

This week we look at the third of the Six Perfections, which is traditionally called (using the Sanskrit term) *kshanti*. It's helpful to start with this term because, as we'll see, *kshanti* covers a range of shades of meaning, and so there's actually a variety of English words that we can use to translate it.

To gain a broad sense of what *kshanti* involves, we can refer to an excerpt from the Pāli canon, a large group of collections of records of the Buddha's teaching that were compiled in the ancient Pāli language, some 400 years after his own time. The one in question comes from the collection called 'middle-length discourses' (*Majjhima-Nikāya*), and was translated into English by Thanissaro Bhikku:

*Monks, there are these five aspects of speech by which others may address you: timely or untimely, true or false, affectionate or harsh, beneficial or unbeneficial, with a mind of good-will or with inner hate. Others may address you in a timely way or an untimely way. They may address you with what is true or what is false. They may address you in an affectionate way or a harsh way. They may address you in a beneficial way or an unbeneficial way. They may address you with a mind of good-will or with inner hate. In any event, you should train yourselves: 'Our minds will be unaffected and we will say no evil words. We will remain sympathetic to that person's welfare, with a mind of good will, and with no inner hate. We will keep pervading him with an awareness imbued with good will and, beginning with him, we will keep pervading the all-encompassing world with an awareness imbued with good will — abundant, expansive, immeasurable, free from hostility, free from ill will.' That's how you should train yourselves.*

From this passage, we can gain a sense of what's meant by *kshanti* – although we've provisionally translated it on this course as 'forbearance', we might also talk in terms of **patience**, **endurance** and **receptivity**. We'll expand on these terms shortly. However, the passage above comes from early Buddhist writings while, as we know, the whole idea of the Six Perfections really belongs to later, *Mahāyāna* Buddhism. In *Mahāyāna* terms, the *bodhisattva*'s practice of *kshanti* comes from a much more profound realization – he or she isn't actually separate from anybody else, because no 'selves' ultimately exist. This is a crucially important *Mahāyāna* position, and we need to be a little careful in how we understand it. It's not really stating that you or I don't actually exist, as is sometimes thought – it's probably more helpful to consider that, from the point of view of universal inter-connectedness (as described by the Law of Dependent Arising and Cessation), we can't say that I (or you) are strictly separate from the rest of existence. In other words, the 'boundaries' between 'self' and 'other' aren't anywhere near as hard and definite as they subjectively seem.

Returning to our everyday experience, we can consider three helpful interpretations of *kshanti*.

The first of these is **patience**. If our default reactions to life's challenges and frustrations are anger or irritation, *kshanti* represents a more creative, skilful response that recognises the futility of getting ourselves worked up when we're challenged. We can't always get our own way, and that's just how things are. This more patient approach is close to the spirit of the earlier excerpt from the Pāli canon. It's also, ultimately, a realistic, approach to our difficulties – after all, life is guaranteed not to go our way at least some of the time, and it's usually not our fault, or anybody else's. Even if people *are* deliberately putting obstacles in our way, it's very unlikely that their behaviour will be changed by our expressing frustration or anger.

Secondly, we can interpret *kshanti* as **endurance**. This means having the mental resilience to put up with unpleasant things that we can't influence or avoid (and, after all, there are sure to be many of these). For example, the weather will regularly fail to meet up to our hopes – we wish for a warm, dry day and we get a miserable, damp one instead. There's absolutely nothing we can do about it, except dress appropriately! Disappointment potentially lies in every part of our experience – it's great when things go as we hope they will, but it's an absolute given that they won't always, and sometimes things turn out to be the opposite of what we hoped for. It's not just a matter of a comfortable life, either – sometimes we'll be stopped in our tracks by illness, and we have no choice but to shelve our plans until we've (hopefully) recovered. Put in these terms, there are endless opportunities for us to practice *kshanti* as endurance.

Thirdly and lastly, we can see *kshanti* in terms of **receptivity**. This is actually a particularly important part of the Buddhist path (it's covered in much more detail in the Going Deeper course 'Tiratna's System of Dharma Practice'). For our immediate purposes, we can say that *kshanti* as receptivity involves a spirit of openness, particularly towards our own behaviour. We try not to shy away from difficult self-reflections, instead admitting our weaknesses to ourselves and learning from such realisations, painful though they might be. Maybe just as painfully, we can remain open to the honest criticism of those who know us well – or, better still, actively encourage it. Ideally, we treat this sort of input as a constructive opportunity to see ourselves and grow, rather than a trigger or a source of hurt. Of course, none of this is necessarily easy, and it shows, once again, that there's a side to *kshanti* that requires spiritual strength to respond to strong challenges.

Looking at these three facets of *kshanti* together, we can see that there's a common ground that amounts to facing up to our challenges in a creative, skilful way, even if our past tendencies have been towards reactivity or a sort of victim mentality. There are yet more interpretations of the term – Tiratna's founder, Sangharakshita, also characterized *kshanti* as gentleness, humility, tolerance and love. We can see just how important and versatile this third of the Six Perfections can be.