

**T**HOSE WHO HAVE MADE FORBEARANCE part of their nature and have great powers of judgment can endure anything.

According to tradition, the Bodhisattva once came to the conclusion that worldly life, because it is beset with pettiness, leaves little room for matters of the spirit. It seemed to him that living in society involves one in endless trouble and nuisance. Nor is it conducive to a tranquil state of mind, as one tends to concentrate purely on the material and sensual. Besides, one is exposed to the taints of passion, hatred, delusion, impatience, anger, arrogance, pride, selfishness, and other sins. Worldly life undermines one's sense of shame, one's awareness of what is right, and instead serves as a breeding ground for greed and caprice. On the other hand, he regarded the homeless life of a wanderer as something blessedly free from all these ills, because it does away with possessions and things of the senses. He therefore became an ascetic, noted for his integrity, his learning, his serenity, modesty, and self-possession. Because he never faltered in his vow of forbearance, was always preaching that virtue, and had a way of teaching the Law in the light of it, people disregarded his real name and that of his family and invented the suitable nickname Kṣāntivādin—Preacher of Forbearance. [1] Any outstanding achievement, be it in power, knowledge, or penance, any extravagant devotion to the arts, any quirk of speech, physical peculiarity, or mannerism can earn a man a nickname. [2] So it was with him. Knowing what power there is in the virtue of forbearance and wishing to instill it into others, he used to discourse on the topic constantly and, as a result came to be known as Kṣāntivādin. [3] The great forbear-

ance that was part of his nature and that remained unaltered when others wronged him, together with the remarkable sermons he gave on the subject, earned him the reputation of a saint.

The Noble One lived in a delightfully secluded area of forest. With its abundance of fruit and flowers all the year round and with its pellucid lake adorned with white lotuses and blue water lilies, it was like a lovely park. And by residing there he endowed the place with the sanctity of a hermitage. [4] For, wherever a holy man of outstanding character chooses to settle, the place becomes auspicious and delightful—it becomes an object of pilgrimage, a hermitage. The various forest deities who lived there revered him, and people seeking salvation, lovers of virtue, visited him constantly. And he gratified the gathered crowd by giving sermons on the subject of forbearance, which were a delight both to their ears and to their hearts.

One day the king of those parts<sup>1</sup> thought he would like to have a water party—a particularly attractive idea since it was the height of summer—and with the ladies of his court he went to that same part of the forest, which had all the qualities of a park. [5] Crowded with court beauties, the forest looked as lovely as Nandana, the garden of the gods, but the king seemed to embellish it further as he strolled through it, amusing himself with that gorgeous bevy of wantons. [6] In pavilions and bowers, under trees bright with flowers, and in the water where the lotuses were wide open, he delighted in the spontaneous exuberance of the women. [7] With a smile he watched how gracefully some reacted in their alarm at the bees who were confused by the fragrance of their garlands, their intoxicating drinks, their scented water and ointments. [8] Though their ears were adorned with flowers of fresh beauty, and though their hair was wreathed with many a garland, the women were no more sated with flowers than the king was with their graceful movements. [9] He watched how the young women's eyes settled first on the pavilions, then lingered over the clusters of lotuses, then hovered like bees

about the flowering trees. [10] Even the bold mating calls of the cuckoos, the dancing of the peacocks, and the hum of the bees were outshone by the chatter, the dancing, and the singing of those women. [11] The royal drums sounded like the dull rumble of thunderclouds and roused the peacocks to scream and fan out their tails:<sup>2</sup> they looked like actors practicing their art in the service of their king.

In the company of his women the king thoroughly enjoyed his outing to this park. But the never-ending round of amusements had made him weary, and he was feeling the effects of drink. So he lay down on a magnificent couch in a beautiful pavilion and surrendered to sleep.

When the women noticed that the king was otherwise occupied, they set off together in friendly groups, since the beauties of the forest had captured their hearts and they had not yet seen enough of it. As they rambled about with typical restlessness, the confused jangle of their jewelry mixed with the sound of their chatter. [12] Behind them came their maids, bearing the umbrella, fly whisk, throne, and other insignia of royalty, all brightly decorated with gilt. [13] Deaf to their maids' protestations, the women rushed up and greedily picked from the trees any blossom that was within easy reach, and the tender shoots as well. [14] Though they themselves were covered in flowers woven into wreaths and ornaments, if they encountered on their way a bush with pretty flowers or a tree with trembling buds, they could not pass it by without greedily stripping it.

Now, as the royal ladies wandered through the forest, captivated by its natural beauty, they came upon Kṣāntivādin's hermitage. Those in charge of the women, though aware of the saint's holiness and of the power he had acquired by his austerity, nevertheless dared not prevent them from approaching him, because the king liked to indulge their whims. Besides, the women were by now out of reach. It was as though they were drawn by the beauty of the hermitage, which was further enhanced by its aura of magic power. And no sooner did they enter it than they saw the great saint sit-

ting cross-legged at the foot of a tree. His expression was calm and gentle but of such extreme profundity that he was hard to approach. He seemed positively ablaze with the radiance that came from his austere life.<sup>3</sup> Through constant meditation he contemplated the highest objects and yet had that beauty in repose which is a sign that the senses are unruffled. He was, in fact, like an embodiment of the Law, a blessed and auspicious sight.

The king's women felt the power that he had acquired by his austerity pervading their whole being, and, the moment they saw him, all frivolity, playfulness, and arrogance dropped away. They approached with proper humility and attended upon him reverently, while he greeted them, made them welcome, and gave them as good a reception as any guest could wish. Then, as their enquiries about religion gave him the opportunity, he entertained his guests with a religious address whose point women could easily grasp, illustrating it with plenty of examples.

[15] "Anyone born in the human condition—which is not to be despised—who is of sound constitution and has acute senses, who, though death inevitably awaits him, is yet so feckless that he fails to do a good deed every day, must be under some misconception. [16] A man may have a good pedigree: he may be handsome and in the prime of life; he may be extremely powerful or prosperous. But to secure happiness in the next life none of these avail: he must also have perfected himself in such virtues as generosity and integrity. [17] Even without a good pedigree and other advantages, a man has only to refrain from evil and to possess those virtues of generosity and integrity for happiness to be his in the next life, as surely as rivers flow into the sea in the rainy season. [18] A gold chain only shows that one is rich. The true ornament in this present life, of one who is wellborn, handsome, in the prime of life, exceptionally powerful or wealthy, is a regard for virtue. [19] Trees are adorned with blossom, low-hanging rain clouds with streaks of lightning, lakes with lotuses and their drunken bees, and human beings with virtues that have

been brought to perfection. [20] Whether it be health, age, wealth, beauty or birth, three different degrees can be distinguished: high, low, and middling. This threefold distinction is by no means due to a person's natural disposition, nor to outside influences, but rather to how he has behaved in the past. [21] Once one has realized that this is the immutable law of existence and that life is transient and prone to decay, one should desist from evil and feel disposed to do good. This is the path to fame and happiness. [22] On the other hand, a corrupt heart acts like a fire, burning up both one's own and other people's good completely. If, therefore, one is afraid of evil, one should take pains to avoid such corruption, by cultivating its opposite. [23] Just as a fire, however fierce, is quenched when it meets a large river brimful of water, so a raging heart grows calm if one inclines to forbearance, that mainstay in this life and the next. [24] Practice forbearance and you will avoid evil by cutting it off at the root. The result will be that you arouse no ill feeling because of your friendly disposition. You will be loved and honored for it and thereby win happiness. Finally you will enter heaven as though it were your own home—all because of your attachment to virtue. And what is more, dear ladies, this quality of forbearance is [25] the crowning glory of a fine character, the full flowering of virtue and good reputation. It is purification effected without contact with water, great riches attained by a host of different virtues. [26] It is the pleasing imperturbability of the stouthearted that ever remains impervious to the affronts of others. That which goes by the fair name of Forbearance is the result of special qualities. It is imbued with compassion and benefits everyone. [27] Forbearance is the distinguishing mark of the powerful, the culminating strength of ascetics. A torrent of rain on the raging fire of malice, forbearance allays all ills in this life and the next. [28] The shafts of abuse hurled by the wicked are blunted by the armor of forbearance worn by the good. Mostly they turn into flowers of praise and become part of the garland that celebrates their good name. [29] They say forbearance destroys the delusion that is at odds

with the Law and that it is also a fine means of attaining salvation. Who, then, would choose not to persevere in forbearance, which invariably conduces to happiness?"

Such was the sermon with which the Great One entertained the ladies.

Meanwhile the king had slept off his weariness and awoken. His eyes were heavy with the lingering effects of drink. His thoughts turned to lovemaking, and he frowningly asked the chambermaids where the royal ladies had got to. The maids told him that they were now gracing another part of the forest and were admiring its splendors. On hearing this, the king was eager to watch the ladies at their ease, laughing, chatting, playing, and disporting themselves without constraint. So he rose from his couch and wandered off through the forest with young women carrying his parasol, his fly whisk, his fan, his shawl, and his sword. In his train came those attached to the women's apartments, dressed in their tunics and holding their canes of office. The trail that the young ladies had made in their wayward ramblings was strewn with all sorts of flowers, sprays of blossom, and twigs and was picked out with the red juice of chewed betel. By following it, the king came to the hermitage. But the moment he set eyes on Kṣāntivādin, that noble sage, surrounded by the royal harem, he became extremely angry, partly out of hatred, because he had long borne a grudge against him, and partly because his brain was fuddled with drink and his thoughts were warped by jealousy. And as he was completely lacking in calm judgment, his good breeding and refined manners vanished as his vile temper got the better of him. He broke into a sweat, grew pale, and started to tremble. Under a frowning brow his eyes squinted, rolled, stared, and became bloodshot. His charm and good looks disappeared as he wrung his hands, crushing together the rings on his fingers and shaking his golden bracelets. Then, hurling abuse at the great sage, he said something to this effect: "Huh! [30] Who dares to affront our majesty by setting eyes on our royal ladies? Who is this sly seducer masquerading as a holy man?"

At this the eunuchs grew alarmed and said to the king:

"Your majesty, please, please don't. This is the holy man Kṣāntivādin who has purified his soul with a long course of vows, restraints, and penances." But because his mind was disturbed, the king took no notice of what they said, and he continued: "Good heavens! [31] How long have people been taken in by the hypocrisy of this twisted character who gives himself out to be no ordinary ascetic! Let me be the one to expose the man's deceitful nature, full of guile and duplicity, which he conceals behind the garb of an ascetic." So saying, he snatched his sword from the hand of the female attendant who was carrying it and advanced upon the holy saint as though he were an enemy whom he was determined to kill.

The royal ladies had been informed by their attendants that the king was coming. But when they saw that his gentle mood had been dispelled by anger, they grew sad at heart. Their eyes flickered with distress and agitation, as they stood up and took leave of the great sage. Then they went to meet the king, lifting their cupped hands to their faces in homage. They looked like lotuses in autumn with their buds bursting out from the sheath. [32] But neither their respectful attitude, nor their charm, nor their gentle manners availed to calm his mind, which was enflamed with anger. His violent change of mood was apparent in his rough bearing as, with a fixed scowl and with his sword at the ready, he advanced upon the holy man. Seeing him do so, the court ladies grasped at this last opportunity to plead, gathered around him, and said: "Please, your majesty, please don't do anything rash. This is the blessed Kṣāntivādin." But the king, in the wickedness of his heart, grew all the more angry, feeling sure that the man had already won their affection. His puckered brow and sharp, sidelong glances full of indignation were clear signs of menace that silenced their daring plea. In a rage he turned on those in charge of the womenfolk, and, shaking his head so that his earrings and the tassels of his crown trembled, he said, with a glance at the women: [33] "This man preaches forbearance but does not practice it. As you see, he couldn't resist the desire to have contact with women. [34] His words are one thing, but his actions and his wicked thoughts are an-

other. What is this dissolute character doing sitting in a hermitage, boldly trumpeting aloud his fraudulent vows?" The king was so intensely angry that his heart grew hard, and the court ladies found their request rejected. Since they knew how ferocious he could be, and how inflexible, their spirits sank into despair, and their superintendents, equally anxious and distressed, made signs with their hands to motion them away. Deeply sorry for the holy man, the ladies bowed their heads in shame and retired.

[35] "It is our fault that this mild ascetic, blameless though he be, and famous for his virtues, has incurred the king's displeasure. Who knows what quirky impulse he will follow, what course he will take? [36] Any injury the king may do to the holy man's body, already wasted by penance, would at the same time be a blow to his position as king, to the renown that accrues from it, and to our own innocent hearts." Such was the lament of the royal ladies as they went away, helpless to do anything but sigh deeply and commiserate. The king went up to the saint and threatened him. In his blind fury, he drew his sword to cut him down with his own hand. But seeing the *Great Being* remain calm and impassive, maintaining a cool and unruffled composure even in the face of attack, the king, in an even greater passion, said to him: [37] "What a fine art this fellow has made of playing the monk: he even looks at me just as a holy man would, flaunting his hypocrisy!" The *Bodhisattva's* patience was so habitual that he remained unruffled. After the initial shock, he immediately realized, from this rude outburst, that it was a fit of anger that was making the king behave so unnaturally that he had dropped all semblance of politeness and good manners—and that he had lost the power to discern what was good for him and what was not. Feeling sorry for him, he tried to soothe him by speaking in earnest somewhat as follows: [38] "One meets with disrespectful behavior in life, and, since it may be part of one's fate or even due to some fault of one's own, I do not care about that. But I am sorry not to be giving you the usual welcome due to visitors—not even a greeting. Besides, your highness, [39] it is not fitting for someone such as you,

intent on setting miscreants aright and working for the good of the world, to act in haste. You would do far better to reflect first. [40] A thing can seem bad though in fact it is good. Equally, something bad may appear otherwise. The right way to behave is not immediately obvious. First one must consider the various factors involved. [41] But if he reflects on what to do, arrives at the truth, and then proceeds in the proper manner according to the rules of statecraft, the king will secure great blessings, both spiritual and material, for his people and will not lack them himself. [42] You should therefore purge your mind of rashness and devote yourself to work that will do you credit, because any unwonted breach of conduct among persons of distinction causes great scandal. [43] Since you would not tolerate someone else behaving in a way that would disrupt the forces of good in this hermitage, protected by the might of your arm, how can you yourself, the lord of the land, be ready to do something of which no decent person would approve? [44] If your women happened to come to my retreat together with their attendants, what fault could that be of mine to transform you with rage like this? [45] But just supposing it were my fault, it would, even so, become you better, my lord, to show forbearance in the matter, since forbearance is the greatest mark of distinction in a powerful man: it shows he can maintain his good qualities. [46] Nothing—neither dark-blue earrings whose glint plays upon the cheeks nor crest jewels of varied luster—can adorn kings so well as forbearance. So please do not disdain it. [47] Get rid of your impatience: it can never give solace. Cultivate patience instead, as you do your lands. For kings usually behave toward holy men with noble and tender respect."

Despite the saint's conciliatory words, the king, his judgment still distorted, persisted in his false suspicions and replied: [48] "If you are not merely disguised as an ascetic and are set on keeping your vows of restraint, why are you begging me for safety on the pretext of a sermon on forbearance?" "Your highness," said the *Bodhisattva*, "deign to hear why I have made the attempt. [49] It was to prevent you being branded as the murderer of an innocent brahmin ascetic and thereby

ruining your good name because of me. [50] All beings are doomed to die, in the natural order of things. So I am not frightened of dying, even as I look back on my life. [51] It was to prevent you from infringing the Law, which holds out the reward of happiness, that I commended forbearance to you as a sure means of attaining bliss. [52] I speak of forbearance with joy at having something so incomparable to offer: it is a rich source of other virtues and a sure defence against wrongdoing.” But the king took no notice of the saint’s lofty words—kind and true though they were—and angrily interjected: “Now let us see how devoted you are to forbearance.” So saying, he aimed his sharp sword at the saint’s right hand, which, with its long, delicate fingers upraised, was slightly outstretched in an attempt to restrain him, and he severed it from his arm as a lotus from its stalk.

[53] Even with his right hand cut off, the Bodhisattva, keeping true to his vow of forbearance, felt less pain than sorrow as he envisaged the frightful and inexorable suffering in store for the pampered king who had cut it off. “Alas!” he thought. “He has gone beyond the point where he can still be helped and is no longer amenable to gentle persuasion.” He felt sorry for the king, as for a sick man deserted by his doctors, and kept silent. But the king continued his threats. [54] “Unless you give up your hypocritical austerities and this mischievous charlatanism, I shall go on hacking at your body till it finally succumbs.” But the Bodhisattva said nothing to him, knowing that he could not be won over and that he was set in his obstinacy. The king then duly proceeded to lop off his other hand, both his arms, his ears and nose, and his feet. [55] But as the sharp sword fell upon his body, that perfect saint felt neither grief nor anger: he knew full well that the mechanism of the body must have an end, and he was well used to exercising forbearance toward people. [56] Even as he silently looked on while his body was hacked to pieces, his spirit remained unbroken in its constant forbearance. And, because of his kindly disposition, he felt no sorrow. But to see the king fallen from the path of virtue caused him anguish. [57] Compassionate souls, who have great powers of judgment, are not so

much troubled by the hardship they themselves experience as by that which befalls others. [58] But, the moment the king had committed his foul deed, he was attacked by a burning fever, and no sooner had he left the bounds of the wood than the earth gaped wide and swallowed him up. The ground opened up with a terrific noise and was ablaze with leaping flames. As the king sank into it, a great din arose on all sides, and the courtiers were shaken and bewildered. The king’s ministers knew the great power of the saint’s spiritual energy and realized that it was thanks to it that the king had sunk below ground. They became terribly afraid that the holy man would shortly burn up the whole country because of the king’s crime. Accordingly they approached him, bowed low, and, with hands held out, begging his pardon, made an appeal: [59] “The king is quite thoughtless. He is the one who in his blindness has reduced you to your present state. Let him alone serve as fuel for the fire of your curse. Do not burn down this city. [60] Please do not burn the innocent people in it: the women and children, the old, the sick, the holy men and the poor. You are on the side of the good. So kindly preserve both the king’s country and your own religious merit.” The Bodhisattva reassured them, telling them to have no fears. [61] “As to him who has cut off my ears and nose, hands and feet with his sword—maiming an innocent being who lives in the forest—[62] how could someone such as I wish him any ill at all? Long live the king! And may no evil befall him. [63] A being oppressed with death, sickness, and sorrow, obsessed with greed and hate, eaten up by his own evil life, is someone who deserves pity. How could anyone be angry with such a person? [64] But were such a thing feasible, I would it were I who suffered retribution for the king’s crime, since the taste of suffering, however brief, is intolerably bitter for those who are accustomed to an easy life. [65] Now, as I cannot save the king who is ruining his own well-being in this way, why should I compensate for my own helplessness by harboring malice against him? [66] Quite apart from the king, every born creature has to suffer death and its concomitant ills. In such circumstances the really unendurable thing is the fact of

birth. Without that, what suffering can there be, and from what source? [67] Through countless eons this wretched body has perished time and again in a long succession of lives. Why give up being patient now, simply because it has been maimed? It would be like giving up a precious jewel in exchange for a piece of straw. [68] Living in the forest, keeping the vows of an ascetic, preaching forbearance, and soon to die, why should I want to lose my patience? So do not fear: I wish you well. Now go.”

[69] In this way the saint instructed the ministers and at the same time initiated them as disciples in goodness. He himself remained resolute to the end, relying as he did on his forbearance. Then, leaving his earthly abode, he mounted up to heaven.

So, then—those who have made forbearance part of their nature and have great powers of judgment can endure anything.