

Āghāta Paṭivīnaya Sutta 1

Paṭhama Āghāta Paṭivīnaya Sutta

The First Discourse on Removing Resentment

[Anger management]

(Aṅguttara Nikāya 5.161/3:185 f)

Translated & annotated by Piya Tan ©2005

1 Introduction

Of the five methods mentioned in the Āghāta Paṭivīnaya Sutta 1 for overcoming resentment, the first three are first, second and fourth divine abodes (*brahma, vihāra*), that is, lovingkindness, compassion and equanimity. The sutta Commentary says that altruistic joy (*muditā*) is missing because it is difficult to show altruistic joy to the one whom one resents (AA 3:294).

This sutta should be studied with **the Vitakka,saṅghāna Sutta** (M 20)¹ where five methods are given for the overcoming of distracting thoughts during meditation.

Āghāta Paṭivīnaya Sutta

Lovingkindness

Compassion

Equanimity

Disregarding the resentment

Contemplation on karma

Vitakka,saṅghāna Sutta

Turning another meditation sign

Examining the dangers of the distraction

Disregarding the distraction

Stilling the thought-formations [identifying the causes]

Sheer determination

2 Anger management

[Here is a valuable piece of self-analysis of anger through personal insight by a forest monk, Ajahn Thiradhammo.]

In winter [at Dhammapala Monastery in Switzerland,]² we have three months of monastic retreat. It's a good time for practice and usually it's a peaceful and quiet time. But about a month into the retreat this year, I had this little encounter with somebody. Afterwards, I was left with a discomfort; maybe you could call it anger. It wasn't somebody in the monastery. If it had been somebody in the monastery I could have talked to them and we could have worked it out. It was somebody in a chance encounter I had on a walk, and then they were gone. I couldn't even chase after them and sort it out. So there I was in the middle of a monastic retreat, no distractions, and there was this thing.

I called it “**anger**” as a way to deal with it, and this “anger” just wouldn't go away. I found it troublesome in the peaceful monastic setting to have this anger nagging at me. But I finally gave in: I realised, “This is a good chance to learn.”

I began to contemplate this irritation, to examine what was going on. It was an unpleasant physical sensation around my heart. As I looked at it, this “anger” suddenly turned out to be something else:

resentment. It surprised me, because the person I was resenting wasn't even there!

It was just a memory, imagination. So I contemplated this resentment for the next two or three days. I found it was resentment at being misunderstood. It went back to something that happened decades ago. I began to look at it, to be open to it, to receive it non-judgementally. As I did so, it began to unravel. It looked almost like it was unpacking itself. What I had thought was anger turned out to have a complex mechanism. It turned out to be a series of things.

After resentment, **fear** came up, fear of letting this resentment out, of it exploding, and fearing what the other person would do if I let it out. The fear lasted three or four days. Below fear was **frustration**. I spent three or four days with that one. Each day was an unravelling of this feeling I had called “anger.” It

¹ M 20/1:119-122.

² A slightly revised version of this article—with the additional information within [square brackets]—is found in *The Forest Sangha*, ed Ajahn Varado, Penang: Inward Path, 2004.

began to unravel in an almost mechanical way. As it unravelled, it opened up. As it opened up, it got more scary, because it didn't have a shape any more. It became more nebulous, and it became bigger. It became bigger than me. But as it unravelled it became less solid and more spacious, and there was more flexibility with it. When it reached frustration, it seemed less personal. It seemed more universal.

This unravelling went on for a few weeks. Then one day I noticed it was just this colourless energy. It had neither colour nor texture nor emotion. I couldn't say it was either resentment or frustration; it was just this pulsating energy, a colourless energy, though it wasn't pleasant. I could see that it was not me, and there was a fear with that. At least with anger I could say, "Well, OK, that's me."

But as it got more and more unpacked, it got down to sort of an archetypal level. It was a basic fundamental emotion. Then there was just this energy there, pulsating. A powerful energy without colour or direction. I couldn't say it was mine. I could only say it was **life-force**. And this was a revelation to me, to find that anger is part of our being. It is an expression of life-force. Of course it's been polluted by negative influences, in this case by my own stuff, my frustration and resentment and fear. But at its source it is just the life-force. This was frightening to discover, because I had no control over it. With anger I had a certain degree of control: I could keep my mouth shut, or let it out; but this stuff, what is it?

It is important therefore, that we work with anger, not against it, because it is part of our life-force. If we try to work against it, it is like trying to kill ourselves. This is what many people do, they try to strangle their anger.

They try to stop it and then they get depressed and resentful and frustrated, because they're stopping their life-force. To work with anger doesn't mean to let it out, but to work with it, to be able to tune into it at a level where it's at this life-force level. Once we can see in a different way it has a different meaning for us.

I realised that when I thought it was simply "anger," certain scolding thoughts arose in me, "Oh, you shouldn't be angry. Thirty years of meditation and you're still angry." But when it became this energy, a pulsating energy, then all these voices stopped, because there was no history with it. There was no history, no colouration and no personal investment in it, because it is just natural life-force. That's surely what the Buddha was telling us, not to take the things we're aware of as an expression of ourselves, but to be aware of what their real implications are, what is their real depth. Many times we're just looking at the surface, we aren't really seeing what the source is. If we cultivate mindfulness, awareness, it can begin to penetrate through; it can unpack emotions like anger.

Anger is not something to be throttled and strangled, but something to be explored and opened to and discovered. It is to be transformed into something which is enlightened. Practice is about enlightening that quality, not about pushing it away, or trying to strangle it or ignore it. Anger is telling us something about ourselves whether we want to hear it or not. We should remember the teaching of Ajahn Chah, that "all things are teaching us," and remember that the things we don't like are probably the things that are teaching us most of all.

Ajahn Thiradhammo,
Cittaviveka Monastery,
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The First Discourse on Removing Resentment (A 5.161/3:185 f)

1 Monks, there are these five ways of removing resentment, by means of which a monk would be able to remove all resentment that have arisen in him.

What are the five?³

2 (1) When resentment arises in a person, **lovingkindness** should be cultivated in that person.⁴
In this way, resentment would be removed in that person.

3 (2) When resentment arises in a person, **compassion** should be cultivated in that person.
In this way, resentment would be removed in that person.⁵

4 (3) When resentment arises in a person, **equanimity** should be cultivated in that person.
In this way, resentment would be removed in that person.

5 (4) When resentment arises in a person, **that person should neither be mindful of it nor attend to it.**⁶

In this way, resentment would be removed in that person.

6 (5) When resentment arises in a person, **that person should determine the ownership of karma in that person thus:**⁷

“This venerable one⁸ is the owner of karma, heir to karma, born in karma, bound by karma, has karma as his refuge.⁹ Whatever karma one does, good or evil, one is heir to it.”¹⁰

In this way, resentment would be removed in that person.

Monks, these are these five ways of removing resentment, by means of which a monk would be able to remove all resentment that have arisen in him.

— evaṃ —

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³ In the following, we see 3 of the divine abodes (*brahma, vihāra*), without the 3rd, ie, altruistic joy (*muditā*). Comy says that altruistic joy is not mentioned because it is difficult to cultivate it towards those whom one resents (AA 3:294).

⁴ *Yasmim bhikkhave puggale āghāto jāyetha, mettā tasmim puggale bhāvetabbā*. This sentence, though it looks simple, is somewhat tricky as *puggale* can be tr either as acc pl (“to the persons”) or as loc sg (“in the person”). Since *yasmim* (“in whomever”) clearly qualifies *puggale*, the phrase *yasmim...puggale* should be tr as “in whichever person” or such like. Comy speaks of *yattha ārammaṇe bhikkhuo āghāto uppanno*, “wherever the monk’s resentment in the object,” he should remove it with these five (methods) (AA 3:294).

⁵ On the absence of “altruistic joy” (*muditā*), see Introd.

⁶ *Yasmim bhikkhave puggale āghāto jāyetha, asati amansikarāto tasmim puggale āpajjitabbo*, lit “Monks, when resentment arises in a person, non-mindfulness, non-attention should be entered upon in that person.” Cf **Vitakka Saṅghāna S** (M 20.5/1:120) where it is one of the 5 methods of overcoming distractions during meditation. MA suggests 5 other methods for disregarding distracting thoughts: (1) Occupy oneself with something else; (2) recite some work explaining a doctrine; (3) read a Dharma text (like a *pūjā* book); (4) examine the parts of an object from his bag, like fire-sticks (“this is the upper stick; this is the lower stick”); (5) carefully and reflectively examine his requisites (“this is the awl; this is a pair of scissors; this is the nail cutter; this is the needle”); (6) darn the worn-out parts of the robe. (MA 3:90 f).

⁷ This reflection on karma is given in the 3rd person pl (“beings”) in **Cūḷa Kamma Vibhaṅga S** (M 135.4/3:202).

⁸ *Ayaṃ āyasmā*, ie, the one whom one resents.

⁹ See **Samsappati Pariyāya S** (A 10.205/5:288, 291); see also M 1:390, 3:203; A 372-74, 186, 5:88; Kvu 522.

¹⁰ *Kamassako ayaṃ āyasmā kamma, dāyādo kamma, yoni kamma, bandhu kamma, paṭisaraṇo, yaṃ kammaṃ karissati kalyāṇaṃ vā pāpakaṃ vā tassa dāyādo bhavissatī ti*. As at **Thāna S** (A 5.57/3:71-75) = SD 5.12, where it is said to that these should be constantly reflected upon.