

Transforming Anger

Mindfulness Worksheet

Date / Time:

So far today, have you brought kind awareness to your:

Thoughts? Heart? Body? None

To begin this Meditation, please bring kind awareness to

- why you chose this topic
- how your belly, chest, and head each feel when you reflect on this topic
- the emotions that you can associate with these visceral feelings
- the positive or negative impact of any stories you believe in regarding this topic
- the fact that many others are feeling similarly about this topic as you
- how you might feel with increased awareness around this topic
- when you can apply increased mindfulness to this topic in your day-to-day life



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■ PURPOSE / EFFECTS

Anger is a functional emotion, as it is a fitting evolutionary response to injury and loss. It often steels us toward constructive action.

However, anger, like stress, is incredibly taxing on the mind and body. People inclined to anger have more heart attacks and gastrointestinal problems than those who are not.

Anger also often incites violence, both physical and emotional. Using anger as a tool for right ends is possible by learning to transform it from a destructive, animal rage into a righteous expression of justice.

■ METHOD

Summary

Techniques of withdrawal, analysis, detachment, and compassion help turn anger into peace.

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Long Version

- 1. Spacious Withdrawal:** Retreat from the source of your anger and sit quietly, breathing deeply. Bring the situation to mind and then slowly expand your awareness to encompass more than the situation; focus on your breathing if you need to as the relative importance of your anger shrinks in your mind. This disengages the unthinking parts of your brain that make you want to lash out and engages the moderating, thoughtful parts.
- 2. Counting Down:** An oldie but goodie. Count down slowly from twenty (or thirty...or whatever works for you). When you reach one, your emotional response will already have cooled.
- 3. Counteremotional Exercise:** Use anger as a trigger for love. Use your anger as a spark to consider what you love and those things that you find beautiful in life. Most importantly, be compassionate toward your own anger.
- 4. Structural Analysis:** In a meditative posture, consider the situation as objectively as you possibly can. Analyze the roles, intentions, and actions of everyone involved as well as the entirety of the event—its wins and losses. Respond clinically.
- 5. Planning:** Use the anger to steel you and make you stronger. Focus your angry emotions on a plan to establish resources and skills to resolve the problem.
- 6. Emptiness:** Using the same principles as structural analysis, take it a step further and recognize the transitory nature of human life and human squabbles.
- 7. Abandoning the Self:** Feel the anger in your mind and observe it detachedly. Recognize how the state of anger ebbs and flows with electrochemical impulses in the brain. Your anger is not your Self. There is no self. Thus, there is no anger.
- 8. Lovingkindness:** Respond with love; “turn the other cheek.” Some exercises on lovingkindness are here.
- 9. Building Alliances:** Realize that you do not exist in isolation. Recognize that you are part of a community and a support network.

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■ HISTORY

The teachings of the Buddha are full of reminders that anger is destructive and that detaching from it is one of the keys to enlightenment and happiness. Christ taught to “turn the other cheek” when we are struck instead of angering.

■ CAUTIONS

Serious anger issues that lead to extreme rage and violence may be better dealt with, at least initially, by a trained therapist with knowledge of anger management techniques.

■ NOTES

If you would like to test your ability to transform anger, you might try, during your next stressful traffic jam, silently sending out waves of lovingkindness to all the other cars on the road, even those who cut you off, don't pay attention, drive too slow, or lay on the horn.

You might also choose a relative or acquaintance who has been a source of frustration and anger in the past and try to hold them in your mind in a compassionate and loving state.