

Dawn Scott

*The Steadying Power of Patience*

Part 1: “Water the Seeds of Enlightenment with Patience”

July 3, 2021



Welcome. My name is Dawn Scott. I'm a practitioner and teacher in one of the many variations and flavors of Theravada Buddhism.

You can probably hear birds chirping. I'm here on the coast of California, and the beach isn't far away; neither are the birds, which you can hear, or the sky. There's beauty all around. Wherever you are, I hope that you're safe, I hope you're well, I hope you're protected, and I hope your loved ones are safe and healthy and protected too.

I want to welcome you to this four-part series on the steadying power of patience. During the first week of this four-part series, we'll be exploring and getting to know patience, or *khanti parami* as it's called in the Pali, a language that some of the teachings of the Buddha were preserved in.

I think patience is one of the unsung, underappreciated qualities of the heart that's so integral to the awakening process. Patience as a *parami* [perfection] helps the heart begin the process. You could even think of it as a journey. It's a journey of the heart, relaxing into whatever arises and meeting it with little to no reactivity. I like to think of complete patience, *khanti parami*, as a training ground for equanimity. During this first week of the four-part series, we'll be looking at the context within which patience is cultivated and developed, and that's the context of the *paramis*, or the ten perfections.

I have a dear friend who sends me beautiful messages before I head into retreat. Sometimes she'll leave them as a text; sometimes she'll leave them as a voicemail. In this particular instance, about three years ago, she sent me a text saying, "Have a magical retreat with your teacher. The conditions for awakening are there. Believe it's possible."

“The conditions for awakening are there. Believe it's possible.” This meant so much to me that I wrote out her text word for word and put it on my altar. It was so inspiring. I think one of the reasons it was so inspiring to me and continues to be inspiring to me is we can read the suttas, learn about the Buddha, hear some of the stories of his life and of his disciples, and think, "Awakening happened for them those thousands of years ago, and that's not possible for us." And I think otherwise. I think that these teachings—when we really take them to heart, when we take time to study, reflect on the dhamma, and really live into them—can lead to complete freedom and complete awakening.

Awakening is talked about in different ways in the various traditions of Buddhism. One way of articulating awakening is thinking of it as a heart-mind that is free of irritation, the anguish of greed, the erosive nature of aversion, and the life-denying quality of delusion.

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Since awakening is possible, it's important to remember that the seeds of awakening are in each and every human heart. Just take a moment to really take that in: that the seeds of awakening are in each and every human heart. You may be thinking, "She doesn't know me. She doesn't know what's in my heart." And that's true, I don't know you. But what is also true is that I'm in the process of getting to know my own heart-mind, beautiful qualities that are present and not-so-beautiful qualities, the unskillful that's present in my own heart-mind stream.

In getting to know my own heart, I'm actually getting to know your heart, because hearts aren't all that different. This spirit that's afoot in our times right now, the divisiveness, the zeitgeist that we're living in would have us think that we're so different that we can't live with an abiding respect for each other. The truth is these differences are just tiny, tiny variations on the shared theme, the shared experience of being human. The seeds of awakening are in each and every human heart, and you can think of this practice, this gradual process of awakening, as learning to tend to those seeds.

What are the conditions that result in the blooming, flowering, and blossoming of the beautiful heart qualities that lead to awakening, qualities like the ten paramis?

You may be familiar with the ten paramis, you may not be—whatever the case is, feel free to close your eyes. Just rest and receive the sounds of each of these ten paramis, and notice how it lands in your heart-mind and your body, just hearing these ten qualities.

1. Generosity.
2. Virtue. I like to think of it as a heart that's ethically attuned, that's concerned for the well-being of all beings.
3. Renunciation or letting go.
4. Wisdom.
5. Energy.
6. Patience, my favorite.
7. Truthfulness.
8. Determination or resolve.
9. Benevolence, friendliness, goodwill or kindness.
10. Equanimity.

These beautiful qualities of the heart that are native to each and every human heart are transformed into paramis by the intention that animates them. There are two intentions, compassion and liberation.

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When we call forth, say, truthfulness or patience to support the welfare of another or to mitigate difficulties or challenges, i.e., we call on that parami in the service of compassion, it starts to be transformed into a perfection.

The compassion is coupled with calling forth the parami to wear away at the forces of greed, aversion, and delusion in the mind. When the parami is summoned when we call on it in service of compassion and liberation, it's transformed into a parami. It becomes a perfection.

I want to talk about where to go from here. First, a few words about perfection. We're not talking about perfectionism. We're not talking about a refusal to accept any standard that is short of our ideas about what perfection is. Perfection in this context is about bringing these noble qualities to their full maturity, to their full strength. And they're brought to their full maturity and strength by being in service of supporting compassion and liberation.

It's said that cultivating these ten paramis, these noble perfections of the heart, takes us across the floods. And the floods are a metaphor for dukkha, or all the ways that we create challenges, suffering, pain, dissatisfaction, stress, and grief for ourselves or the people that we love or even people that we don't even know all that well.

These floods, or dukkha, are also a metaphor for conditioned reality: the fact that all of our sensory experiences, every sight, sound, smell, taste, sensation of the body, every thought, emotion intention, the most sublime, refined meditative states can't give us the lasting satisfaction or the happiness that our heart longs for that, from my perspective, is our birthright.

And it's thought that the Buddha, over eons, during the birth and death of countless universes and innumerable lifetimes, brought these ten noble qualities to their full fruition and their full maturity. These ten perfections were one of many conditions that led to his awakening. Since the Buddha was a human just as we're human, we too can cultivate these ten paramis, these ten perfections, over many lifetimes (if you believe in the multiple-lifetime model) or in this lifetime.

I want to talk about what patience is not. Patience is not gritting our teeth and white-knuckling it through some difficulty or some challenge, some unpleasant or painful experience, or some injustice. White-knuckling it, gritting our teeth—I don't even know what to call it. It's just trying to survive. Sometimes it's just waiting with aversion to the current moment while holding out hope for a better future.

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We can actually bring our practice to engage in the work of social justice, and when we do bring our practice to social justice issues, sometimes we'll be told, "Just wait. I know you're wanting to see X, Y, and Z shift and change. But just wait because the conditions aren't right. And actually, because the conditions aren't right and you're pushing to effect change, you're being impatient."

That's not patience either. Let's be straight up about that. That's not patience. That's aversion to change. That's resistance to change. That's aversion at work in that person's heart-mind co-opting the word "patience" with the intention of maintaining the status quo to preserve and consolidate power.

True, complete, mature patience that's brought to its full strength helps us to be in relationship to the way things actually are without causing harm.

I want to read some of the qualities and manifestations of complete patience from a teaching from a text called *The All-Embracing Net of Views*. I was talking to a scholar who let me know that it can also be translated as the "net of Brahma" or the "divine net."

Again, just as we were resting and receiving the ten paramis, noticing how they landed in our heart-mind, noticing how the mind responded to each of those ten qualities, feel free to rest and receive the images and manifestations of patience that I'm about to read you.

"If patience were a strength, what would it be like? Summon patience, knowing that it's a strength. Patience is a strength. Patience is a stream of water extinguishing the fire of anger. Patience is a mantra for quelling poisonous speech."

What if you had a word or phrase that was an expression of patience that you held in your heart-mind so that when you were in a challenging situation with another person, you just held that word, image, or mantra in your mind?

This is my favorite image: "Patience is an ocean on account of its depth, a shore on account of bounding the great ocean of hatred." I'll just read that to you again. "Patience is an ocean on account of its depth, a shore on account of bounding the great ocean of hatred."

Patience is a beautiful quality—a beautiful, benevolent, beneficial quality. I have a teacher who suggests that when we cultivate these beautiful qualities like the ten paramis, they are gems that adorn the heart and mind.

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You may have experienced this. You may have seen this in your own life. You meet someone who's so dedicated to living with wisdom, compassion, or kindness that the light of those qualities just shines through their being and radiates through their skin, and they're made beautiful by having these beautiful qualities active within their heart-mind stream.

I'm not talking about a physical beauty. It's an inner beauty that just comes radiating through their being. So you can think of patience and its steadying power as a gem with which we'll be adorning our heart-mind.

It's a gem with many, many facets, and three of the facets that we'll explore in the next three weeks are patience as forbearance, patience as gentle perseverance (a phrase I learned from Gil Fronsdal), and patience as acceptance of the truth.

Complete patience helps the heart to mature into nonreactivity, and it comes into its full maturity through being animated by the wish to alleviate suffering (compassion) and to uproot greed, aversion and delusion (liberation or freedom). These paramis are brought to life through the intention of compassion and liberation.

I want to thank you for exploring the parami of patience with me, and I look forward to connecting with you around patience as forbearance in Week 2 of our four-part series.

Take good care. Bye.