

## The Shackles Will Then Set Him Free

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“The shackles will then set him free” is a line from 'The Scripture of Avalokiteshwara'. What is worth noting here is that it does not say someone will come along and remove the shackles for us but clearly states that the shackles themselves will set us free. This is made possible by the power of compassion, which is what calls us to training. Training enables us to hear the cries ( for help) of our world and shows us how the 'shackle', or aspect of inner confusion, that holds and drives us in a destructive and distressing cycle of activity, becomes the catalyst that inspires us to deepen our ability to meditate and, through that, to go beyond our present understanding of life.

This article looks mainly at aspects of training with anger and resentment, along with the importance of being able to recognize and respond to the sorrow and grief that causes these attitudes of mind to come into existence. However, the same basic principles apply to any issue ( shackle) that we can neither resolve nor understand and which has a controlling influence upon us. Exploring these issues is a complex matter. Studying, understanding and enabling the need to get angry or resentful to fall away will call forth many feelings questions and insights, each of which have to be reflected upon, understood and investigated with care, thoroughness and tender contemplative inquiry. It is not a quick process.

A golden rule in training is that for things to change we have to be prepared to change, and, sooner or later, we come to see that if we are not willing to let the practice open our eyes and show us how to respond to our distress in a wiser way then the issue at hand will continue to entrap us, thus this 'shackle' inspires us to CEASE. To stop blundering on in the same old way, to turn within, sit still and, through that, open ourselves up to being taught by that inner flow; *I come for Refuge, please help me*. This turning to the Master in the Heart, combined with letting go of all that we think we know, is also a description of bowing, it is why the scriptures say that when there is no more bowing there is no more Buddhism. It is the key to all aspects of converting karma, resolving confusion and enabling ourselves to be drawn ever deeper into the wonder and vastness that we call Buddhist practice.

It is too simplistic to say that getting angry is wrong, so don't do it. We are never angry for no reason and it can take many years of training before we become aware of what that reason is. Until then we usually mistake the catalyst, ( another person or situation), for the cause, ( unresolved pain within us), and direct our anger outwards towards that catalyst. Our habit pattern may be to lash out, to defend and fight for our corner, it may be to become cynical and scornful or to seek escape. This course of

action is the glue that keeps the shackle of distress firmly clamped around us and tightens its grip. It locks us into the position of being one who is vulnerable, who sees themselves as a victim and who suffers

When anger arises so does its root cause. Our interaction with life has touched on an old pain buried deep within us, something that we can neither understand nor resolve and this generates confusion. We want to stop hurting but do not know how to, from this comes a build up of tension and we call that tension anger. So anger is the product of confusion and, as such, is a lid that covers something else; that something is usually pain, deep distress and the aching grief that accompanies it. Giving vent to anger provides short term relief, ( by releasing some of the tension), but guarantees and increases the continuation of long term distress. This is because when we act in confusion we create more confusion, adding to the tension, increasing our ability to feel frightened lost and therefore more angry.

Wanting the quality of our life to improve, but not yet having the ability to understand what is happening to us, the tendency can be to think about it and then expect our distressed mind to come up with a solution. This is like asking an illiterate person to teach us to read and write and results in some common mistakes.

The first is the very understandable attempt to cover up the anger by pretending it is not there and *trying* to be kind and compassionate. We attempt to jump from step one to step twenty in one leap. This is usually the result of desperation; we want to be seen as a good Buddhist, and Buddhists aren't angry, there can be a fear of being wrong, ( angry equals failure), or a dread that there is no real compassion within us, that we are no good, and that if we allow ourselves to look our fears will be confirmed. There may also be a doubt that we can cope with looking at what lays within us, maybe it will overwhelm us. Perhaps we want it all to just go away and stop bothering us. There can also be resentment at having to do the considerable and long term work of training, *why should I?* Resistance and laziness, ( forms of doubt), are often an attempt at self protection. We fear we are defeated before we have begun so it seems easier, and safer, not to look within, to not even try. So the fearful mind looks for a quick fix, but there isn't one. Wallpapering over the cracks always creates more stress and tension. It is like trying to sew up a wound that still has pus in it....the result will be very unsatisfactory.

In order to help ourselves in a real way ( by that I mean in a way that enables us to change) we have to see what lays beneath the surface appearance, ( emotions / feelings), of the shackle; why do we hurt? What torments us? How can we help this precious being we are? So where do we begin? How do we go from being where we are now to where we are capable of being?

Preparation and having the right tools are a large part of any task, never more so than here.

There are two requirements for training and together they make one whole. Firstly you have to want to do it, secondly you need the means, ( a practice), that will enable

that wanting to become reality. These two are the right and left feet of 'going on'. When both feet are in place the rest is just a matter of time and a great deal of hard work. This will ask much of us, however, it is reassuring to know that resolving inner confusion is dependent upon the choices we make and the actions that flow forth from those choices, not upon whether someone has good or bad luck.

Begin by establishing a steady, grounded, consistent practice. We need to address the whole of our life and not just one aspect of it. This in itself is an act of compassion and of great kindness towards oneself. Meditate regularly and if the mind drifts off, gently bring it back to awareness in the moment. Follow the basics of our practice in detail, ( this is usually the most neglected area), forget self created strategies, listen deeply to what comes in on the breath and pay great attention to the Precepts. Relax into it at a pace that is maintainable long term. This first step is the foundation stone that supports and makes possible all the steps to come. It is the quickest and surest way, this **is** the short cut and it can save us life times of suffering.

The reason why we cannot successfully jump from step one to step twenty in one leap is because each individual step along the way contains essential and personal teaching and these insights need to be fully digested and understood. One step paves and prepares the way for the next, it enables it to manifest. It is a gradual unfolding of the mystery we call 'me' and of the how where and why change is needed.

Much of the Buddhist teaching is about how we use our minds. If we make unwise choices that produce harmful behaviour then we continue to agitate and distress both our bodies and minds. When driven by the heat and froth of emotionalism, ( fear and pain), we create a 'violent movement' **1** within us, this causes distress to the physical fabric, ( organs muscles etc), of our bodies and adds to the confusion and tension. Body and mind cannot settle and this hinders our spiritual breathing, ( that which flows when we meditate). It will remain shallow and unable to penetrate to the depths of our being.

Without the settling and stilling process of daily training the body and mind will remain unable to connect with true insight ( the medicine that heals all sorrow ), and we will not be able see to the root cause of the shackle.

The quality of our meditation equals the quality of our awareness, which is our ability to see clearly and accurately. This awareness is central to everything and effects every decision we make, because we make choices based upon what we believe to be real. This is why training has to include every aspect of our life. If our awareness is flawed then we will continue to be driven and controlled by those confused feelings because we lack the ability to see what we are doing to ourselves. This all tightens the grip the shackle of any unresolved painful issue has upon us as we struggle to defend and protect ourselves from the actions of others.

We cannot think, reason or talk our way through all of this, we need the stability, the tender anchor of the 'absolute upright' **2** that only meditation and surrendering to the Refuge, can bring. This gives us the strength to not react when the actions of others

ignite that old pain and the emotions stir. It will enable us to identify mental fabrication, that is reactions that come from the confusion that surrounds our grief and, if acted upon, will add to our distress. It will show us a better and wiser way to deal with emotion and pain and this changes everything as a new vista of options opens up before us. Training connects us with the wish in our hearts and, within that, lays the longing, the wanting to fulfil our potential and the means of doing so. Most of all it will give us the courage to face our opinion of ourselves. It is often this, combined with the imagined and fearful scenarios our poor stressed minds have created, that holds us back.

Steadily grounded in and tenderly supported by the practice we can begin to get an understanding of where we are right now with the issue at hand, and we can be (and must be) completely honest with ourselves. By this I mean looking at what we actually **do**. It is one thing to say I know I do not have to be angry, I know that if I meditate guidance will come, it is another to stop being angry and to live from stillness. There can be a big difference between what someone knows intellectually and how they actually behave. What lays in the space between these two? That is what we must discover, and the discovering of it is what changes us.

We need not fear this honesty. From my experience never once has anything within the meditation been patronizing, judgemental, or had a sneering attitude towards me. These are traits we humans have created, they do not exist within that vast living stillness. When reflecting within I have only ever been met with tenderness, an understanding of my plight that is heartbreakingly gentle and the most practical of help. The universe knows that here is one who suffers and who is seeking to transform their life and this is a noble thing. We, and all that lays within us, are already known to the core, we are loved accepted and cherished beyond comprehension and the teaching is already there, waiting for us to be able to see it.

If we want the end result to be true then we need to start with truth. Maybe we are filled with raw pain, fear or a sense of injustice, resentment, unfairness, even a wish for revenge. If so then 'this is how it is',..... *for now*, acknowledge that, turn within, to the Master in the Heart, and say, "I wish to lay this to rest, how can I do so, what is my first step?" Within every situation there is the way forward. It is like Kanzeon's rosary ( a symbol of the spiritual breath flowing in a cyclic motion) that hangs or reaches down into hell, like a ladder so beings can climb up into the clear air of liberating insight. The power of compassion is the power of Truth. Don't let a sense of desperation make you grab at imagined or self created solutions, don't rush, wait for something that is real, it will come to you, a step that will take you where you need to go, and it is worth waiting for.

Compassion cannot be self created, nor need it be. It is more fruitful to put effort and energy into right use of will. Work on ceasing; that is, on guarding your outflows, cease to give outward expression to anger. If you can sit still, accepting and gently containing all the painful confusion that arises within you, and cease to let rip in anger, then nothing has been added. Just we have refrained from doing something

that would have been harmful. This is very different to trying to add something, which is what self creating a type of behaviour is. If we can be patient and trust the practice, which is also trusting the unfolding process, then we will see we lack for nothing and, in time, compassion will arise effortlessly, ( because it is its nature to do so). Every step will be taken fully at a pace that we can cope with, no stone will be left unturned and we will never have to pretend that we are other than we are. There is a completeness to this process as the Master within guides and awakens our minds, and each little insight brings our perception more into focus with what is real. I know it is not quick, it is far too complex a matter for that, but it is thorough.

Entrusting ourselves to the process and being patient is part of our offering. Faith and patience are closely intertwined and are part of the medicine that heals, especially where anger is concerned. So is the wish on our part to be fully and gladly responsible for all that lays within us. Rather than trying to create a false persona if we spend quiet time with ourselves, sympathetically looking within, and tenderly long to understand and help this being we are, inner connections are made. The eye of clarity, which is also the hand of compassion, penetrates deep within, it reaches down into the dark tangle of confusion, love flows and much becomes possible. It is a private and intimate process, done not for show but for love.

Whenever something is the catalyst for connecting us with self doubt or fears of worthlessness, anger (and grief) can arise. When the pain of this is greater than our ability to sit still we may strike out, seeking to squash the other person, asserting our dominance in the hope that it will hide the fear and ease the distress we feel. We need to be careful in this area, especially when emailing, as it is so easy, and tempting, to let either unrestrained emotions or carefully calculated words, designed to cut another to the quick, pour out then just press a button and let someone have it with both barrels. This may give a flash of satisfaction but that soon passes and we are left with sorrow, because we were hurtful to another, and bewildered loneliness because in lashing out at another we committed an act of violence towards ourselves, and, most of all, because there was no REAL reason for our actions, so they confuse us.

For some the pain they experience is so great they just have to hurt someone else. It is all they know. There is great suffering in this. Every time we lash out it confirms and tightens the pain of the shackle. It hurts so much because we believe that life is against us and our actions re-enforce that thought. The pain ( confusion) within us is longing for a different response and that will come to us within the meditation, it will flow in on the breath.

If we can remain unmoved and sit with the distress, containing it within our being, then, just as the kesa is wrapped around our body so the meditation will wrap itself around the turbulent feelings and they will lack the power to control us. The 'shackle' now has nothing to latch onto, it cannot find any external expression. At first it can take a great deal of effort and determination, even endurance, to contain so much distress, but when we do that 'shackle is gradually immobilised by the power of compassion. Securely and tenderly held within the sitting place, the womb of the

Tathagata, it encounters the 'tenderness that has a revolutionary impact upon our minds'. 3 When we sit within the unfathomable depths of the stillness, help will come. It silently flows in, permeating every part of us, bringing increased awareness, reassurance and relief, which pave the way for confidence, ( faith), and trust, ( calmness).

Gradually the shackle opens and reveals its secret, reveals what caused it to come into existence in the first place. For this to be able to happen it needs something, it requires that we train ourselves to be one who can *receive* the Truth of what has lain within us for so long. Everything is dependent upon our ability to meditate and to trust the great mystery that we call 'I take Refuge'. The seeing of the cause of our grief enables us to understand what has made us the way we are and shows us how unresolved pain has influenced our life. This insight is the beginning of a transformation that will enable the inclination to be bitter or angry to fall away. For myself it was like seeing what lay at the centre of a wheel. Radiating from that I saw 'spokes' of activity, character and personality traits, ways of responding, things I wanted to have and things I tried to avoid, that flowed out from, and had been fashioned by, that central issue of terrible grief. Thus the shackle not only inspires us to sit more deeply, it reveals insights that provide a sympathetic understanding of ourselves. These insights are Dharma, Dharma is truth and when we see clearly we know exactly where and how change is needed. Only the eye of inner reflection can see in this way. Only a body and mind nourished by the heart of bowing, of offering and entrusting oneself to the Refuge, can become the vehicle for this great work.

If we think we have been treated badly getting angry or resentful can seem like standing up for ourselves. It can be a way of saying, "I am worth something, I deserve better than this and I am not going to take it laying down", and so the pain of being ill used combined with the weight of grief and anxiety can produce resentment and bitterness, especially if we think the person who abused us is 'getting away with it'. Having responded in this way myself I understand it very well.

As a younger monk I began to feel a longing to resolve this anxiety and the sense of hopelessness that went with it. I spent time in contemplation, turning to the Master in the Heart, then patiently abiding, making a space where guidance could manifest. When an insight came I let myself soak in it, enter into it, clarify in my mind what it meant. Some of what came out of this is what I write about here, and I write as one for whom it is still work in progress. It has shown me that the distress was the product of a terrible grief. A grief that I thought would destroy me. The pain of it had permeated so much of my way of being that it was like a tight knot that had to be unravelled, seen, learnt from and, above all, understood. Understanding enables us to change our ways and this is the solvent that dissolves the shackle.

Over the years many insights have arisen from those contemplations. Four stand out as being relevant here and I offer them in case they are of use to anyone else. I should mention that they are specific to myself and that, when you reflect upon your life,

different aspects of the teaching will no doubt be highlighted because contemplation responds to our individual needs.

1. 'Set up not your own standards'. This is a line from the Sandokai, which is sung at morning service, and we will look at it further on, in the section on impatience.

2. The Scripture of Great Wisdom says, "Going on beyond this human mind, he is nirvana". When my every day mind is disconnected from its deeper source, (meditation), it has only logic, intellectual reasoning and stored up memories to rely upon. To this limited mind my feelings and responses seemed both reasonable and understandable. To go *beyond this human mind* I had to go beyond intellectual reasonableness, emotion, logic and self created strategies.

I had to look to and rely upon Buddha Nature.

Just as the source of the confusion lies buried deep beneath the surface turmoil of reactions motivated by anxiety so does the medicine that will enable the shackle to fall away. Connecting with the source of help requires that we release our hold on the mind as we have known it, with its fixed ideas and theories, giving it the freedom to merge with and dissolve into the meditation. This can also be described as 'letting go', as surrendering or as entering into the life of faith. When we 'let go' and cease to impose a way of being upon our mind, it no longer has any sense of individuality or 'self' definition. Going beyond this human mind is like stepping out into a Great Unknown, without a backward glance at whatever may lie behind us.

The mind is now unhindered and from the mystical depths of our being what we need to see, (the root cause of the shackle and what to do about it), will rise up into that openness, like a gift of grace, and is carried on the breath into our conscious mind, offering us the teaching that is pertinent personal and intimate to us. The seeing of it calms and fills us with relief and gratitude. Now we understand, it is like a long term struggle or fight is finally over, fretfulness gives way to inner ease and the way forward is wide open. We are now content to let the meditation teach us, never doubting that it will.

3. I had seen pictures of the Buddha seated in meditation before his enlightenment, the armies of Mara were attacking him, hurling arrows and poisonous spears, (hate, ill will and the temptation to become distracted), but none of them could touch him, they bounced off his halo and fell as lotus blossoms. What made this possible? Then I realised that he had purified his own heart and there was no place, (unresolved confusion), within him where the arrows could penetrate. He knew his own completeness and sat within it. This was his protection. Velcro came to mind, one piece of cloth has many little hooks, the other has a rough pad that the hooks will adhere to. Velcro cannot attach to smooth glass, it needs a place to stick that will receive and hold it. What was it within me that enabled the 'arrows' of another person's actions to attach and hurt? I set about looking for and opening my heart to

those vulnerable inner areas and seeking to help them.

Buddhism is the Way of Non-Attachment. When someone is angry with, or unkind to me, they are in a self created 'bubble' of their own pain and distress. Their actions stay within that bubble and cannot hurt me unless I move from my internal sitting place and, through that movement, disconnect the mind from it's source, ( completeness), so that it becomes lost and vulnerable. Driven by thoughts of protecting and defending itself this disconnected mind reacts to those arrows and that reaction becomes the target which attracts, receives and holds on to them.

Confusion is another word for attachment. Our lack of insight, or you could say the way in which we use our minds, binds us to the world of feelings and that attachment prevents us from seeing the whole picture, so we believe things to be other than they are. Non-attachment can be seen as something hard and cold, but it isn't, it is about living from our original purity, ( the source of the Precepts), and there is joy and beauty in this. It is the true heart of love.

4. At times it seemed that those who abuse power or are unkind to others 'get away with it', and I found this very hard. What came out of contemplating this was that the law of karma holds all of us accountable for our actions and no one 'gets away' with anything. Yet still I felt resentment. These issues require patient, consistent contemplative effort, and always giving time and effort to seeking for a genuine understanding of the Truth. We never have to settle for pretending that we understand when we really don't. In time I came to see that when one person harms another it is because they allow their suffering, ( unresolved issues), to control their actions. The confusion within them plays itself out and finds expression within daily life. If I then react with anger or bitterness I become the same as them. I too have let my inner pain control my actions, and so it goes on, you hurt me so I will hurt you, or someone else. In a strange way we become the object of our own contempt by doing the very thing that we disliked so much in another person. Somewhere along the line someone has to cease or the wheel of suffering rolls on.

A Tibetan master, whose name I do not know, said that if someone gets angry with you, ( *or hurts you in any way*), it is as though they throw a dagger that lands at your feet. If you respond with anger, ( *or wish to hurt them*), it is as though you have picked up that dagger and stabbed yourself with it 10,000 times. Hearing this went through me like a jolt. Sometimes seeing so clearly can come as a shock, it is called being disturbed by the Truth.

This may all seem obvious but each one of us has to know these things as we know that fire burns if we put our hand into a flame. Because we have heard the words and can repeat them it does not mean that we have HEARD. It is only when we have been changed by them that we know we have heard.

Other things that I have found it helpful to work on when training with anger are:

We can learn a great deal about ourselves when anger or frustration arise, in the same

way that when another person is angry with us they will often blurt out exactly what they think. This sympathetic understanding is part of the unfolding process and we can only benefit from it if we do not despise, or fear, ourselves for the occasions when anger has got the better of us. Resolving all the pain and grief within will have it's messy, or less than perfect moments. Thankfully as training deepens and we steadily transform our lives these times become fewer and farther between.

Personally I am grateful that the scriptures remind us that 'perfection does not demand perfection'. Whilst making every effort not to give expression to anger if there is an occasional regrettable incident <sup>5</sup> the practice shows us how to contemplate the event and learn from what happened. We can then sincerely apologise where necessary and walk on, accepting with good grace any consequences that our actions may have created and put into practice what we have learned.

Perhaps you snapped at someone because you were tired and overworked. If looked at sympathetically we will see what we can do to help ourselves at these times, both internally and externally. Just to accept that you work under pressure can help, and if you can be kind to yourself at these times it will be easier to have sympathetic understanding to others when they too are bad tempered.

On busy days punctuate your schedule with 'just being moments'. Lower the eyes, silently say, "I come for Refuge", let everything fall away, breath out the stress, then breath in and give yourself to the flow of breath, which I sometimes think of as Buddha's touch. It calms the body and settles the mind. People get angry when they feel frazzled and cornered by a situation. Entering the internal meditation hall, releasing the fear of it all being too much into that tender flow, and having compassion for ourselves helps us to deal with the task before us in the best possible way. My experience has been that how I approach and execute a task is as important as what I am doing. It can be done in a way that generates more tension or can connect me with the sufficiency of the moment, grounded in the Refuge we know that this is the best I can do and it is enough. When body and mind are together in the moment, ( basic working meditation), we are not in a state of conflict with ourselves, and this makes all the difference.

If you are filled with anger and feel it is often out of control do your best to contain it within you and endure the powerful feelings that accompany those emotions. Be patient with yourself and have respect for the efforts you are making. No one resolves these matters overnight and we will most likely fall over and have to pick ourselves up many times. Simple things can help. When you feel it all bubbling up step outside, remove yourself from the situation for a while and breath in some fresh air. Put your wrists and hands under running water, ( any bathroom tap), offer the churning emotions to the universe, let the water draw the heat of it out of you, let it's coolness flow in.

Rather than speaking in anger to another have something else you can say, ( silently to ourself), like Om Mani Padme Hum, or anything that helps, like making the resolve to not open ones mouth at that moment. This can break the hold the feelings have on our mind, it gives us something else to think about. It is making an effort, you are doing something to turn the mighty tide of karma, sewing a seed that will

bloom in the future. Being genuinely sorry for speaking in anger is such a seed.

If one person has been unkind to another in the past, then they meet them again, anger can arise. Looking with honesty may reveal that they do not like how they behaved towards that person but don't want to acknowledge what was done, so the memories that arise cause resentment. Annoyance can be the 'lid' ( or wedge), used to protect ourselves from having to look at our own actions.

Being with someone who has character traits that reflect blind spots within us, that is aspects of our own behaviour that we have not yet been able to recognise but which none the less disturb us, can also call forth annoyance. So contemplating what we dislike about another person can help us to understand ourselves. It also cultivates humility and tolerance. .

Nothing exists in isolation and everything we do affects every part of us, which is why practice has to include the whole of our life. Anyone training with anger, (or wishing to deepen their practice), is wise to avoid excitement. This agitates body and mind, quickens the heartbeat, dulls awareness and, because it is of emotionalism, greatly increases our inclination to feel fear, despair and anger. The natural joy that arises from interacting with others and appreciating the beauty of our planet is very different to this. It is of that which silently flows and unites our inner organs in gratitude and delight. Excitement distresses the heart, joy opens and nourishes it.

Try to never turn away from what lays within you. If you fear it and think it is too much to cope with right now acknowledge that and stand before your altar, if you don't have one you can look up at the sky, and ask, "how can I train myself so that I am not afraid to look". Or simply say, "I am afraid and do not know what to do, please help me". Then carry on with your day.

Never force yourself, look to see what you can do now and value that. If you cannot imagine a time when you will want to face that inner turmoil don't worry, just keep training. If I take a block of ice out of the fridge it will eventually melt. This is because I have changed the conditions in which I keep it. The same is true of us. All the time we are training we are changing the conditions ( of body and mind), which hold our reluctance to look. Sooner or later that resistance will also melt .

The scriptures say, ' to cherish the longing deep' within us. Look to your true wish, that which called you to training, give it the freedom to blossom, to make itself known to you. Follow it, nourish it, by letting it guide you. My experience is that we train for the love of doing it and because there is something within us that naturally wants to do the right thing. By patiently nurturing our True Wish, confidence ( faith) will grow and we will want to look, because inner reflection has the eye of compassion and the heart of wisdom. It's gaze tenderly beckons to that which lays broken and battered within. A ray of hope illumines the darkness, a connection is made within that great mystery, something that was lost and forlorn looks up and finds that trust has not died. Now we know we can look.

The most difficult forms of anger to deal with are when it is either hidden, ( denied), or justified.

For some the pain of what lays beneath the surface is so great that the mind rejects, or buries it, to the extent that it is as though it does not exist. We call this a 'blind spot'. This person carries a heavy load, as I know from personal experience. They may appear to be calm and unflustered but, no matter how deeply the feelings are buried, they will still have an effect upon their life, often making them anxious, controlling, ( this is usually an attempt to keep oneself safe in an uncertain world), and finding it difficult to trust others. Once again, if we steadily train we enable ourselves to be helped. For myself I began to see ( in meditation) a blank space, an unknown. I just sat in it, that is all we need to do, sit in trust and keep training, the meditation will do the rest. Extra faith and courage, when needed, will be given to us. The scriptures say, ' do do the work within my heart', by sitting in faith we invite and enable Buddha Nature to do It's work.

There are times when we can 'let go' in an instant and times when it is a much longer process. Occasionally the anger trapped within a person is such that it will not just fade away, it has to be expressed or let out in a wise way within a controlled environment, and this is not a breakage of the Precepts. This is because it has a true purpose and is not of confusion. It is part of the healing process and the intent is to ease suffering, not add to it. The anger can be released within the safe enclosure of retreat, universal compassion understands and it is absorbed into the heart of stillness.

Justified anger can result from any perceived form of social, sexual, political or racial injustice. Someone thinks, “ Of course I am angry, what is happening here is wrong and they are the ones who need to change, not me”. When we are distressed by a situation, but do not know what to do about it, anger seems like a response, it's a statement that, at heart, means to say 'I care very much', but sadly all it does is add to the general pool of universal suffering, often making things worse. Anger has a heat and an insistence to it that creates conflict and alienates people, making it more difficult for others to be open and willing to change.

Obviously we do what we can in a practical and lawful way to instigate change and improve unjust or cruel situations. We can also 'spread our robe'. As Buddhists this is something that we can all offer, stillness rather than agitation, it is the true work of training. The great monk poet Reverend Ryokan said he wished his robe was big enough to cover all the suffering in the world. It is. To hold the issue at hand within one's awareness, sit down and rest the eye of the heart upon it and all concerned, including oneself, is to spread the robe. We also call this offering merit or turning the stream of compassion within. As the inner gaze connects with the flowing of the heart the whole situation is released into the pure place of meditation. This is where 'the fiery pit becomes a cool and silver lake'. 5 It is where we see what we can and cannot do to help a situation.

That inner flow will enable us to see that some beings are not yet ready for change,

that each of us is at a different stage on our spiritual journey and it is not a matter of right or wrong, good or bad. It is so easy to point the finger at others, but can we identify our own problem areas? Do we understand our own koan, are we sorting out our own life? These are the questions we should be addressing whilst having sympathetic understanding for others.

Do your best not to put yourself into conflict with anyone or anything, even if you think you know best, it will make any 'shackle' tighter. To stand against someone is to place a wedge between you and them, and therefore between yourself and the meditation. It cuts you off from seeing clearly and temporarily creates the dualistic mind. We can disagree with what someone says or does whilst knowing that we and they are the same and that, at heart, at root, within that sameness there is no conflict. The conflict comes when we allow an opinion, or a cause, to be more important than sitting still. Reverend Master Jiyu used to say that Buddha Nature is never angry with itself. It is when we lose sight of 'the important thing', then we enable feelings or opinions to pull us off our sitting place.

If you find yourself in conflict with an object, such as not being able to sort out a problem with the computer, or the car won't start, exactly the same applies.

Anger and frustration can be used as a form of emotional blackmail. If I don't get what I want I'll have a tantrum. Hoping to avoid this people often let the person have their own way because it seems easier than dealing with an unpleasant scene. If you are inclined to manipulate situations in this way, ( or any way), take some time to contemplate upon why. Sit down in a comfortable chair, relax, lower the eyes and gently reflect within, then ask "Why do I do this? What causes this behaviour pattern? What am I afraid will happen if I don't act in this way? Do I think it saves time or that this the best or only way to get things done?" To understand more deeply we must look with the eyes of loving kindness. There is no blame or accusation here, just a wish to understand. There is always confusion and usually fear behind this kind of activity. What are you afraid of? It can be hard to acknowledge that we have behaved badly but that acknowledgement is called 'standing up straight before the Buddhas and Ancestors'. Don't let a sense of shame prevent you from looking because the contemplative gaze will never be disgusted or see you as a nasty person, it will just respond to the call for help and your wish to live a better life. If you can see what causes this behaviour then you can respond directly to that underlying issue.

At times we may well have a genuine need to act in a robust and dynamic way but that is different to being angry, which has within it the heat of confusion and 'self' expression.

In looking at anger we must also reflect upon impatience, which has the same root as violent rage and the urge to kill. Contemplating impatience brought to mind, 'set up not your own standards'. With even the mildest impatience we are adding something, that something is self. We are resisting or objecting to what is happening, wanting it to be other than it is. This insistence is a form of desire. The razor's edge of training is

the Middle Way, and an aspect of this ( and of the Preceptual life) is that we neither add nor withhold anything, in other words, we, ( or 'self') are not in evidence. So contemplating impatience will help us to deepen our understanding of both ourselves and of what it means to follow the Middle Way.

With a gentle and patient attitude reflect upon why you are impatient. What do you want from the situation? Could you be doubting your ability to do something quickly or well enough? Is there fear of being judged ? Could it be pride ( in yourself and devaluing others) and you are frustrated because another person is not as efficient as you are? What aspect of 'set up not your own standards' is highlighted within the contemplation? These insights will take us deeper into the heart of bowing. They will show us where and how 'I want' is arising and in seeing it we can cease to do it.

Over the years I have cast out a net, looking for anything that will help teach or inspire me to let go of varying forms of resentment and have found the following three accounts inspirational.

The great Chinese master, Xu Yun wrote in his autobiography, Empty Cloud, how he used all that meditation and his will power gave him so that he would not die whilst being brutally beaten by guards because he did not want them to have the karma of having killed him. To hear of such generosity of spirit is humbling.

An old Tibetan monk, whose name I do not know, who had been imprisoned and tortured for many years was asked, “Were you ever afraid when you were in prison?” he replied, “Yes, I was afraid that I would lose my sense of compassion for those who tortured me”. I have thought of this many times and have offered gratitude to this monk for his example.

There is a Jataka Tale [6](#) that tells of a man whose property was attacked, his buildings were burned, livestock stolen and he saw his family killed before the brigands cut him to pieces. It said that, at no point, did he feel anger or hatred towards them. When I first read this, as a young postulant, I thought it was not possible for any person to be this way.

Now I know that all these accounts are an offering to us. They describe the magnificence of what a human being is capable of when liberated from confusion, when we 'return unto the source' and abide in our natural, pure state.

I know that each one of us has the potential to be this way and the bite of the shackle is the call to realise and fulfil that potential.

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## Notes

1. In *Rules for Meditation* it says “the body must make no violent movement.” See, Dōgen, Great Master, *Rules for Meditation*, in *The Liturgy of the Order of Buddhist Contemplatives for the Laity*, (Mt. Shasta, CA: Shasta Abbey Press, 1990) pp. 97 -

100.

2. “The Absolute upright holds as it is” comes from *The Most Excellent Mirror Samadhi*. Ibid. p. 61. \*
3. From the *Shushōgi*, by Great Master Dōgen, see Jiyu-Kennett, Rev. Master, *Zen Is Eternal Life*, (Mt. Shasta, CA: Shasta Abbey Press, third edition, 1987) p. 155.
4. Please do not think that I am making light of this. How we treat other people matters very much and I am not of the school of thought that says if you are upset by what I say, tough luck, it's your problem. Every effort should be made to be kind and respectful to others and to speak to them as we like to be spoken too.
5. *The Scripture of Avalokiteshwara Bodhisattva*\*. Kanzeon and Avalokiteshwara are both names for the Bodhisattva of Compassion. See *The Liturgy of the Order of Buddhist Contemplatives for the Laity*, (Mt. Shasta, CA: Shasta Abbey Press, 1990) pp. 48 - 51.
6. Jataka Tales tell of the Buddha's previous lives and are used to express aspects of the teaching.

\*. These scriptures are sung at Morning Service.