

## Skillful means to reduce the power of ill-will

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We practice meditation in order to cultivate peace, peace in our minds, peace in our lives. We can see that it is quite difficult to establish ourselves in peace, even under the most idyllic conditions. There will inevitably be some disruptions to the peacefulness of mind, usually internal disruptions. These disruptions are of great variety. But ill-will, aversion, anger or hatred are the disruptions that destroy the peace of mind most quickly, not only in times of meditation, but in the general daily course of living. Whenever anger, ill-will, or irritation arises it immediately destroys our peace of mind, our mental well-being. There are many things, many people, many situations which may trigger off this reaction in the mind, but we must be very clear that the problem is within us and not 'out there'.

Most of the time we justify our reasons for being "angry", for being disturbed, but that doesn't help us to experience peace and well-being in life. In fact the more we justify our anger, the more prone we are to indulge in it. The more we indulge in it, the more it becomes habitual and the more often we experience it. On many occasions, the Buddha taught about the dangers of indulging in thoughts of ill-will, anger and aversion. He encouraged his disciples to train by various means in order to reduce the power of this aversion, to conquer this enemy, to free oneself from this bondage called anger. It is important to contemplate and see the faults of anger, see that it is a blemish, see that it is a trouble maker in our lives. The first step is quite often contemplating to see what is the result, what is the effect of this thing called ill-will, anger, on our lives, physically, mentally and socially.

The Buddha pointed out some of the obvious faults. He compared ill-will, anger and aversion to an enemy. An enemy would wish harmful things towards one and would rejoice when harmful things happen to one, and anger achieves this very effectively.

An enemy would not want you to be handsome or attractive, he or she would want you looking ugly and miserable. The Buddha said that anger does this to you. If we have the state of anger, and we have this state often, our features will not be pleasing to look at. Anger, hatred, ill-will and aversion has the effect of detracting from our physical appearance. When you are angry, when you are full of hatred and anger, your features are not pleasant, attractive or pleasing or in any way beautiful. Why? Because the features are an expression of the mental state. When the mind is agitated, negative, disturbed, the features become distorted. This is the first blemish, the first fault of indulging in an angry state of mind — the physical appearance is not pleasing.

The second disadvantage is that, like an enemy would not wish you to have well-being, nor to be able to rest at ease and feel peaceful and comfortable, but would want you to be miserable and suffer discomfort and pain, anger does that. When you are angry, when you are irritated, you can't rest, you can't sleep, you can't eat. You suffer from lack of sleep, lack of good nutrition, you get ulcers and all sorts of physical health problems as a result of anger.

The third disadvantage, the Buddha said, is that just as an enemy would not wish you to be prosperous and successful, anger makes it difficult to be prosperous, to be successful. If you are given to anger, if your mind is irritated, you will not have good judgement. When we are given to anger, ill-will, and aversion, many things go wrong in our lives: business, work, study. As a result of anger we make mistakes. If we indulge in anger often, express anger often, have an angry disposition, we will have a reputation, but not a good one. We will not have a reputation of being a responsible, level headed person, one that people will respect. We will be

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known as someone who can't control their emotions, short tempered. just as enemy would not want us to have friends and companions, if we give vent to anger, indulge in anger and hatred, we are not going to have too many friends and companions. It is not easy to live with someone who is always getting angry, upset and showing a lot of irritation.

If one really indulges in anger and makes it a habit, a really strong habit, its consequences are more far-reaching than just this present life, in that it will be a cause and condition for an unhappy rebirth. A negative state of mind causes us to act in unskillful ways of body and speech, that is unwholesome *kamma*, which, if it becomes habitual, leads to an unhappy rebirth in a future life.

So the Buddha pointed out these faults of ill-will, of anger, and hatred. How do we deal with anger? What can we do to try and reduce its power, to try and reduce its strength, to avoid these pitfalls, to avoid these consequences, to avoid this suffering? The Buddha gave many illustrations, many skillful means by which we can deal with anger. In one particular discourse the Buddha gave five. He said to try these things, develop these five things, one or another, to counteract anger and ill-will, to try and reduce the power of anger and ill-will.

The first one, which is the direct opposite of anger and ill-will, is *loving kindness*. To cultivate goodwill, to establish the mind in loving kindness, metta is a wonderfully effective remedy for anger. This is a contemplation which weakens the tendency towards ill-will, towards the negative perception. Loving kindness is cultivating a more positive perception.

Having the aspiration or the wish for goodwill, the well-being of oneself and others as one's wish or intention, one can cultivate this as a meditation, ill-will and aversion can't get through, can't come and disturb and irritate the mind that is well established in the perception of loving kindness, even in difficult situations. To counteract ill-will, and to develop goodwill, we are encouraged not to allow the mind to dwell only on the negative, only on what is wrong, only on what is faulted, but to intentionally, consciously, make the effort to see the good side as well. Loving kindness meditation is a very good thing to do. It is very important thing to do often, to find ways to bring into the mind positive perceptions and sustain them in the mind.

The second way is the *development of compassion*. Compassion is the recognition of suffering and the wish to relieve suffering in oneself and others. Once we see suffering most of us will respond and wish to relieve it. When you have ill-will, aversion towards people, you quite often fail to realise that that person is suffering. Suffering takes many forms. When someone is being quite nasty, instead of just reacting, have you ever stopped to ask why they are being so nasty, so aggressive? Or why they are being so unreasonable? Emotionally, mentally, they are unhappy, that's why they are behaving like that. A happy person, a joyful person just doesn't behave like that. When a person is acting in an obnoxious way, if we are mindful, we can recollect and say: "Well, maybe they're having a hard time. Maybe they've got a real problem." Once you see that they are suffering, you feel compassion and you won't be caught in a reaction of ill-will and anger. You'll be more forgiving and allowing. Remember to notice the suffering and you'll wish to relieve suffering and you won't react in a way to make the suffering worse. The enemy all of a sudden becomes someone you care for. Compassion is a very wonderful quality of mind, and it is quite easy to arouse, provided that we somehow remember to see, and to recognise, the suffering in life, in the hearts of all beings. That will change our perception of the person. Perception is very important because that's what affects the way we respond, the way we act.

Another skillful means is to *develop equanimity*, non-reacting. If you can't develop loving kindness, and you can't feel compassion, develop equanimity. We can't make everything be just as we want it to be. It is not possible. Bring that into the mind, accept that things are just the way they are. People are just the way they are. There is just so much that we can do and then there is a great deal beyond our control, beyond what we can shape. Equanimity is an essential part of life if you want to remain sane. Otherwise you would go crazy,

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or just end up being a very irritated person, continually irritated by a world that just will not do what you want it to. Equanimity means appreciation, understanding, accepting, coming to terms with, being at peace with the fact that there is a limit to what one can do and can achieve. One just accepts that people are like that and then stands aside. just let it be. Be at peace.

Another suggestion that the Buddha made is the idea of ***actually avoiding***, not getting close to the situation, not getting involved. If you really can't cope with the situation or a particular person, then avoid the situation. Sometimes that's about the only thing that people can do. This not only means physically avoiding, but mentally as well. Sometimes you avoid them physically, but they are very present in your mind, aren't they? Mentally we continually bring up something over and over, it takes on life, we live with it. It's very unhealthy. Put it aside, forget it. Let it be.

One last approach that the Buddha encouraged was to ***contemplate the law of kamma***. There is justice. There is always justice. No-one gets away with anything. No-one escapes the fruit of their *kamma*. When anyone does unwholesome or unskillful *kamma*, when they rob, when they cheat, when they abuse, whether or not you take them to court, whether or not you beat them on the head, they cannot escape their *kamma*. Everyone inherits their own *kamma*. Contemplating the law of *kamma* is sometimes very good to try and help us rise up and accept some apparent injustices in life. This doesn't mean that we should not take steps to protect ourselves, or to try and correct injustices. but sometimes there is nothing we can do. To relieve that sense of injustice, righteous indignation, which is just a glorified way of saying 'I feel angry, resentful', contemplate the law of *kamma*.

These are very useful, skillful means that we can utilise in order to reduce the power of ill-will and aversion. If we can reduce it, we are reducing self-torment. If we eliminate it, we eliminate an enemy, our own inner enemy. This is why the Buddha said:

"Though one may conquer a thousand enemies on the battle field, single handed, and conquer them a thousand times over, yet greater is the one who conquers oneself."

Conquering oneself means conquering one's defilements and, in this case, means conquering ill-will and aversion. I encourage all of you to contemplate the nature of ill-will, to begin to recognise the faults, the disadvantages and to endeavour to cultivate these skillful means: loving kindness, compassion, equanimity, avoiding, and contemplating *kamma*, so that we can be freed from those disadvantages, that suffering.

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