

Untying The Knot of Anger...A step towards wisdom

Faced with possible threats or experiences of hurt or pain we encounter a combination of mental and physical events we call anger.

In anger we attempt to fight off threats or painful emotions.

Through learning and conditioning and habit we take fight/flight mind/body reactions and we add a layer of narrative and beliefs with which we make an appraisal or a prediction about a situation that has already occurred or that will happen. Appearance tells us that we are angry in the moment, but we are usually angry about the past or about the anticipated future in which the event may repeat. 1

As a basis for mindfulness practice in general-anger is a temporary energy and is not solid (is groundless, empty, has no substantial reality or permanence.) The thoughts, associated narratives, mind-body reactions and appraisals are not facts. Through awareness we can observe that these non-solid energies are temporary and that in the space and presence of awareness, these energies are short lived. Teachers often ask us to ask ourselves, "What is this?" of the phenomena. 2 The response provides the R step (Recognition) in the well known practice of R.A.I.N.

The answer may often be the recognition of the momentary experience of suffering. In mindfulness practice-awareness of suffering suggests compassion as the antidote. To two main parts of a compassion practice are to recognize the pain and suffering in oneself or others and then to take action to ease that suffering as is possible. 3

Practice Strategies toward Skillful Means with Anger

Ask during practice: "What is this?" (Recognition)

Label the emotion: This is anger. Gradually associative links clarify that beneath anger is fear and beneath fear, a fixed belief.

Ask during practice: "Am I in danger at this moment?" or "What belief connects to this fear?" During the phase of awareness practice that yields Recognition we can often find that the root of the belief is a thought/story/narrative. It is such recognition that reveals a gap (sense of duality) between our actual experience (process) and the commentary and content of the attached story. The shorter and more elegant way of expressing the above mentioned recognition is that "thoughts are not facts." (Thoughts have no substantial reality.) 4

During mindful breath work, the breath, the body and the approach with curiosity allows for a developing scope of perspective, an increase in consciousness. As you rest your attention on your breathing, take a few mindful breaths, noticing the different sensations as the in-breath and the out-breath come and go in various places in your body.

You don't have to do anything special. Just relax and trust your awareness to notice. Allow yourself to rest in that awareness, without judging yourself or needing to fix anything. Allow your questions and curiosity to produce responses.

Since anger is an expression of aversion to and rejection of what is unfolding in the present moment-focusing your awareness allows insights into what is bringing suffering. "...If we can allow ourselves to feel vulnerable and insecure when that is what is arising, if we can be totally ourselves without any pretense, we will find a great inner strength. It is just that moment when we acknowledge our shadow side that we have kept hidden and under wraps, that our armor loosens. It becomes possible to breathe a little more freely. We begin to open the door of compassion, for ourselves and for the human condition." 5

When you recognize that suffering is present when you feel aversion and anger, you can choose kindness and compassion instead of self-criticism and instead of dislike for your experience.

Name the anger, the aversion, the suffering as, "here now." Best you can, then, as above mentioned, soften into the moment. In this way the symptom of tension and the energy of anger can gradually become signals for turning in toward the difficulty and responding compassionately.

Breathing mindfully, trust your capacity to hold the suffering of anger, of ill-will, and of yourself in compassion and in awareness.

This kind of response can be made in the same way that you would extend presence and compassion to a loved one in pain.

Practice self-compassion, softly considering, "May I be at ease," or "may I learn to step toward wisdom," or "may my kindness in all things begin here."

Allow for your basic goodness to open up a way to proceed. Each episode of such practice can prepare us gradually with skills. We may discover that anger is an opportunity for training as well as for gaining merit-if we practice with awareness. Compassion via mindfulness practice can help untie the knot of anger and help us move toward learning, the patient result of wisdom.

1 Dr. Weisinger's Anger work-out Book; steps-by step methods for greater productivity, better relationships, healthier life, Hendrie D. Weisinger, Ph.D., Quill Books, 1985, New York

2 Being Zen; Bringing Meditation to Life, Ezra Bayda, Shambhala Publications, 2003, Boston & London

3 Mindful Compassion; how the science of compassion can help you understand your emotions, live in the present, and connect deeply with others, Paul Gilbert, Ph.D. and Choden, New Harbinger Publications, Inc., 2014, Oakland, CA

4 Mindfulness Based Cognitive Therapy for Depression; A new approach to preventing Relapse, Zindel V. Segal, J. Mark G. Williams, John D. Teasdale, The Guilford Press, 2002, New York & London

5 Seeking the Heart of Wisdom; The path of insight meditation, Joseph Goldstein & Jack Kornfield, Shambhala Publications, Inc., 1987, Boston & London

Compiled and configured with your well-being in mind,

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