

The Elimination of Anger

The ultimate goal of Buddhism is the deathless condition of Nibbana, the sole reality. Hence, one who aspires to that state should renounce mundane pursuits and attachments, which are ephemeral, for the sake of that reality. But there are very few who are sufficiently mature to develop themselves to achieve that state in this very life. Thus the Buddha does not force the life of renunciation upon those who lack the spiritual capacity to embark upon the higher life.

Therefore, one should follow the path of mundane advantage which is twofold, namely, the advantage obtainable here in this very life and the advantage obtainable in future lives, as steps on the path to the spiritual life. Although one may enjoy the pleasures of life, one must regard one's body as an instrument with which to practice virtue for one's own and other's benefit; in short, one should live a useful life of moral integrity, a life of simplicity and paucity of wants.

As regards acquisition of wealth, the Buddha said: "One must be diligent and energetic," and as regards the safeguarding of one's wealth, "one must be mindful and economical."

It is not impossible that even the life of such a man may be somehow or other disturbed and harassed as a result of the actions of "unskillful" men. Although this might induce him to abandon his chosen path, it is at such times that one must not forget the steps to be taken for the purpose of establishing peace. According to the teaching of the Buddha this includes the reflection: "Others may be harmful, but I shall be harmless, thus should I train myself." We must not forget that the whole spirit of Buddhism is one of pacification. In the calm and placid atmosphere of the Buddha's teaching there is every chance, every possibility, of removing hatred, jealousy and violence from our mind.

It is no wonder if we, at times, in our everyday life, feel angry with somebody about something. But we should not allow this feeling to reside in our mind. We should try to curb it at the very moment it has arisen. Generally there are eight ways to curb or control our anger.

1. Recollect the teachings of the Buddha.

The first method is to recollect the teachings of the Buddha. On very many occasions the Buddha explained 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 to be found 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.

— *Dhammapada*, 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.

— *Dhammapada*, v. 133

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

— *Dhammapada*, 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.

— *Dhammapada*, v. 221

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

— *Dhammapada*, v. 223

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

— *Dhammapada*, v. 233

If by contemplating the advice of the Buddha in this way one cannot curb his anger, then let him try the second method.

2. Find some redeeming quality or goodness in the offending person.

Naturally, any bad person may possess some good quality. Some men are evil in mind but 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 out some good in him, either in his way of thinking, or 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 that are to be found in everyone. Whilst we think thus, our mind will soften and we may even feel kindly towards that person. If we develop this way of thinking we will be able to curb or eliminate our anger towards him.

At times, this method may not be successful and we shall then have to try the third method.

3. Scrutinize the exact nature of our life and its happenings.

Basically, this 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 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.

4. *Remember that we suffer harm or loss as a result of our previous kamma.*

There is another way, too, to eliminate upsurging anger. Suppose we think of someone who has done wrong to us. On such occasions we should remember that we suffer harm or loss as a result of our previous *kamma*. Even if others were angry with us, they could not harm us if there were no latent force of past unwholesome *kamma* committed by us which took advantage of this opportunity to arouse our adversary. So it is I who am responsible for this harm or loss and not anybody else. And at the same time, 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 we recall to mind this law of *kamma*, our anger may subside immediately.

5. Reflect on the previous lives of the Buddha and his forbearance.

We can consider such a situation in another way too. We as the followers of Buddha believe that our Bodhisatta passed through incalculable numbers of lives practicing virtues before he attained Buddhahood. The Buddha related the history of some of his past lives as illustrations to teach us how he practiced these virtues. The lives of the prince Dhammapala and the ascetic Khantivadi are most illustrative and draw our attention.

At one time the Bodhisatta had been born as the son of a certain 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 even when she saw that her lord the King passed that way. So he grew angry and immediately sent for the executioner. When he came, the King ordered him to snatch the child from the Queen's arms and cut his hands, feet and head off, which he did instantly. The child, our Bodhisatta, suffered all that with extreme 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 at that time.

At another time, our Bodhisatta was an ascetic well-known for his developed virtue of forbearance and consequently people named him Khantivadi, the preacher of forbearance. One day he visited Benares and took his lodgings at the royal pleasure grove. Meanwhile, the King passed that way with his harem and, seeing the ascetic seated under a tree, asked what virtue he was practicing, to which the ascetic replied that of forbearance. The King was a materialist who regarded the practice of virtue to be humbug. So, hearing the words of the ascetic, he sent for the executioner and ordered him to cut off his hands and feet and questioned the ascetic as to whether he could hold to forbearance at the severing of his limbs. The ascetic did not feel ill-tempered but even at that time he lay down extending his loving-kindness and holding his forbearance undiminished. He spoke to the King in reply to the effect that his forbearance and other virtues were not in his limbs but in his mind. The King, being unsuccessful in his attempts to disturb the ascetic's feelings, grew angrier and kicked the stomach of the ascetic with his heel and went away. Meanwhile, the King's minister came over and, seeing what had happened, bowed before the dying ascetic and begged him saying:

"Venerable one, none of us agreed to this cruel act of the King and we are all sorrowing over what has been done to you by that devilish man. We ask you to curse the King but not us." At this the ascetic said: "May that king who has caused my hands and feet to be cut off, as well as you, live long in happiness. Persons who practice virtues like me never get angry." Saying this, he breathed his last.

Since the Buddha in his past lives, while still imperfect like us, practiced forbearance and loving-kindness to such a high extent, why cannot we follow his example?

When we remember and think of similar noble characters of great souls, we should be able to bear any harm, unmoved by anger.

6. Think about the previous lives of our enemy.

Or, if we consider the nature of the round of rebirths in this beginningless and infinite universe, we will be able to curb our upspringing anger. For, it is said by the Buddha: "It is not easy to find a being who has not been your mother, your father, your brother, sister, son or daughter." Hence with regard to the person whom we have now taken for our enemy, we should think: "This one now, in the past has been my mother who bore me in her womb for nine months, gave birth to me, unweariedly cleansed me of impurities, hid me in her bosom, carried me on her hip and nourished me. This one was my father in another life and spent time and energy, engaged in toilsome business, with a view to maintaining me, even sacrificing life for my sake," and so on. When we ponder over these facts, it should be expected that our arisen anger against our enemy will subside.

7. Reflect on the advantages of loving-kindness.

And further, we should reflect on the advantages of the development of mind through the practice of extending loving-kindness. For, the Buddha has expounded to us eleven advantages to be looked for from its development. What are the eleven? The person who fully develops loving-kindness (1) sleeps happily. He (2) wakes happily. He (3) experiences no evil dreams. He (4) is beloved of men. He (5) is beloved even of non-human beings. He (6) is protected by the gods. He (7) can be harmed neither by fire, poison or a weapon. He (8) is quickly composed in mind. He (9) is serene in his complexion. He (10) passes away unbewildered at the moment of his death. If he can go no further along the path of realization, he (11) will at least be reborn in the heavenly abode of the Brahma Devas.

8. *Extend loving-kindness towards any and every being in the world.*

So, by every similar and possible way should we endeavor to quench our anger and at last be able to extend our loving-kindness towards any and every being in the world.

When we are able to curb our anger and control our mind, we should extend from ourselves boundless love as far as we can imagine throughout every direction pervading and touching all living beings with loving-kindness. We should practice this meditation every day at regular times without any break. As a result of this practice, we will be able, one day, to attain to the *jhanas* or meditative absorptions, comprising four grades which entail the control of sensuality, ill-will and many other passions, bringing at the same time purity, serenity and peace of mind.

Article by Ven. K. Piyatissa Thera

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