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PATIENCE (KHANTI) FOR DEALING WITH ANGER (DOSA): A BUDDHIST PERSPECTIVE

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ABSTRACT:

The Buddha described patience (*khanti*) as the highest spiritual practice. It connotes that since patience has its own strength; it should be understood as preached by the Buddha that the beneficial fruits of patience by symbolizing the attributes of a noble person (*Brahmaṇa*), have the force of strength which is but patience. What is actually meant by this Dhamma is that the strength of patience (*khanti*) capable of preventing anger (*dosa*) resembles a force of army which is able to defeat the enemy. Buddha has therefore preached that a person who is equipped with this strength of patience is a *Brahmaṇa*, a Noble One. *Khanti* (patience) in Pāli derives from the word *khamati* which means approval, consenting, letting be, giving space, not wanting things to be different. So *khanti* means agreeing to whatever is the reality of the present moment, even if it is disagreeable. Making peace, being kind, being gentle. Allowing the situation to be. This amounts to changing our attitude, our perception.



KEYWORDS : *Khanti* (patience), *Dosa* (anger).

INTRODUCTION:

Patience (*khanti*) is very important that it was taught by the Buddha in the *Ovāda Pāṭimokkha*, the first teaching of the Buddha. "Patience is the ultimate asceticism." During the time of the Buddha, ascetics striving for the goal of enlightenment thought it can only be attained by practising severe asceticism and bringing a lot of pain to the body like depriving the body of food and sleep. That is why the Buddha said that patience is the ultimate asceticism that really helps us overcome our defilements. At a later time, the Buddha while residing at the *Jetavana* monastery said to Ananda, who asked him what is the most important thing for a monk to practise? The Buddha shared, "*Khantī paramaṃ tapo titikkhā*" – the best ethical practice is *khanti*.

Patience (*Khanti*) is usually shown in the Pāli texts to mean that one should not be elated when one is praised or outraged if criticized. The Buddha advised his disciples, "If anyone were to speak ill of me or of my teaching, or of my disciples, do not be upset nor perturbed, for this kind of reaction will only cause you harm. On the other hand, if anyone were to speak well of me, my teachings and my disciples, do not be overjoyed, thrilled or elated, for this kind of reaction will only be an obstacle in forming correct judgement. If you are elated, you cannot judge whether the qualities praised are real and actually found in me, my teachings and my disciples".¹ The commentary points out that this means developing equipoise when faced with dispraise or praise.

¹ M. I. p. 2.

The Concept and Meaning of Patience (Khanti)

In more general circumstances, patience should be developed in order to experience favorable circumstances in life without greed and unfavorable circumstances without hate. Only when we can do this are we truly patient. "A Treatise on the *Pāramīs*" says, "The perfection of patience is the endurance of harm imposed by beings and formations (*Saṅkhāra*), or the act of consciousness occurred in such a mode, predominated by non-aversion and accompanied by compassion and skillful means." In "The Expositor", patience is defined as "the state of forbearance in a patient person." Later in the same commentary, it is given as one of five restraints (virtue, mindfulness, knowledge, patience and effort) which helps discipline the average, untrained man. In that context, patience is mentioned as involving endurance of cold and heat.

It is clear that *Khanti* is very important in one's spiritual life to progress. The word *Khanti* is defined as 'forbearance, patience and forgiveness. *Dhammsaṅgaṇī* defines *khanti* as; 'forbearance' and 'absence of intolerance', ability to forgive and endure (harm done to oneself), 'absence of ferocity', 'absence of bluntness'². '*Khanti*' is commonly translated as 'patience, or forbearance, or endurance.'³ It is derived from the root '*khamu*' and '*ti*' suffix. The root *khamu* means 'to endure, to tolerate or to bear patiently.'⁴ according to grammatical rule, '*u*' of *khamu* is elided and '*m*' of *kham* is changed into '*r*': *khan+ti=khanti*. In Sanskrit, *Kṣānti* is derived from the root '*kṣam*', and '*ti*'. '*ṣ*' of *kṣām* is changed into '*h*' and '*m*' is changed into '*r*'. *Khanti* is translated into '*h*' and '*m*' is changed into '*r*'.

In the *Buddhavaṃsa*, the Buddha exhorted his disciple 'to bear praise and disdain with patience' (*Sammānāvamānakkhamo*).⁵ One should neither be elated when meeting with pleasant objects nor upset when encountering unpleasant objects. It is no tolerance of pleasantness if we develop greed under fortunate circumstances or of unpleasantness if we develop hate under unfortunate circumstances. The essential meaning here is: we are truly patient only when favourable situations are faced without greed; and unfavourable ones without hate.⁶

However, with regard to the Perfection of Patience, the Commentaries generally use in illustrative stories the term Perfection of Patience (*Khantī Pāramī*) only for tolerance to acts of physical or verbal aggression by others without giving way to anger. The *Cariyāpiṭaka* Commentary, expounds in the Chapter on Miscellany: "*karuṇūpāyakosallapariggahitaṃ sattasaṅkhārāparādhasaṅgamaṃ adosappadhāno tadākārapavattacittuppādo khantipāramitā*."⁷ The group of consciousness and its concomitants associated with tolerance of wrongs done by others, predominated by the mental factor of non-aversion (*adosa-cetasika*) and grasped by compassion and skill in means is called Perfection of Forbearance; that is, the group of consciousness and its concomitants formed in such a mode of tolerance to faults of beings is called Perfection of Forbearance.

The Way to deal with Anger (Dosa)

Dosa is powerful destructive vice. It is great destroyer in the world. *Dosa* is mental state which often instigates crime. Hatred proliferates hatred. One's hatred engenders hatred in another. An angry face cannot soften another's heart. "Hatred never ceases through hatred" says the Buddha. In the *Kodhana Sutta*, the Buddha has elucidated as "When angry, they know not Goodness or the *Dhamma* (*Kuddho atthaṃ na jānāti, kuddho dhammaṃ na passata*)",⁸ and in addition, *Antarāmaḷa Sutta* in the *Itivuttaka* and *Khaggavisāṇa Sutta* in the *Cūḷavācchasaṅgī* uttered as follows;

"*Duṭṭho atthaṃ na jānāti, duṭṭho dhammaṃ na passati; Andhatamaṃ tadā hoti, yaṃ doso sahate naraṃ*."⁹

² Dhs. p. 230: "*khanti khamanatā adhivāsanatā acaṇḍikkaṃ anasuro po attamanatā cittassa – ayaṃ vuccati khanti*."

³ Nyanatiloka, "Dictionary". p. 61.

⁴ Ashin Kumāra, "Dhātuttha pane kunong" paramisarpe. Yangon, 1998, p. 115.

⁵ Buv. P. 14; "Buddhavaṃsa pāḷi", (Yangon: The Religious Affairs, 1997), p. 317.

⁶ Bhaddanta Vicittasārābhivaṃsa, "The Great Chronicle of the Buddha", Vol. 1, Part. 1, Trans by U Ko Lay and U Tin Lwin, (Yangon: Ti=Ni Press, 1991), p. 249.

⁷ CpA. p. 280.

⁸ A. IV. p. 96.

⁹ It. P. 84.

“It means, while *dosa* pervades or spreads one’s mind, he knows nothing in the correct perspective.”

Patience (*khanti*) is the main antidote to hatred or anger (*dosa*). As Buddhists, we should consider the Buddha’s advice and example. Incidents from the life of the Buddha wherein he displayed patience are not rare. The Buddha had many a time exhibited great patience in the face of provocation. He never got angry but instead radiated loving-kindness even towards his oppressors.

On one occasion when the Buddha was staying at Rājagaha, a heartless individual bribed certain villains to revile the Buddha when he entered the city for alms. They followed him through the city shouting: “you are a robber, a simpleton, a fool, an ox, an ass, you have no hope of deliverance from suffering.” Hearing these words, Venerable Ānanda, the personal attendant of the Buddha was very grieved and assisted him to leave the city for another place. To impress on his disciples the need to cultivate the virtue of forbearance, he said:

Ānanda, we should do no such thing; wherever a tumult arises, even there should we remain until that tumult passes away. When these uproars have subsided then only should we go elsewhere. As an elephant on the battle-field endures the arrows shot from a bow, even so, Ānanda, shall I endure abusive speech; most people are, indeed, ill natured.¹⁰

The Buddha was not at all disturbed by the various cruel attempts of his disciple Devadatta who tried to kill him to cause a schism in his *Saṅgha*. In such situations, the Buddha not only maintained his mental balance, but also wished for the welfare and happiness of Devadatta in the same way as he did for the welfare and happiness of Rāhula, his only son who was born on the day his father left the palace to seek enlightenment.¹¹

Once, a brahmin came to abuse him in very harsh and unkind words, the Buddha remained silent till the brahmin finished pouring out his wrath over him. When the brahmin finished reviling, the Buddha asked him in a very friendly tone: “If you were to visit a friend and you took a gift to him, but the friend declined to accept the gift, what would you do?” The brahmin replied that he would take it back. The Buddha said: “You brought me a gift of much abuse; I do not accept; you can take it back.” Then the Buddha explained to him the inappropriateness of his vituperation and preached to him comprehensively the sublime truth he had discovered. Hearing this, the brahmin in realizing his mistake, became pleased with the Buddha and accepted him as his teacher.¹²

Giving his own examples the Buddha’s advice to his disciples was to adhere to his instruction regarding love (*mettā*) and patience (*khanti*) even in the most extreme circumstances in which one may be tempted to react with hatred. Patience and endurance in the face of difficult, unpleasant and painful situations should not be regarded as a weakness or passive behaviour on one’s part. In fact, it is a real mental strength to be able to be patient which needs a lot of courage and determination. We should take the example in respect of patience (*khanti*) that has been mentioned in the *Vepacitti Sutta* how the king of the Devas practices the patience. In this Sutta we have knowledge by reading the following passage spoken by the king of gods and his personal assistant, Mātali:

“Mātali asked the king of gods—could it be you are afraid of Vepacitti or weak that you forbear like this though you are hearing such insulting words from the mouth of him?”

“I am neither afraid nor weak. Yet I forbear, Vepacitti. How is it one who knows the consequence of anger, like me, would get provoked by such a fool?” the king of gods replied. The king of gods continues saying as—it is indeed a fault for one who returns anger for anger. One who does not give anger for anger wins a double victory. Knowing well the other’s anger, he who behaves for the good of both himself and other persons will be mindful and will remain calm.¹³

In the *Kākaṭūpama Sutta*, the Buddha has stated how a monk following the Buddha’s teaching, should practise patience and forbearance even when one is seriously injured physically. “Monks, even if bandits were to carve you up savagely, limb by limb, with a two handled saw, he among you who let his heart get angered even at that would not be doing my bidding. Even then you should train yourselves: Our minds will be unaffected and we will say no evil words. We will remain sympathetic, with a mind of good will, and with no inner hate”. By considering repeatedly this advice we ought to control our anger.¹⁴

¹⁰ Dhpa. III. p. 494.

¹¹ S. II. p. 156; Vin. II. p. 184.

¹² Sn. p. 21-25.

¹³ S. I. p. 221; SA. I. p. 342.

¹⁴ M. I. p. 129.

To cite references from the *Piṭakas*, the practice of forbearance depends to a great extent on one's view according to *Puṇṇovāda* Sutta of *Majjhima Nikāya*. If one will look at the *loka* through loving, compassionate and grateful eyes, one will find many things which one can forbear on the *loka*, which deserve our love, compassion and gratitude upon the *loka*. If this can be done, there can be not much difficulty to have forbearance. It can be gradually developed. Without actually practising it, forbearance will not be attained. Actually, physical practice is called *patipatti* or *carāṇa* and mental practice is called *pariyatti* or *vijjā*.

The Buddha called 'Sādhū' to the view of Venerable Puṇṇa with regard to forbearance. The dialogue between the Buddha and Venerable Puṇṇa was as follows:

The Buddha: 'Son Puṇṇa, the people of Sunāparanta village are ferocious and barbarous. How would you feel if they were to abuse you?'

Ven. Purina: 'Venerable Sir! If the people of Sunāparanta were to abuse me, they are all good people; they are all extraordinarily good people. Then I would feel that they had merely abused me and they should be thanked for not pounding me up. Thus, I will control my anger and forbear.'

The Buddha: 'Son Puṇṇa! How would you feel if the people of Sunāparanta were to pound you up?'

Ven. Puṇṇa: 'Venerable Sir! If the people of Sunāparanta were to pound me up, they are all good people; they are all extraordinarily good people. Then I would feel that they had merely pounded me up and they should be thanked for not cutting me with knives. Thus, I will control my anger and forbear.'

The Buddha: 'Son Puṇṇa! How would you feel if the people of Sunāparanta were to cut you with knives?'

Ven. Puṇṇa: 'Venerable Sir! If the people of Sunāparanta were to cut me with knives, they are all good people; they are extraordinarily good people. Then I would feel that Venerable Channa had to kill himself with his knife. I do not have to do it myself. Now they had done it for me and they should, therefore, be thanked. Thus, I will control my anger and forbear.'

The Buddha: 'Sādhū, Son Puṇṇa! Sādhū, Sādhū!'

Venerable Puṇṇa was one who wanted to pay his debt of gratitude to the *loka*. Paying the debt of gratitude to the *loka* is the best way of seeking for one's benefit. Thus, Venerable Puṇṇa realized.

From this, it is seen that in his dealings with the surroundings he always looked at them through the eye of gratitude. In truth, if one knows the way to look at the surrounding *loka*, one will find and see that all are one's benefactors. Who would be able to survive without the surroundings *Loka*? This is the record of how a disciple at the time of the Buddha viewed and practised *khanti* (patience).¹⁵

By cultivating and developing patience, the destructive emotional energy within us will not have the chance to surface to take control and direct us to commit evil.¹⁶ Once Venerable Sāriputta, the chief disciple of the Buddha, was confronted by a Brahmin who abused him with angry words. When these words did not affect Venerable Sāriputta, the Brahmin became even more furious. 'Didn't you hear what I have just said? The angry Brahmin had shouted. Do you have nothing to say to all my insults?', Venerable Sāriputta, smiled gently at the Brahmin, and replied, "well, my friend, I do hear you loud and clear. But since I know that you have nothing useful to say, I hear only sound vibrations".¹⁷

CONCLUSION

Anger (*dosa*) is by nature a painful state of mind. Whenever we develop anger, our inner peace immediately disappears and even our body becomes tense and uncomfortable. One of the most harmful effects of anger is that it robs us of our reason and good sense. Wishing to retaliate against those whom we think have harmed us, we expose ourselves to great personal danger merely to exact petty revenge. To get our own back for perceived injustices or slights, we are prepared to jeopardize our job, our relationships, and even the well-being of our family and children. When we are angry, we lose all "perspectives" and freedom of choice, driven here and there by an uncontrollable rage.

Patience (*khanti*) is a virtue that, when practised in daily life, is beneficial to everyone. People around them as well as the society in general can benefit from it in several ways as patience works against the negative factors of anger, ill-will and hatred. There is no benefit that excels patience. Patience is the weapon of the virtuous person. Patience is one of the blessings and also one of the perfections (*Pāramī*). Patience

¹⁵ U Shwe Aung, "The Buddha - Peerless Benefactor of Humanity", First Edition, Myawaddy Press, Yangon, 1995. p. 230-232.

¹⁶ Ud. P. 42; UdA. P. 251.

¹⁷ DhA. IV. p. 146.

leads to *Nibbāna*. When we are endowed with patience, the world will always appear pleasant and have a healthy glow.

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