

Finding Calm in the Storm

Weekend Course Practices

Practice #1: Becoming Aware of the Arising of Anger

Use the following questions to help you increase your awareness of when anger arises and the various elements involved in each occurrence.

The First Arrow

1. What is the object, person, situation, etc., that is triggering your anger?
2. Is this something that you have encountered previously?
3. What specifically is it about that object which makes it a trigger for you?
4. Do you think it is also a trigger for everyone else?
5. What would it look like for you to avoid the object?

The Second Arrow

1. What are the thoughts that followed upon experiencing the trigger?
2. If you have encountered this situation before, are the thoughts you now have similar to what you had on the other occasion(s)?
3. Why do you think that you are having those thoughts?
4. Do you think everyone else would have similar thoughts?
5. If your thoughts subsequently led to reacting to the situation or object (i.e., the third arrow), what factors played a role in that reaction?
6. Can you imagine responding more constructively to the situation?
7. What thoughts might support reducing anger and having a more beneficial outcome to the situation?

Practice #2: Recollecting the Detrimental Effects of Anger

Reflect upon your own experiences with anger and ask yourself the following questions to increase your awareness of the disadvantages of anger and thus encourage you to practice patience. Examine whether you are able to bring these faults to mind as a deterrent to current situations in which you might generate anger.

Detrimental Effects for Oneself

1. When you have anger in your mind, does it make you feel happy or miserable?
2. When you have anger, does your mind feel at peace and in control, or disturbed and running wild?
3. How does having anger make you feel physically? What effects does it have on your health?
4. Have thoughts of anger ever kept you from sleep, ruined your appetite, or adversely impacted some other aspect of your life?
5. When anger is in your mind, are you able to communicate your thoughts calmly, clearly and effectively?
6. When you speak or act from your anger, do you later feel embarrassed, have regret for what you did, feel guilty about your actions, or have self-hatred?
7. Does your anger ever result in you being shunned by others or experiencing more loneliness in your life?
8. Has prolonged anger ever made you bitter or resentful towards others?
9. Thinking about how others appear to you when they are expressing their anger, how do you think you appear at similar times?
10. In general, does anger resolve the problem or situation that provoked it, or does it complicate and compound the suffering you were trying to avoid?

Detrimental Effects for Others

1. When you have anger in your mind, how does it make others around you feel?
2. When you express yourself verbally or physically with anger, what effect does that have on others who witness it?

3. Do others who are the object of your anger tend to be responsive and agreeable, or do they get hurt by what you did, become inflamed with anger themselves and possibly even retaliate?
4. Has your expressing anger ever resulted in having ongoing conflict with others, creating damage to a relationship or even terminating a friendship?
5. Has anger become a habitual pattern in a close relationship you have with another, to the point where it becomes commonplace or routine, and is simply accepted as part of that relationship?
6. Have you ever physically harmed others or damaged their possessions due to anger?
7. Can you find any real benefits for others from your mind of anger?

Practice #3: Using Meditation and Mindfulness to Observe Anger

Take some quiet time to sit and reflect upon one or more of your own past episodes of anger and ask yourself the following questions in order to (1) increase your awareness of the sensations that arise as you experience the spectrum of anger, (2) develop the ability to wait to respond appropriately, and (3) explore the potential to reframe the situation through changing your thoughts at that time. Then, when you encounter something that could trigger your anger, notice when you are able to hold that awareness of what's happening, to then wait to respond rather than habitually reacting, and also to eventually consider that it's possible to reframe your thoughts so you can consequently respond with more beneficial words and actions.

Increasing the Habit of Awareness

1. In recalling that episode, when did you first recognize that anger was being triggered?
2. What physical and mental sensations arose at that time?
3. Can you detect with more precision how the feelings of hurt and anger changed throughout that episode?
4. At any point during the episode, was there also present a desire to change your mind or to do something different?

Developing the Habit of Waiting

1. What would it have been like for you to step back, breathe, and simply wait to respond to your feelings?
2. Are there any techniques you've found that inspire you to avoid your immediate reaction and to wait before responding to a situation?

Exploring the Habit of Reframing

1. Can you see that in that episode you had the potential to choose to see things differently and to change your response?
2. Looking back on that episode, how could you reframe things now so that your anger might be lessened or avoided?
3. On those occasions when you have been able to change your thoughts when anger arose, what happened? What did you think and how did you then act?

Practice #4: Accepting the Nature of Things

When you experience something that gets you upset, ask yourself the following questions to increase your acceptance of the nature of things and see if it has an effect on diminishing your reaction of anger.

Examining the Reality of the Situation

1. Can you accept the reality of the event and see clearly what is happening?
2. Is it something that you can change? If so, what might you do to facilitate that change rather than getting stuck with anger or frustration?
3. If it is something that you cannot change, can you see the uselessness in becoming agitated and simply let it go by relaxing the mind?

Recalling Change and the Impermanence of Things

1. At this moment, are you being taken off guard because of not being aware of the fact that everything changes and that your expectations to the contrary aren't in line with reality?
2. In terms of what you are experiencing and how you are feeling, are you exaggerating the importance of what is happening to you at this moment?
3. Does it help lessen your anger by seeing that the situation is going to change, and that in hours, days, months or years, it might even seem quite insignificant?

Seeing the Nature of Existence

1. To what extent have you accepted that having problems such as this and being let down are part of life, that they are part of the human condition?
2. Are you and your situation really that different from other people and what they experience?
3. If others are involved in your situation, are you expecting them to behave in ways that are beyond their capability? Can you see that they might be overpowered by their own negative emotions, just like you?

Looking at the Situation from a Wider Perspective

1. Are you seeing your problem or difficulty only from the perspective of your self-centered attitude and are therefore not aware of others?

2. Does it help to recall the various experiences that other people have in their lives, especially those who are in situations with much greater suffering than yours?
3. Does holding an awareness of others and seeing your own suffering as relatively minor help you to lessen the thoughts of anger and allow you to bear what is difficult for you at this time?
4. If you have some conviction in karma, then does that understanding help you to see that the situation is simply the consequence of your own past actions that were done out of confusion?
5. Within the understanding of karma, can you see that creating the causes for future suffering by reacting with anger is contrary to your own wish to not suffer?

Practice #5: Seeing Others' Viewpoints and Examining How Situations Are Co-Created

When situations arise in which the actions or words of others are causing you to get upset, ask yourself the following questions to increase your awareness of the others' viewpoints and the various factors, including possibly yourself, that are involved in creating the situation. See if this has an effect on diminishing your reaction of anger and opening up to resolution.

Seeing Things from Others' Points of View

1. Are you truly clear on what the main issue is in this conflict with another?
2. Do you know for sure what motivation is behind what they are saying or doing?
3. Can you see how this situation might appear to them at this time and what their needs are?
4. Do you think that there may be factors in their upbringing, in society at large, in their culture, or in their personal lives that might be informing how they see this situation?
5. If you aren't able to know the above for yourself, is it possible to ask the other person to clarify their needs and concerns, and for you to listen to them?

Understanding the Factors Involved in the Situation

1. Is it possible that you are playing some role in creating this situation with the other person? Are your behaviors or views involved in the conflict?
2. If so, can you take responsibility for those factors from your own side and act accordingly in response to the situation, and do so without blaming yourself or feeling guilty?
3. Can you determine other factors that may be contributing to the situation?
4. Which factors are under your control, which are under the control of the other person, and which can neither of you control?

Practice #6: Cultivating Compassion and Kindness

When situations arise in which the actions or words of others are causing you to get upset, ask yourself the following questions to increase your capacity to view the other person with compassion and kindness. Examine if this has an effect on diminishing your reaction of anger and opening up to resolution.

Examining the Nature of Others and Generating Compassion

1. Is it in the nature of this person to harm me and others? If so, is there any use in having anger towards them? Wouldn't that be like having anger at fire for its nature of burning?
2. If it is not in the nature of this person to harm, why make yourself miserable getting angry at what is not really them? Since this behavior is extraneous to them, does it make sense to have anger towards the person?
3. In the light of seeing this person as someone whose actions are motivated by their destructive emotions and disturbing attitudes, can you generate some compassion towards them, wishing them to be free from those mental states and from the suffering that they bring?
4. Since you yourself have changed for the better over time, can you see the possibility that this person might also improve and cease their harmful actions? How does that make you feel about them?

Responding to Others with Kindness

1. Is there the possibility of responding to this person with kindness? What does that look like in terms of what you would say or do differently?
2. Is there something in your view of this person that is blocking them out of your heart at this time?
3. Does recalling that this person wants to be happy and doesn't want to suffer help you to feel a common bond with them and thus respond with kindness?
4. By seeing that your own well-being depends on the kindness of others such as this person, does it help you to feel more affection and gratitude towards them?

Practice #7: Using the Wisdom of Emptiness

When situations arise in which you experience something that could trigger anger, ask yourself the following questions to bring the wisdom of emptiness into your awareness. Examine if this has an effect on diminishing your reaction of anger.

Examining the Ultimate Nature of Things

1. Is it possible to see how you are not only exaggerating the unpleasant aspects of the situation but are also projecting the deeper distortion of inherent existence onto yourself and everything involved?
2. In particular, how does the “I” appear at this time when your anger is being triggered?
3. Who is this “I” that hurts so much at this time? Who is this “I” that feels that it is unjust that this is happening to me?
4. Can you find such a concrete and solid “I”? Is it the body? Is it the mind? Is it something other than those?
5. And how do I know that I am hurt at this time? Is there something more than the feeling of being hurt that causes me to think “I am hurt.”?
6. Is it not true that it’s only because the mind or the body is hurt that I then think “I am hurt.”?
7. Through these investigations, since you can see that the “I” does not stand on its own, can you arrive at an open state focused on the lack of this concrete, independent “I” who needs to be defended and whose happiness is most important?