

The Cultivation of Unassailable Capacity: A Scholarly Analysis of *Kṣānti Paramita*, Buddha Nature, and Non-Passive Endurance in the *Lotus Sūtra*, Chapter Ten

I. Foundational Textual Context: The Imperative of Endurance for the Dharma Teacher

The instruction on patience (*Kṣānti*) within the tenth chapter of the *Saddharma Puṇḍarīka Sūtra* (The Lotus Flower of the Wonderful Dharma Sūtra, hereafter the *Lotus Sūtra*) represents a pivotal moment in Mahayana doctrine, establishing the requisite mental fortitude for those who dare to propagate the ultimate teaching. The *Lotus Sūtra* is widely recognized as one of the most venerated and influential Buddhist Mahāyāna scriptures, particularly serving as the foundational text for schools such as Tiantai, Tendai, and Nichiren.¹ British Buddhologists consider it, for many East Asian Buddhists, to contain the final, complete, and sufficient teaching of Śākyamuni Buddha for salvation.¹

I.A. The *Lotus Sūtra* and the Doctrine of the One Vehicle (*Ekayāna*)

The profound authority of the instruction in Chapter 10 is derived from the *Sūtra*'s two central theological tenets. The first is the doctrine of the One Vehicle (*Ekayāna*), which reveals that all Buddhist paths and practices are, ultimately, "skillful means" (*upāya*) leading toward the single goal of universal Buddhahood.¹ This unified vision elevates the *Sūtra* above provisional teachings and necessitates an intense commitment from its adherents, making the

consequences of upholding or slandering it commensurately significant.

The second critical theme is the idea that the lifespan of the Buddha is immeasurable and that the historical Śākyamuni Buddha did not truly pass into final Nirvāṇa, but only appeared to do so for the sake of teaching.¹ This revelation of the Eternal Buddha underscores the idea that the protective influence of the Buddha is constant and boundless.¹ This eternal presence acts as a powerful doctrinal anchor for the practitioner when faced with extreme difficulty, providing assurance of ultimate spiritual support.

I.B. The Mandate of Chapter Ten: The Teacher of the Dharma

Chapter 10, titled "The Teacher of the Dharma," is directed toward those practitioners—including monks, nuns, and lay devotees—who uphold, read, recite, copy, and, most importantly, explain the *Sūtra* to others.² These "Dharma Masters" are crucial links in the transmission of the *Ekayāna* doctrine, and the Buddha bestows upon them predictions of their future attainment of *anuttarasamyaksambodhi* (supreme perfect enlightenment).²

The instruction acknowledges that the task of expounding the *Sūtra* is fraught with peril. It is explicitly stated that those who harbor fear or doubt regarding the *Lotus Sūtra* are often novice Bodhisattvas or individuals characterized by "overbearing arrogance".³ This indicates that the Dharma Teacher must be prepared to face resistance that stems not just from ignorance, but from deeply entrenched wrong views and egoic attachment. The necessity of practicing great compassion, gentleness, and patience, alongside the realization of the Dharma of Emptiness, is presented as the proper and correct manner of practicing the Bodhisattva way via the *Lotus Sūtra*.³

I.C. Exegesis of the Verse: "If anyone speaks ill of you, or threatens you..."

The verses cited in the query directly address the highest level of threat the Dharma Master may face:

If anyone speaks ill of you, or threatens you
With swords, sticks, tile-pieces or stones
While you are expounding this sūtra,
Think of me, and be patient! 4

The verse explicitly covers both verbal abuse ("speaks ill of you") and concrete, often fatal, physical violence ("swords, sticks, tile-pieces or stones").⁴ This severity immediately establishes that the resistance encountered by the Dharma Teacher is not trivial, but represents a direct confrontation between the ultimate truth of the *Ekayāna* and deep-seated worldly delusion (slander of the Dharma). The experience of adversity, therefore, functions as a powerful validating mechanism, confirming the practitioner's identity as a true votary of the Sūtra and placing them in the historical lineage of those who have upheld the Law through persecution.³

The injunction to "Think of me, and be patient!" is profoundly significant.⁵ The instruction to recollect the Buddha (*Buddhanusmṛti*) serves as a mechanism for immediate mental stabilization. By recalling the image and reality of the Eternal Buddha, the practitioner redirects attention from the temporary, painful reality of the attack in *saṃsāra* to the ultimate, permanent, and protected reality symbolized by the Buddha's boundless life.¹ This mental shift fundamentally prevents the suffering from being internalized and defeats the attacker's intention to destabilize or stop the practice. The recollection of the Buddha enables the practitioner to tap into the deep well of spiritual power necessary for active *Kṣānti*.

II. The Perfection of Patience (*Kṣānti Pāramitā*): Active Strength and Transformative Capacity

The analysis of the verse confirms that the patience prescribed is not a passive acceptance of harm. Rather, *Kṣānti Pāramitā*, the Perfection of Patience, is understood within Mahayana cosmology as a dynamic, active, and transformative spiritual discipline essential for the Bodhisattva path.

II.A. Defining *Kṣānti*: Beyond Quietism and Stoicism

Kṣānti (Sanskrit) or *Khanti* (Pāli) signifies patience, steadfastness, tolerance, endurance, and forbearance.⁶ In the Bodhisattva ideal, this practice is held in the highest regard.⁹ Critically, *Kṣānti* is not synonymous with quietism, resignation, or passivity.⁹ It is defined as a "determined refusal to be beaten down, defeated, deflated, or stopped" in the determined effort to relieve suffering for oneself and others.¹⁰

This determination transforms difficult circumstances—including insults and physical threats—from mere misfortunes into opportunities for spiritual growth.⁹ This transformative power is what imbues the person who cultivates *Kṣānti* with depth, courage, vision, and dignity.⁹ The successful practice of this perfection is understood to accelerate the path toward Buddhahood, as the pressure of hardship, when managed skillfully, becomes the "rocket fuel for awakening".⁹ The requirement is to endure hardship "without losing focus on liberating all beings from *saṃsāra*," suggesting that the intensity of adversity is directly proportional to the potential for rapid spiritual advancement.⁶

II.B. The Tripartite Dimensions of Mahayana *Kṣānti*

Mahayana texts elucidate *Kṣānti* through three interconnected dimensions, which collectively demonstrate its comprehensive power⁶:

II.B.1. Endurance of Personal Hardship

This dimension involves facing internal and external difficulties—such as pain, disease, poverty, or loss—in a constructive manner.⁸ The practice begins with the acceptance of the First Noble Truth: *Dukkha* (stress, difficulty, or suffering).⁷ Anguish is largely generated not by the pain itself, but by the resistance to suffering.⁸ By accepting the fundamental instability and temporary nature of life, the practitioner stops wasting energy attempting to deny or avoid *dukkha* and ceases self-pity, thereby cultivating emotional fortitude.⁷ The ability to remain strong and undefeated by despair is a direct function of this acceptance.⁸

II.B.2. Patience with Others (Forbearance of Insult and Injury)

This is the explicit requirement of Chapter 10: handling mistreatment from sentient beings. When faced with insult, hatred, or injury, the instinctual egoic response is often a desire for vengeance, leading to anger and hatred, one of the Three Poisons.⁸ Forbearance requires releasing this anger and cultivating *equanimity* so that one is not manipulated by external stimuli.⁸ The Buddha's capacity to conquer the entire world is attributed, in part, to the power

of patience, emphasizing that this is a practice of immense, quiet strength.¹¹

II.B.3. Acceptance of Ultimate Truth (*Anutpattikadharmakṣānti*)

This third and most profound dimension is the receptivity to the ultimate truths of reality, including impermanence, non-self, suffering, and emptiness.⁶ Known in advanced stages as *Anutpattikadharmakṣānti* (receptivity to the non-arising of all *dharmas*), this signifies a deep understanding that phenomena lack inherent existence.⁶ This acceptance is revolutionary because the ego, which attempts to preserve itself, often responds with fear.⁸ By realizing that the conceptual self ("I") is merely a transient thought conjured by the brain and senses, the practitioner realizes there is nothing essential to protect, dramatically changing the perception of pain and enabling true, deep forbearance.⁸

II.C. Mental Mastery and the Transformation of Affliction

The mental mastery achieved through *Kṣānti* directly addresses the core user premise: increasing the capacity to handle mental suffering caused by abuse. This requires cultivating mental discipline to manage desires and impatience, both of which arise in the mind and lead to suffering.¹³

The end of suffering, as understood by Bodhisattvas, does not signify the end of physical pain or loss, but rather the internal transformation of suffering into awareness, solidarity, and love.⁹ When the practitioner is patient with their suffering, they realize it is expansive and shared ("ours" instead of "mine"), connecting the individual warmly to the entire world.⁹ This internal stability, or mastery over affliction, is highly correlated with impulse control—a key component of emotional intelligence—which contemporary studies indicate is a far more important indicator for success in life than high intellect alone.⁷

The following matrix summarizes the essential distinctions of this transformative practice:

Comparative Dimensions of *Kṣānti*

Dimension of Kṣānti	Nature of Endurance/Patien	Resulting Benefit/Power	Corresponding Mahayana
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	ce		Truth/Concept
Endurance of Personal Hardship	Facing difficulties (pain, disease, loss) constructively, resisting despair or denial.	Spiritual transformation of misfortune into benefit (Rocket Fuel). ⁹	Acceptance of <i>Dukkha</i> (Suffering/Stress) ⁷
Patience with Others	Forbearance against mistreatment, insults, and injury, cultivating equanimity and releasing hatred.	Conquering the world (i.e., external circumstances) through inner power. ¹²	Cultivation of <i>Metta</i> and <i>Upekṣā</i> (Loving-Kindness and Equanimity) ⁸
Acceptance of Truth	Profound receptivity to ultimate realities: impermanence, non-self, emptiness, and non-arising.	Insight (Penetration) and adherence of the mind to reality. ¹²	<i>Anutpattikadharma kṣānti</i> (Receptivity to Non-Arising Dharma) ⁶

III. Buddha Nature, Non-Duality, and the Source of Compassion

The philosophical ground that allows the practitioner to withstand physical threats while maintaining compassion lies in the Mahayana teaching of *Tathāgatagarbha*, or Buddha Nature, and the non-dual view of reality presented in the *Lotus Sūtra*.

III.A. The Universal Seed of Awakening (*Tathāgatagarbha*)

The foundation for universal compassion is the central claim of the *Lotus Sūtra*: that all

beings, without exception, possess the potential to achieve Buddhahood.¹ This potential is described as the "great hidden treasure of the heart, as vast as the universe itself".¹⁴ When the practitioner faces abuse, the practice involves recognizing this inherent seed of Buddha Nature within the aggressor. This recognition shifts the focus from the aggressor's transient, defiled actions to their ultimate, pure potential, dispelling feelings of powerlessness in the practitioner.¹⁴

The instruction to endure violence is theologically sustainable because the Sūtra affirms the non-duality of the suffering world (*Sahā*) and the Pure Land.¹ The Buddha constantly abides and preaches the Dharma in the present *Sahā* world sphere, implying that the Buddha's realm is immanent.¹ Since this world and the pure land are ultimately non-dual, the temporary suffering and aggression (swords, sticks, stones) are not ultimate realities. They are inherently empty.⁶ This non-dual viewpoint allows the practitioner to remain grounded in ultimate reality, reinforcing the practice of profound acceptance (*Kṣānti*) even amidst chaos.

III.B. The Role of *Mahākaruṇā* (Great Compassion)

Great Compassion (*Mahākaruṇā*) is considered the single most important Dharma of the Bodhisattva path; as the Chenrezig Sutra states, holding onto compassion ensures that "The whole Buddhadharma will be in the hand of that person".¹⁶ When confronting an abuser, compassion arises not from condoning the action, but from recognizing that the abuser's action is rooted in their own immense suffering, ignorance, hatred, and the destructive karmic consequences they are generating.¹⁷

This focus transforms the aggressive act from a personal affront into an expression of the abuser's immense suffering and negative karma. The Bodhisattva's act of forbearance thus becomes a form of *Mahākaruṇā* directed toward the abuser's future. By maintaining inner peace and allowing anger and hatred to dissolve—analogized to pouring water onto fire—the practitioner reduces the likelihood of reciprocal karmic output.¹⁸ This prevents the cycle of aggression from continuing and provides a compassionate model for transformation.

III.C. Contemplative Practices and Non-Self

The internal stability required to respond to violence with patience is reinforced by the contemplative realization of *non-self* and *emptiness*. The fundamental resistance to suffering (*dukkha*) stems from the belief that there is a permanent, defensible "self".⁸ When the

practitioner realizes that the sense of "I" is a moment-to-moment mental construct, the ego's mechanism for personal offense dissipates.⁸

Tiantai scholasticism, highly influenced by the *Lotus Sūtra*, articulates this ultimate non-dual view by stating: "There is no suffering to be severed. Ignorance and *klesas* are indivisible from *bodhi*. *Samsara* is *nirvana*".¹⁵ This doctrinal position ensures that the difficulty caused by the abuser is not seen as an external obstacle to be removed, but as raw material to be integrated immediately into the path of awakening.

IV. The Ethical Imperative: Non-Enabling Compassion and Protective Boundaries

A critical examination of *Kṣānti* must address the ethical challenge that the boundless compassion inherent in Mahayana Buddhism could be interpreted as enabling or perpetuating harm, particularly in response to systematic or pathological abuse.¹⁷ The sophisticated application of *Kṣānti* requires integrating patience with wisdom (*Prajñā*) to ensure protective action is taken.

IV.A. The Critique of Passive Tolerance

A common critique asserts that boundless compassion toward "evil" people, such as those who cause massive harm (e.g., corporate leaders indifferent to environmental destruction or abusive individuals), renders the compassionate person a "silent enabler".¹⁷ The argument is that internal meditative practices alone have little bearing on external realities and that physical prevention or removal of the perpetrator is necessary to stop the suffering.¹⁷

The Mahayana approach resolves this tension by asserting that while vengeance or hatred are poisons, ethical passivity is incompatible with the Bodhisattva Vow to alleviate suffering. The spiritual strength derived from *Kṣānti* enables fierce, yet compassionate, action.⁹

IV.B. Wisdom (*Prajñā*) as the Foundation for Boundaries

Buddhist ethics maintains that *Karuṇā* must always be directed by *Prajñā*. Setting strong personal boundaries is not a failure of compassion but an application of wisdom.¹⁹ Boundaries, when rooted in self-compassion, are fundamentally "extremely compassionate" because they serve multiple protective functions for all involved parties.¹⁹

The establishment of clear ethical boundaries achieves three essential objectives:

1. It removes confusion from the relationship dynamics.
2. It prevents the abuser (or potential abuser) from inflicting further injury.
3. It prevents the person setting the boundaries from being harmed.¹⁹

Therefore, responding to threats of "swords, sticks, tile-pieces or stones" may necessitate external, physical intervention, removal from society, or permanent separation from the aggressor.¹⁷ This protective measure is the non-violent preemption of harm. By setting a physical boundary, the practitioner upholds the principle of *ahimsa* (non-harm) for both parties: protecting the victim and preventing the perpetrator from generating even more severe negative karma.

IV.C. Impartial Compassion and Practical Intervention

The exercise of impartial compassion requires a multifaceted view of abusive situations, considering the needs of the abused, the needs of the perpetrator, the institutional needs, and the community needs.¹⁶ When viewing the situation from a long-term perspective of benefit and harm, it becomes clear that true compassion may demand firmness.

For victims of abuse, compassionate response mandates that they must be heard and provided with support, such as therapy or financial compensation for trauma.¹⁶ For perpetrators, compassion requires them to take responsibility and cease harmful actions.¹⁶ If proximity to an abusive person is actively detrimental to a victim's attempt to cultivate compassion or equanimity, then separation is often the best option.²⁰ The victim is not morally deficient if they cannot immediately forgive; their journey is their own, and often, simply being neutral and living one's life apart from the abuser is the most compassionate and wise course of action.²⁰

The internal stability cultivated through *Kṣānti* is the critical prerequisite for this process. It ensures that the external, protective measures (like expulsion or setting boundaries) are taken not from a place of anger, fear, or retaliation, but from a calm, centered space of determined *Karuṇā* and *Prajñā*, thereby ensuring the action remains rooted in the Bodhisattva Vow.⁹

Ethical Matrix of Active Compassion and Boundaries

Type of Harm (Sticks/Stones)	Internal Practice (<i>Kṣānti</i>)	External Response (<i>Prajñā</i> /Wisdom)	Justification (Compassion for Whom?)
Verbal Attack/Insult	Forbearance; managing mental suffering; non-retaliation.	Neutrality; wishing well; separation if proximity is detrimental. ²⁰	Self-compassion; preventing the attacker's immediate karmic escalation. ¹⁹
Physical Threat/Ongoing Abuse	Steadfastness; refusal to be defeated or stopped in practice. ¹⁰	Establishing firm boundaries; active intervention; physical prevention of harm; removal/expulsion. ¹⁷	Compassion for the victim (protection); Compassion for the perpetrator (preventing greater negative karma, such as Slander of the Dharma). ¹⁶

V. Eschatological and Sectarian Interpretations of Suffering

The gravity of the Buddha's instruction on patience is fully understood only when considering the severe karmic consequences attached to slandering the Dharma Teacher, a theme highly elaborated upon in traditions centered on the *Lotus Sūtra*.

V.A. The Doctrine of Slander of the Dharma (*Hōbō*)

In the context of the *Lotus Sūtra*, abuse directed at the votary (the upholder and teacher) is often defined as "slander of the True Dharma".²¹ This offense is depicted as far graver than the Five Cardinal Sins.²¹ The *Sūtra* itself warns that if a person fails to have faith, but instead slanders, despises, hates, envies, or bears grudges against those who uphold the *Sūtra*, they

will fall into the Avīci Hell for a whole kalpa and repeat the cycle for countless kalpas.⁴ Conversely, those who abuse the keeper may be reborn blind, while those who laugh at the votary may suffer from various afflictions, including white leprosy or contorted limbs in successive lives.⁴

The practical function of these extreme eschatological warnings is two-fold: they serve as a powerful cosmic deterrent, attempting to prevent persecution by emphasizing the extreme karmic risk involved, and they simultaneously provide immense reassurance to the Votary, confirming that their suffering is recognized and will be ultimately vindicated by cosmic law.

Slander (*hōbō*) is interpreted broadly, meaning "to turn against" the Law.²¹ Historically, teachers like Nichiren, who heavily relied on the *Lotus Sūtra*, built their preaching career on correcting what they viewed as slander. He opposed rival schools, such as those who claimed the *Lotus Sūtra* was too profound for the degenerate Latter Day of the Law (*mappo*), asserting that such claims constituted slander.²²

V.B. Adversity as Proof of True Practice

For the practitioner, the experience of persecution and physical threat, far from being a sign of failure, becomes proof that one is upholding the ultimate teaching in the defiled age of *mappo*.²³ The Bodhisattvas of the Earth, who emerge to spread the correct teaching during this difficult time, are expected to encounter these trials, which affirm their identity.²⁴

A nuanced understanding of slander within these traditions also reveals that it extends beyond external theological conflict. Slander also applies to internal community discord, specifically "despising, hating, envying and bearing grudges" against fellow members who embrace the *Sūtra*.²⁴ This highlights that the ultimate challenge to *Kṣānti* lies not only in facing external enemies with swords but in overcoming the subtler, insidious forms of egoic attachment and jealousy within the spiritual community itself.

V.C. Tiantai Scholasticism: *Kṣānti* in the Stages of Practice

Tiantai scholastic analysis, guided by the Great Teacher Zhiyi, places the cultivation of *Kṣānti* within the progressive stages of spiritual cultivation. The practice of "having patience" is designated as the ninth stage in a sequence leading to enlightenment.²⁵ At this stage, the practitioner must be "tranquil and undisturbed by favorable or adverse conditions" while

advancing through preliminary grades of practice.²⁵

The placement of *Kṣānti* immediately precedes the final stage, "Free from Attachment to Dharma," where one must release attachment even to the various degrees of faith and conceptual models.²⁵ This framework confirms that the profound patience mandated in Chapter 10 is not an introductory virtue but a highly cultivated, necessary component of rigorous mental discipline that prepares the mind for the ultimate realization of true reality.

VI. Conclusion: The Unassailable Capacity of *Kṣānti*

The instruction given by the Buddha to Medicine-King Bodhisattva in Chapter 10 of the *Lotus Sūtra* defines *Kṣānti* not as passive tolerance or self-abnegation, but as the Perfection of Endurance—an unassailable spiritual capacity rooted in wisdom and the realization of non-dual reality.

The analysis confirms the inherent strength of this practice. *Kṣānti* actively involves training the mind to cultivate deep acceptance of reality (the non-arising of all *dharma*s), using this realization to transform external adversity into spiritual growth.⁶ By maintaining this inner equilibrium, the practitioner is able to withstand both verbal assault and physical threat without succumbing to the poisons of anger and hatred.

The key to non-passive endurance lies in the continuous recollection of the Eternal Buddha ("Think of me!"), which stabilizes the mind in ultimate, protected reality.¹ This stability enables the practitioner to apply wisdom (*Prajñā*), ensuring that compassion (*Karuṇā*) is always protective, never enabling.¹⁹ The ultimate achievement of *Kṣānti* is the transformation of suffering itself—recognizing that even pain, when embraced mindfully, becomes shared with all beings, thus dissolving the self-clinging that constitutes *dukkha*.⁹ The Bodhisattva, empowered by this non-dual comprehension, uses the aggressor's poison as the "medicine" for universal awakening, fulfilling the mandate of the *Lotus Sūtra* through fierce, unwavering forbearance.

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