

## The Best Ways to Manage Anger in accordance with the Buddhist Perspective

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### ABSTRACT

There exist three fundamental roots of issues within our existence. These roots are identified as greed, hatred, and delusion, which serve as the foundation of unwholesome kamma. Consequently, the emergence of these unfavorable actions and challenges can be directly attributed to the presence of greed, hatred, and delusion. The state of greed, along with that of hatred, is consistently accompanied by a veil of ignorance or delusion. The subject matter being addressed in this particular piece pertains to the effective Management of Anger. Accordingly, I shall delineate various strategies aimed at managing and diminishing feelings of anger. Within the realm of Buddhism, a plethora of methodologies exist for the purpose of managing and eradicating Dosa-anger, which constitutes one of the Cetasikas among the 14 unwholesome mental factors that are intricately linked with the 12 categories of unwholesome Cittas, serving the needs of both individuals and society at large who harbor a desire to evade problems, adversities, tensions, anxieties, and apprehensions. The article is structured into three distinct sections; namely the examination of the essence of anger, the exploration of its underlying causes, and the presentation of strategies for anger management, thereby encapsulating the primary objective of this article, which is to foster a comprehensive understanding of the intrinsic nature, causal factors, and effective management techniques related to anger, thereby prompting both individuals and society, regardless of religious

affiliation, to exercise a discerning eye towards achieving the desired quality of life. It has come to our attention that the strategies outlined within this article, in conjunction with those previously mentioned, are in alignment with the Buddhist teachings on anger management, notwithstanding our collective aspiration to manifest an existence reflective of an ideal state.

**Keywords:** The Best Ways; Anger Management.

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## Introduction

Everybody in this world wants to live without having problems caused by greed, hatred, and delusion and wants to gain peaceful and happy life. It is important to know and understand these demeritorious actions caused by greed, hatred, and delusion if we are to make an end of suffering and attain true peace and happiness. In Buddhism, there are many ways to manage and remove anger for an individual and society that do not would like to live with any problems, troubles, stresses, fears, and worries. Although we want to live that ideal life, we seem to pay no attention to the way to practice in order to attain them at all. When most people confront with some kinds of problems in their daily life, they do not emphasize in search of the root of problems that “Where did they come from? Why did they come to us?”. And they do not wish to find the solution of problems. When most of the people confront the problem, they used to solve it with the ways they found out. Some of the ways they used are right and some are wrong because of solving problems with anger. That is why; the things we expect are beyond us. As we know, the whole world has been crying out for peace while we ourselves have been creating violence, conflicts and waging a war. If we want to live in peace, stop creating such kinds of evil things, stop getting angry.

## The Nature of Anger

Anger has the nature of savageness. Its function is to spread or burn up its own support. It is manifested as persecuting. Its proximate cause is the grounds for annoyance<sup>1</sup>. It should be regarded as being like state urine mixed with poison<sup>2</sup>.

In Pāḷi term, Dosa can be translated as anger, hatred, resentment, defect, fault, blemish, dislike, disgust, grudge, ill-will, aversion, wrath, offence, guilt, sin, crime, fear, etc. Even though there are various translations, I will be intent to mention the meaning of Dosa here is Anger, Hatred, and Resentment.<sup>3</sup> Dosa is one of Cetasikas in 14 unwholesome mental factors associated with 12 types of unwholesome Cittas. In 12 unwholesome Cittas, there are two hatred-rooted Cittas. According to 14 unwholesome Cetasikas, Dosa can be divided into four: anger, envy, jealousy and remorse. These four mental factors are concluded into hatred

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<sup>1</sup>. DhsA. 258; Doso caṇḍikkalakkhaṇo, visappanaraso vā attano nissayadaha-naraso, dussanapaccupaṭṭhāno, āghātavatthupadaṭṭhāno.

<sup>2</sup>. Vsm. 478; Visasaṃsaṭṭhapūtimuttaṃ viya daṭṭhabbo.

<sup>3</sup>. Nyanaponika Thera, The Roots of Good and Evil, (Kandy, Sri Lanka: BPS, 1986), p. 21.

because they arise depending on two hatred-rooted consciousnesses. When we analyze the ten defilements, we can see only hatred instead of four. They have the same nature that ferocity. That's why, in ten kilesās, only dosa is taken as hatred defilement.<sup>4</sup>

What is anger? We all know what anger is, and we have all felt it: whether as a fleeting annoyance or full-fledged rage. Anger is a completely normal, usually, healthy, human emotion. But when it gets out of control and turns destructive, it can lead to problems at work, in our personal relationships, and in the overall quality of our life. And it can make us feel as though you are at the mercy of an unpredictable and powerful emotion. What is anger? Anger is an emotional state that varies in intensity from mild irritation to intense fury and rage. The mild state of anger is usually not harmful, as we all go through it almost every week. Anger becomes a problem when it is in a state of fury and rage. This is because it can cause physical harm, among other things. Anger can be caused by both external and internal events. You could be angry at a specific person or event or our anger could be caused by worrying about our personal problems. Memories of traumatic or enraging events can also trigger angry feelings.<sup>5</sup>

### The Causes of Anger

The cause of anger is craving or grasping and our belief in a self. On the surface, this may not be very apparent. Most Buddhists are aware that intense craving leads to attachment and greed. However, intense craving also leads to ill-will, anger and hatred that can make killing or working against living beings.<sup>6</sup>

In *Aṅguttara Nikāya*, there are ten grounds for Resentment which is called *Āghātavatthu* that is proximate cause for annoyance or causes of anger. Here, ground means reason or cause therefore these are also the Causes of Anger. These ten grounds are “One acted for my harm” harbors resentment, “One is acting for my harm” harbors resentment, “One will act for my harm” harbors resentment, “One acted for the harm of one who is

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<sup>4</sup>. Mahāthera Nārada, *A Manual of Abhidhamma*, 1<sup>st</sup> ed., (Kuala Lumpur: Buddhist Missionary Society, 1956), pp. 147, 161.

<sup>5</sup>. <http://utulsa.edu/wp-content/uploads/2014/12/Controlling-Anger.pdf>, [https://bettermentworld/articles/meditation-for-anger/#What\\_Is\\_Anger](https://bettermentworld/articles/meditation-for-anger/#What_Is_Anger), (27, November, 2021).

<sup>6</sup>. Abeysekera, Radhika, *Questions & Answers in Buddhism*, Vol. II, (Canada: Dhammadenna.com, 2001), p. 116.

pleasing and agreeable to me” harbors resentment, One is acting for the harm of one who is pleasing and agreeable to me” harbors resentment, One will act for the harm of one who is pleasing and agreeable to me” harbors resentment, “One acted for the benefit of one who is displeasing and disagreeable to me” harbors resentment, One is acting for the benefit of one who is displeasing and disagreeable to me” harbors resentment, One will act for the benefit of one who is displeasing and disagreeable to me” harbors resentment, and one becomes angry without a reason.<sup>7</sup>

Here, even though there are many effects of Anger, because Cause and Effect always connect and everything always has Cause and Effect. So, I would like to mention a little bit. This Anger has been making us not only reborn into the cycle of existences again and again but also conducive to many kinds of trouble to suffer from mental and physical illnesses. This anger causes big problem between us and our environment.

In addition, according to teachings of the Buddha, it is exactly said that if we died with attaching on somebody or something, we would be reborn into the realm of the hungry ghosts (peta), if we died with getting angry, hell (niraya) would be as a result of dying with getting angry and if we died with ignorance, we would reap the animal realm (tiracchāna). Indeed, all defilements give rise to four woeful states to be reborn<sup>8</sup>. In addition, when we study the Buddha’s teachings connected with the concept of lobha, dosa and moha, it can be understood that when someone dies with attachment on somebody or something, attachment (lobha) makes him reborn into the hungry ghosts’ realm. When lobha is strong in human’s mind, famine or calamity of starvation (dubbhikkhantarakappa) appears toward the world. When lobha is the strongest, the world is destroyed by the fire. When anger (dosa) normally arises in our mind, it produces the hell after life. The calamity of weapons (satthantarakappa) is caused all over the world when dosa is strong in our mind. We can see that civil wars and world wars including political, religious, racial, and individual conflicts all over the world were created by dosa. When dosa is the strongest, the world is ruined by the water. Deluded-mind gives rise to animal realm after life because of delusion or ignorance or because of neglecting the good objects before he died. When moha becomes strong, the

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<sup>7</sup> A.V. 150.

<sup>8</sup> DhsA. 129.

effect of it is of disaster of disease (Rogantara Kappa). The world is destroyed by the air is as a result of the strongest moha.<sup>9</sup>

It is true that angry people always create the problems themselves and others. Because of anger, during the world wars, over six million of Jewish people were killed in the Holocaust by Adolf Hitler. The main cause of all wars is nothing but anger associated with ignorance. Many people died and injured during the civil wars due to anger. More than half of them were civilians (non-military). Therefore, a war is a great evil, which killed peoples and destroyed social systems as well as international relations. Anger makes sentient beings (all beings) beyond awareness of mind and people blinded with anger dare to kill their own mother, father, own baby and so on. Even at the Buddha's time, some people such as Devadatta, had tried to kill the Buddha in various kinds of ways and create a split among the community of the Buddhist monks.

In Buddhism, there are five kinds of kamma (pancānantariya kamma) which are considered the most heinous crimes that definitely lead to hell. They are: Matricide (Mātughāṭaka), Patricide (Pitughāṭaka), Killing an Arahant (Arahantaghāṭaka), wounding the Buddha (Lohitu-ppāṭaka), and creating schism in the Sangha (Sanghabedaka).<sup>10</sup> If one of these five kinds of kamma is committed by someone, there will never be other realm to escape but hell. There is no place to hide from these serious consequences. These kammās prevent us from the attainment of Nibbāna in this very life. However, we should try hard any insight meditation. In this present day, we can see bad results of anger so that some people commit suicide and cause big problem themselves and others. Even parents harm their beloved children without management their Anger. Therefore, in Kodhanasutta of Aṅguttara Nikaya, the Buddha said that an angry man does not know what is right and what is wrong or does not know what cause and effect is. (kuddho atthan ajanati) And an angry man does not see or understand the dhamma (kuddho dhamman apassati).<sup>11</sup>

### **The Best Ways to Manage Anger**

In the Buddha's teachings, we can find many ways which are called loving-kindness, compassion, sympathetic joy, and patience and so forth how to manage and remove Anger in

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<sup>9</sup>. Vsm. 414.

<sup>10</sup>. DA.I. 238, DhA.I. 142.

<sup>11</sup>. A.II. 97.

line with the Buddhist perspective. However, I would like to mention as the best ways that we need to cultivate in our mind. They are proper attention (Yoniso-manasikāra) and self-control (Attano rakkhaṇa).

Yonisomanasikāra is very useful for human beings and Devas as well in order to manage or reduce Anger. If we cultivate it in our mind, we will never suffer from any sufferings. This is also very important practice of people to attain the first path which is called sotāpattimagga.<sup>12</sup>

In punnovādasutta, we can find venerable Punna's proper attention. In this sutta, after venerable Punna took an advice of dhamma from the Buddha, he prepared to leave this country. The Buddha asked "Which country will you go, Punna?" "Venerable Sir, there is a country named Sunāparanta. I am going to live there." "Punna, the people in this country are very fierce and rough. If they abuse, scold, threaten and ridicule, what will you do?" "Venerable Sir, if the people of this country abuse, scold, threaten, and ridicule me, I will think that they do not hit me with their hands." "Punna, if they hit you with their hands, then what will you do?" "If they hit me with their hands, I will think that they do not hit me with a cold, Venerable Sir." "If they hit you with a clod, Punna, then what will you do?" "Venerable Sir, if they hit me with a clod, I will think that they do not hit me with a stick." "If they hit you with a stick, Punna, what will you do?" "Venerable Sir, if they hit me with a stick, I will think that they do not hit me with a knife." "If they will hit you with a knife, Punna, what will you do then?" "Venerable Sir, if they hit me with a knife, I will think that they do not take my life with a sharp knife." "If they will take your life with a sharp knife, Punna, what will you do?" "Venerable Sir, if they take my life with a sharp knife, I will think that there have been disciples of the Buddha who have being humiliated and disgusted by the body and by the life, sought by an assassin. But, I have had an assassin even without seeking for him".<sup>13</sup>

In Aṅguttara Nikāya, there are Ten Ways of the Management of Resentment or Anger taught by the Buddha. They are "One acted for my harm, but what can be done about it?" manages and removes resentment, "One is acting for my harm, but what can be done about it?" manages and removes resentment, "One will act for my harm, but what can be done about it?" manages and removes resentment, "One acted for the harm of one who is pleasing

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<sup>12</sup>. Ps. 17.

<sup>13</sup>. M.III. 268-9.

and agreeable to me, but what can be done about it?” manages and removes resentment, “One is acting for the harm of one who is pleasing and agreeable to me, but what can be done about it?” manages and removes resentment, “One will act for the harm of one who is pleasing and agreeable to me, but what can be done about it?” manages and removes resentment, “One acted for the benefit of one who is displeasing and disagreeable to me, but what can be done about it?” manages and removes resentment, “One is acting for the benefit of one who is displeasing and disagreeable to me, but what can be done about it?” manages and removes resentment, “One will act for the benefit of one who is displeasing and disagreeable to me, but what can be done about it?” manages and removes resentment, and One does not become angry without a reason.<sup>14</sup>

By following above mentioned the ways of examples, we can manage and reduce disagreeable objects. A person who does not have proper attention (*Yonisomanasikāra*), whatever he sees and hears, occur the evil deed through seeing and hearing. When he experiences the disagreeable object, he feels angry with that object and when desirable object, he feels greedy. Systematic attention is proximate cause to make wholesome stage and to reduce Anger.<sup>15</sup>

Next one is *Attanorakkhana* - self-control that is also very useful for human beings and Devas as well in order to manage Anger. In order to understand Pāḷi term, there are many terms which can be used about self-control: *Attagutta*, and *Attasammāpaṇidhi*. *Attagutta*<sup>16</sup> means Self-guarded and *Attasammāpaṇidhi*<sup>17</sup> means setting oneself up properly in life or directing oneself rightly. However, it will use the term ‘*Attanorakkhana*’. In fact, if each one has self-control, the problem will never come to us. The Buddha said in *Sedakasutta* with regard to the self-control “*Attānaṃ bhikkhave rakkhanto paraṃ rakkhanti, paraṃ rakkhanto attānaṃ api rakkhati*” meaning that one protects (controls) oneself, protect others. One protects others, protects oneself.<sup>18</sup> But, we need to know how to protect and control. So, let’s see the story taught by the Buddha.

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<sup>14</sup>. A.V. 151.

<sup>15</sup>. M.III. 268-9.

<sup>16</sup>. A.II. 6, Dh. 54.

<sup>17</sup>. R.L. Soni, *Life’s Highest Blessings, Mahā Maṅgala Sutta*, (Kandy, Sri Lanka: BPS, 1956), p. 51.

<sup>18</sup>. S.V. 169-170.



In the *pācittiya pāli* of *Vinayapiṭaka*, a female Deva could control his mind from getting angry and had benefitted from that. One day, a monk from Ālavi cut down the tree which has been belonged to one deva. When the monk was cutting down the tree, Deva living in that tree said to him that “Venerable, don’t cut down my celestial abode for your residence. The monk took no notice and continued cutting down. At that time, the arm of deva’s son was struck by the monk. It was occurred to that Deva; “It will be good if I kill this monk just here. But this won’t be suiting in me that if I kill this monk just here.” “(This monk has a teacher, the Buddha.) I will tell this matter to the Buddha”. Then this deva approached to the Buddha and having approached, she told that matter to the Buddha. The Buddha replied was; “Very good, Deva. It is very good that you, Deva, did not kill this monk. If you had killed this monk today, much of demerit would also have produced by you. Deva, there is a certain solitary tree that you go and live in it.”<sup>19</sup> In this story, we can see that Deva could control his mind from getting angry. By so doing, she produced not only her own benefit but also others’.

I would like to express next story as an example. In a little town, the father was very gentle and, loved his wife and son very much. He loved his car as well. He thought that if he has these tree things, wife, son and his car, there will be enough for him in his entire life. One evening, after finishing his work, he came back home. He was very exhausted by his work and felt unhappy. He had planned that after finishing dinner, he went to bed and rest without doing anything. When he went to the dining room to enjoy his meal, his wife in the kitchen called him and said: “Husband! There is something to hummer. Please! Take a hammer.” The husband took a hammer and went to the kitchen. At that time, he saw that his son was scrapping the car’s windscreen with a stone in front of the house. He was absolutely furious at his son’s behavior so that he could not control his mind. He quickly seized his son by the wrist and hit foolishly his child on the hand with a hammer. When he was aware of his mind, he understood that it was gone. His child’s hand has broken into many pieces. He immediately took his son and went to the hospital and saw the doctor. Not long afterwards, he asked the doctor whether his son’s condition was good or bad. The doctor said was “Your son never can write the letter in his entire life. I am so sorry. I have tried my best.” The father repented of his foolish behavior and weep inconsolably. He went near his son and hug closely and tightly. His son whispered; “Dad, what time will my hand recover from broking?” The father

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<sup>19</sup>. Vin.II. 34.

kept silence and then went away from his son to the outside of the building. He kicked his car several times. While he saw the letter on the middle of the windscreen of the car written by his son, he stopped kicking. The letter said “I love my father so much”. The facts mentioned above show that anger destroys beings’ lives and expectations as well as their natural beauties and takes away our happiness, peacefulness and harmony. Anger and love have no limits – things are to be used and people are to be loved, but problem in today’s world is that people are to be used and things are to be loved. Consequently, it separates beings from their families, relatives, friends and their environment because of without having proper attention and self-control. Indeed, as the Buddha’s disciples, we need to try to manage an anger that has ever been giving rise to many problems and never has been causing any benefits of beings, by using the instructions of the Buddha. Over 2560 years before of today, the Buddha and most of his disciples managed anger and other defilements. Even if we cannot manage anger, we have to try to control our mind not to create the problems oneself to others getting angry.

## **Conclusion**

All sentient beings are engaged in the pursuit of desires such as lust, hatred, pride, jealousy, and other similar emotions, which have been deeply ingrained in the collective consciousness over extended periods of existence. When viewed through the lens of Buddhist philosophy, the effective management of anger holds the key to resolving various challenges that may arise. Without mastering this emotion, navigating through difficulties becomes increasingly complex. It is a universal inclination to avoid problems, yet the manifestation of anger often leads to the destruction of expected outcomes. Therefore, a comprehensive comprehension and analysis of the origins and triggers of anger is crucial in order to preemptively address and mitigate the array of issues stemming from its diverse sources. The significance of learning techniques to regulate and eliminate anger cannot be overstated, as it serves as a pivotal strategy to prevent its recurrence in our mental landscape. By exerting control over our emotional responses and cultivating a mindset resistant to anger, the likelihood of conflicts, violence, and other adversities resulting from unchecked rage diminishes significantly. Through dedicated practice in nurturing qualities such as loving-kindness, compassion, joy, patience, and mindfulness, alongside the discipline of self-restraint, individuals can foster an environment of peace and contentment devoid of anger or the anticipated complications.

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