and purposes, really strengthened. And I remember when I read the book, there's a point there where he has an insight into thought, which I thought was a spiritual insight, actually. But unfortunately, there was

another man there who was an American who really was broken by it. It's a sad story. So some people just – I mean, now we've got this business in Ukraine and Russia. So there are people having to go through this sort of stuff.

So the final thing is, of course, patience with our spiritual progress. So you have to be careful here because lots of people say to me, "Well, I don't feel I'm progressing." And that means normally that we've got some idea as to where we ought to be, what we ought to have achieved by now, some idea of what the insight practices are, some idea about *nibbāna*.

So this can be very debilitating. And I always think it's best just to put that to the side because the spiritual practice – so long as you're making that effort, that gentle effort to just keep mindful, keep working with it – it's bound to move. The Buddha talks of it like the growth of a tree from a very seed and how long it takes for that tree to finally fruit. So it is a case of really having patience with that, but also not getting into it at all, really. It just happens naturally.

And I think that it's much more wise in a way just to work with our negative mental states, because as they begin to lose their power over us, there's a greater clarity anyway. It's just part of the practice.

In fact, somebody complains to him about how hard the practice is. And the Buddha says, "Well, in the end, you achieve *nibbāna*." And the questioner says, "Yeah, *nibbāna*, so what?" He says, "Well, when you get there, you are happy and with it contented." That's the idea.

So we have to be careful about that, not wanting to have some idea as to what spiritual insights or what *nibbāna* is, and just have that confidence that we're moving that way.

So we've been looking at this patient forbearance, which the Buddha really highlights as an important practice: how to work with people who slander us or abuse us or say nasty things to us. We have to work with hardships and adversity when it comes our way. Cultivating patience towards others and then reactivity either towards others, but spiritually in the practice, this reactivity that we have within ourselves, driven by desire, wanting something, not wanting something, always trying to make the world comfortable. And then finally, just having patience with the spiritual path. The Buddha says it's a gradual path.

Very good. So I can only hope my words have been of some assistance and that by your development of patient forbearance, you will achieve the final liberation from all suffering sooner rather than later.

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