

Ways to Deal With Anger

1. Reflect on the disadvantages of succumbing to anger, both to oneself and others i.e.

(i) Look at immediate effects of anger on mind and body

Is your mind peaceful and happy, or disturbed and discontented?

Are you able to think clearly, make intelligent decisions, or does thinking become confused and irrational?

Do you feel calm and relaxed, or agitated, tense, bio chemically out of balance etc? There is plenty of scientific evidence that anger can lead to health problems, reduced life expectancy etc

(ii) Look how anger affects the people around you

Causes you to hurt people you feel close to, negatively affecting positive relationships

Causes you to exasperate problems with people you find difficult. May also cause them to come back and hurt you further in the future

(iii) More subtle disadvantages based on understanding cause and effect (karma) and the fundamental origin of all our problems and difficulties (The Four Noble Truths)

Anger is a major obstacle to the development of qualities like love, compassion and wisdom, which can ultimately help us to overcome all of our own problems and difficulties, as well as putting us in a better position to help others

2. Be gentle with yourself

Give yourself a break. Don't expect too much of yourself. Being hard on ourselves can be a common cause of anger, which in turn affects others.

As Lama Yeshe said, "Be gentle with yourself and you will be gentle with others"

Are you focussing more on the negative side of your life than the positive?

(The meditation on 'Appreciating our Human Life' in Kathleen McDonald's 'How to Meditate' can be helpful here)

3. Anger more likely to arise in specific situations if we are feeling unhappy or dissatisfied generally

Check overall state of health. Are you tired/stressed, suffering from low blood sugar, hormonal problems etc

Are you feeling under time pressure or is something else bothering you.

It can be helpful at least to be aware of these things and perhaps we need to pay some attention to addressing them

4. Reflect/ meditate on cause and effect (karma)

This particularly encourages us to take more responsibility ourselves for what is happening to us rather than looking to blame someone or something else.

The 'primary/substantial cause' of any experience is within our own mind. External conditions, the way others treat us etc only act as 'contributory causes'

5. Embrace the apparently negative situation as a positive opportunity to apply your practice

Situations giving rise to anger can be good times to work on the development of positive qualities such as patience, equanimity, humility, loving kindness etc.

Think of 'difficult' people as our spiritual teachers

6. Reflect on Impermanence

Are the problems really as solid, important or long lasting as they currently appear

Check experience - how things that seemed important in the past don't seem so now

Also reflect on inevitability of death and the uncertainty of its timing. We don't want to die with anger in our mind. Also the other person might die and imagine how you'd feel if last experience was being angry towards them

7. Reflect on Emptiness/Selflessness

Particularly notice the strong exaggerated sense of 'I' that arises when angry, as something that is very solid and fixed, that is being treated unfairly etc

Also notice the way other things appear to us e.g. our computer or car becomes the most useless thing in the world at that moment (despite the fact that they are very useful most of the time)

Also apply this to people. Again when angry someone can appear to us to be 'inherently' bad or irritating, as if that constitutes the whole of their being.

Applying this, and reminding ourselves of how we generally feel about the person, can be particularly helpful if our anger is directed towards a person we normally feel close to

8. Try to empathise with the other person

Particularly reflect on times when you have done similar things in the past.

Also the more we understand karma, The Four Noble Truths etc the more we understand that the person is harming themselves and hence compassion is more likely to arise than anger

9. Talk things through with the other person

It is however very important that we are honest with ourselves, particularly our motivation, and that we aren't just doing this to prove that we are 'right' etc

10. There are many meditations we can apply as antidotes to anger

E.g. Meditations on love, compassion, equanimity, exchanging self for others

See 'How to Meditate' by Kathleen McDonald for clear explanations of these

11. Draw inspiration from other beings who have experienced great injustice and difficulties

Particularly Nelson Mandela, His Holiness the Dalai Lama and others who despite experiencing considerable problems and injustices have realised that moving on with forgiveness is important for both themselves and others, and have really put this into practice
(This final one came out of the discussion during the class so many thanks to everyone involved)

12. Identify specific 'triggers' when anger is likely to arise.

Good times to be mindful.

