

The Elimination of Anger

as edited by

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Ven. Piyatissa Mahathera in *The Elimination of Anger* (1994) has written:

“It is no wonder if we, at times, in our everyday lives, feel angry with somebody about something. But we should try to curb it at the very moment it has arisen.

There are ways to curb and control anger:

“**The first method** is to recollect the teachings of the Buddha concerning the disadvantages of an angry temper. Here is one of his admonitions:

Suppose some bandits catch one of you and sever his body limb from limb with a two-handed saw, and if he should feel angry thereby even at that moment, he is no follower of my teaching.

Kakacupama Sutta, Majjhima Nikaya 21

“Again:

As a log from a pyre, burnt at both ends and fouled in the middle, serves neither for firewood in the village nor for timber in the forest, so is such a wrathful man.

Anguttara Nikaya II, 95

“Further, we may consider the Buddha's advice ... in the Dhammapada:

He abused me, he beat me, he defeated me, he robbed me of my property. Whosoever harbors such thoughts will never be able to still their enmity.

Never indeed is hatred stilled by hatred; it will only be stilled by non-hatred__this is an eternal law.

Dhp., vv. 4-5

Do not speak harshly to anyone. Those who are harshly spoken to might retaliate against you. Angry words hurt other's feelings, even blows may overtake you in return.

Dhp., v. 133

Forbearance is the highest observance. Patience is the highest virtue. So the Buddhas say.

Dhp., v. 184

Let a man remove his anger. Let him root out his pride. Let him overcome all fetters of passions. No sufferings overtake him who neither clings to mind-and-body nor claims anything of the world.

Dhp., v. 221

Conquer anger by non-anger. Conquer evil by good. Conquer miserliness by liberality. Conquer a liar by truthfulness.

Dhp., v. 223

Guard your mind against an outburst of wrong feelings. Keep your mind controlled. Renouncing evil thoughts, develop purity of mind.

Dhp., v. 233

“If by contemplating the advice of the Buddha in this way one cannot curb his anger, then --

Let him **try a second method.**

“Naturally, any bad person may possess some good quality. Some men are evil in mind and speak in deceptive language or slyly perform their deeds in an unsuspecting manner. Some men are coarse only in their language but not in their mind or deeds. Some men are coarse and cruel in their deeds but neither in their speech nor in their mind. Some are soft and kind in mind, speech and deed as well.

“When we feel angry with any person, we should try to find some good in him, in his way of thinking, in his way of speaking, or in his way of acting. If we find some redeeming quality in him, we should ponder its value and ignore his bad qualities as natural weaknesses. Whilst we think thus, our minds will soften, and we may even feel kindly towards that person. If we develop this way of thinking, we may curb or eliminate our anger towards him.

“At times, this second method may not be successful, and then –

We shall have to **try the third method**, which entails reflecting thus:

He has done some wrong to me and in so doing has spoiled his mind. Then why should I spoil or impair my own mind because of his foolishness? Sometimes I ignore support or help offered by my relatives; sometimes their tears [are] even shed because of my activities. Being a person of such type myself, why should I not therefore ignore that foolish man's deed?

He has done that wrong, being subject to anger, should I too follow him, making my mind subject to anger? Is it not foolish to imitate him? He harboring his hatred destroys himself internally. Why should I, on his account, destroy my reputation?

All things are momentary. Both his mind and body are momentary too. The thoughts and the body with which the wrong was done to me are not now existing. What I call the same man now are the thoughts and physical parts which are different from the earlier ones that harmed me although belonging to the same psycho-physical process. Thus, one thought together with one mass of physical parts did me some wrong, and vanished there and then, giving place to succeeding thoughts and material parts to appear. So with which am I getting angry? With the vanished and disappeared thoughts and physical parts or with the thoughts and material parts which do not do any wrong now? Should I get angry with one thing which is innocent whereas another thing has done me wrong and vanished?

The so-called 'I' is not the same for two consecutive moments. At the moment the wrong was done there was another thought and another mass of molecules which were regarded as 'I,' whereas what are regarded as 'I' at the present moment are a different thought and collection of molecules, though belonging to the same process. Thus some other being did wrong to someone else and another gets angry with another. Is this not a ridiculous situation?

“If we scrutinize the exact nature of our life and its happenings in this manner, our anger might subside or vanish there and then.

“There is **yet another way, too**, to eliminate upsurging anger. Suppose we think of someone who has done us wrong. On such occasions we should remember that we suffer harm or loss as a result of our own previous *kamma* ...

So it is I who am responsible for this harm or loss and not anybody

else. And, now, while I am suffering the result of past kamma, if I, on account of this, should get angry and do any harm to him, by that do I accumulate much more unwholesome kamma which would bring me correspondingly unwholesome results. If I recall to mind this law of kamma, my anger may subside immediately.

We can consider such a situation **in yet one final way too.**

“...The Buddha related stories of his past lives as illustrations to teach virtue.

At one time the Bodhisatta was born the son of a king named Mahapatapa.

The child was named Culla Dhammapala. One day the Queen sat on a chair fondling her child and did not notice the King passing by.

The King thought the Queen was so proud of her child as not to get up from her chair when he passed that way.

So the King grew angry and sent for the executioner. When he came, the King ordered him to snatch the child from the Queen's arms and cut off his hands, feet and head, which he did instantly.

“The child, our Bodhisatta, suffered that with patience and did not grow ill-tempered or relinquish his impartial love for his cruel father, lamenting mother and the executioner.

So far had he matured in the practice of forbearance and loving-kindness..

Reference

Piyadassi Maha Thera. 1994. The Elimination of Anger. Kandy: Buddhist Publication Society.

