

BUDDHIST APPROACH TO SUSTAINABLE SOCIETIES THROUGH ANGER CONTROL METHODS

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ABSTRACT

Disharmonious interpersonal relationships, deleterious effects on health, conflict at a workplace are some of the negative consequences of excessive anger. According to the Western Australia Council of Social Services, social sustainability happens when the formal and informal processes, systems, structures, and relationships actively support the capacity of present and future generations to create healthy and livable communities. Anger control is important in personal and social development by promoting emotional, physical and mental health, enhancing stronger and healthier relationships with others, and creating a harmonious and sustainable society. A sustainable society is one that could satisfy its needs without diminishing the chance of the present and future generations. This concept has evolved to a wider range of issues such as environment, social and economy. According to Buddhism, sustainability means establishing appropriate material wellbeing, non-harming in economic movement, and realizing the inner freedom from suffering. Buddhism has a contribution in shaping the ethical and moral concerns of people. This paper focuses on ways to apply anger control methods derived from the Buddhist teachings for a sustainable society. In order to achieve this objective, a methodology was set up in a framework of literature

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review and textual analysis based on primary and secondary sources. It is revealed that, in Buddhist psychology, hate, ill-will, aversion or resentment are negative emotions sharing similar characteristics with anger. There are several positive emotions and controlling methods to Buddhism can provide to remedy these negative mental states. One can train to gradually heighten his or her awareness of negative mental states and restrict its expression by applying a meditative approach—being conscious, mindful, and regularly reflecting on one’s deeds, speech and thoughts. Moreover, one may reduce one’s his or her anger effectively by repeatedly reflecting on the Buddhist doctrine of karma, disadvantages of anger, advantages of non-hatred, good qualities of the hostile person, rebirth principle, and three characteristics of existence. The development of the virtue of patience and four affective qualities of divine abiding is also recommendable as powerful antidotes against anger. This paper highlights various Buddhist approaches to conquer anger emotion, where one may use any method that will work best in different situations.

INTRODUCTION

Anger creates social issues

Anger is a complex human emotion. One may outburst his or her angry emotion when he or she has the feeling of being rejected, attacked or threatened, and frustrated or powerless. One could outburst his or her anger emotion in various forms ranging from mild irritation to verbal and physical aggression and violent rage. When one frequently expresses excessive anger towards others, it leads to various negative consequences, such as disharmonious interpersonal relationships, deleterious effects on health, conflict at workplaces, confrontation and violence. People tend to violate social norms and commit crime out of anger, resentment and aggression (Averill 1982, p. 101). Recently, anger and violence are increasing at an alarming rate in different settings of societies. Anger triggers daily incidents such as quarreling, fighting, road rage, domestic violence, and internet and computer rage. Furthermore, outburst anger extending to threaten human lives terribly. For example, tragedies of schools and public areas shootings, suicide

bombings, homicide, terrorists, and wars (DeFoore, 2004). These are the social problems that create a chaos society.

Importance of anger control

Anger control is important in personal and social development. If one can deal with different situations in manageable anger emotion, one may have a healthier life and stronger interpersonal relationships with others. Other than that, one who can manage angry emotion wisely will make one has lesser physical, physiological, and psychological symptoms which related to anger. When one has better emotional, physical and mental health, one will have a contribution in creating a harmonious society.

Nature of anger from the Buddhist perspective

Buddhism defines anger as originated from hatred and relates to other negative mental states, such as jealousy, envy and sense of inferiority (Silva 2005, p. 52). From the Buddhist perspective, greed, hatred and delusion are three evil roots and defense mechanisms of self (self-centeredness, self-importance, and deluded views), which lead one to bad consequences and bind beings in samsara¹ (Harvey 2016, p. 47). Hatred is a reverse reflection of greed. When something or someone obstructing one from pursuing desirable things, one's deluded mind with resentment will destroy things and harm the others (Ekman et al. 2005, p. 61). Anger is frequently defined as an adverse emotional response to perceived provocation (Berkout, et al. 2018, p. 3). From the Buddhist viewpoint, one should eliminate anger to lessen mental discomfort, avoid future negative karmic results, and prevent from harming others (Aronson 2005, p. 110).

Social sustainability

According to the Western Australia Council of Social Services, social sustainability happens when the formal and informal processes, systems, structures, and relationships actively support the capacity of present and future generations to create healthy and livable communities. A sustainable society is one that could satisfy

1. Samsara: "round of rebirth". Samsara is the unbroken chain of the five-fold *khandha* combinations, which, constantly changing from moment to moment follow continuously one upon the other through inconceivable periods of time (Nyanatiloka & Nyanaponika 2002, p. 298).

its needs without diminishing the chance of the present and future generations. This concept has evolved to a broader range of issues such as environment, social and economy.

According to Buddhism, sustainability means establishing appropriate material wellbeing, non-harming in economic movement, and realizing the inner freedom from suffering. Buddhism has a contribution in shaping the ethical and moral concerns of people. Thus, this paper draws attention to the human dimension as the critical factor for sustainable development of societies. In order to achieve this objective, a methodology was set up in a framework of literature review and textual analysis based on primary and secondary sources. This paper classifies Buddhist approaches to control anger into three categories: 1) mindfulness; 2) wisdom; and 3) compassion. By cultivating these three qualities continuously, one may reduce anger emotions effectively and promote a sustainable society.

MINDFULNESS

Mindfulness is the most fundamental skill to work with anger emotion. Mindfulness facilitates one to know his or her present emotional state (Aronson 2005, p. 109). One can gradually heighten his or her awareness of negative mental states and restrict its expression by being conscious, mindful and regularly reflecting on one's deeds, speech and thoughts (Kennedy 1985, p. 122). Sakyong (2004, p. 73) indicates that the process of breathing meditation is to recognise thoughts, let the thoughts rising and falling, and back to the breadth repeatedly. The gradual decline of thoughts and dissolve of subtle thoughts may decrease mental agitation, calm the mind, and create a peaceful experience. Mindfulness practitioners may develop an immune system or dismantle the emotions when they discover the operation of the mental process of anger (Ellinghausen 2006, p. 72). Thurman (2006, p. 9) advocates that dismantling things will destroy it in some sense, analyze it, see through it, and confront with its ultimate non-existence. A high level of self-awareness through practising mindfulness is probably allied with the healthy expression of emotions (Kennedy 1985, p. 51).

WISDOM

To effectively reduce one's anger, one should regularly reflect on some Buddhist concepts. According to the Buddhist tradition, one may reduce his or her anger emotion by contemplating on the Buddhist doctrine of karma, disadvantages of anger, advantages of non-hatred, good qualities of the hostile person, rebirth principle, and three characteristics of existence. Through the contemplation of these Buddhist concepts, one may have some breakthrough in the understanding of the nature of things, especially the nature of anger.

1 Doctrine of karma

Under the doctrine of *karma*, skillful actions produce pleasant effects; and unskillful actions produce unpleasant effects. The Buddha advocates that there are painful outcomes by having corruption and unwholesome bodily, verbal and mental *karma* (A.V.292–7). Therefore, one should avoid unskillful actions which originated from unwholesome volitions of greed, hatred and delusion, but cultivate skillful actions such as generosity and renunciation, loving kindness and compassion, clarity of mind and wisdom which are based on non-greed, non-hatred and non-delusion respectively (Harvey 2003, p. 31; Kennedy 1985, p. 65). Hatred is an evil root which triggers unwholesome actions. Anger which is originated from hatred needs to be eliminated in order to free from suffering.

2 Disadvantages of anger and advantages of loving kindness

One suffers when anger arises due to merging with unpleasant feelings or unable to get what one desired. In *Āṅguttara Nikāya* (A.V.293), the Buddha says that one who has ill will and hate will have a thought: “May these beings be slain, slaughtered, cut off, destroyed, or annihilated!” The elimination of hatred from our minds is not an easy task. Thus, one may reduce anger by reminding oneself that people who are angry will have seven disadvantages: become ugly, unable to sleep well, mind constantly disturbed, poor, disreputable, no friends, and reborn in misery plane (A.IV.94, pp. 1066–7). One may also reduce anger by the cultivation of its antidote—loving kindness. Practising loving kindness has eleven advantages: sleep and awake in comfort without evil dream, dear to

human or non-human being, protected from celestial beings, free from harm (fire, poison, weapons), mind can concentrate instantly, bright and serene countenance mind, die with unconfused mind, and reborn in *Brahma* world after death (If he fails to attain *arhatship*) (A.V.342). By contemplating the disadvantages of anger and advantages of loving kindness, one may remind oneself that the importance of reducing anger emotion.

3 Positive qualities of a hostile person

Another method that helps in reducing anger is by focusing on the good qualities of the hostile person. Human in this world possesses both good and bad qualities: some people have abrasive deeds but a soft mind and well speech; some people speak deceptively but neither in their mind nor action; some possess unwholesome thoughts but behave well. One may take any good quality of action, verbal or thought of the hostile person as the subject of contemplation and cultivate one's loving kindness. If it is hard to find any good side of that hostile person, then at least appropriate compassion by contemplating he or she must be in trouble and will suffer accordingly (Harvey 2016, p. 52). This reflection helps in softening one's heart and directing attention away from bad qualities of the hostile person which will intensify one's anger.

4 Parental love

Another useful strategy to reduce anger is by considering the principle of rebirth. In the Buddhist teaching, sentient being who does not yet attain liberation is subject to be reborn in different realms continuously and experiencing suffering infinitely. Every being must have met numerous parents and close family members who had been very good to one in incalculable existences (Harvey 2016, p. 52; S.II.189-90). Hence, according to this beginningless round of rebirth, one may reflect: this hostile person could be my mother in a particular past life—carried me for ten months in her womb, removed disgust (yellow sandalwood, excrement, urine, snot, spittle) from me, played with me and nourished me for decades. Also, this person would be my father in the past who always thought of earning a living to feed and nourish me by doing many difficult

things—pursuing the trade of merchant by goat paths, risking his life by going into battle or sailing on the great ocean. Otherwise, this person could be my brother, sister, son or daughter in the past, who gave me various help (Vis.IX.305). Therefore, pondering upon these thoughts will gradually diminish one's anger; stimulate one's compassion and positive regard for others regardless of their present roles or characters (Harvey 2003, p. 266).

5 Three characteristics of existence

The early Buddhist teaching declares three characteristics of existence as impermanence, suffering and non-self. According to this teaching, all existence is constantly changing and in an undesired way most of the time. Hence, all conditioned existence is subject to suffering without an autonomous true “self”. People suffer due to their delusive views and grasping of the five aggregates. Nonetheless, with the concept of impermanence, one should reason that even the evil one can change to become a better person. One should see changing and impermanence as reality, and not to identify only evil actions one once did (Harvey 2016, p. 52). One should also reflect that the mind is ever-changing, so ‘the person who annoyed me’ is no longer the same person (Harvey 2003, p. 280; Vism.301). Meanwhile, Mahayana Buddhism also introduces the concept of emptiness. Bodhisattva realises that all existence in this world is nothing but fluxes of ‘*dharma*’ which is devoid of an intrinsic identity (Batchelor 1997, p. 77). The angry person, the hostile person and even the emotion of angry are always changing and lacking any inherent existence. Thus, there is no reason for one to get angry if one possesses the wisdom to see ‘things as they really are’.

COMPASSION

The Buddhist teachings emphasize on understanding, practising and realizing *dharma*. To be free from mental afflictions, Buddhism has used various skillful means to help people in developing a calmer, more compassionate and integrated personality (Harvey 2003, p. 2). The development of the virtue of patience and four affective qualities of divine abiding are important in reducing anger emotions. Possessing of these qualities could help one to eliminate self-centeredness, and develop an aspiration for relieving the

suffering of others altruistically.

1 Virtue of forbearance

The supreme quality of the Buddha is his immeasurable compassion. One may overcome his or her anger by recollecting the Śakyamuni Buddha's former lives as bodhisattvas. Śakyamuni Buddha sacrificed his bodies and lives for the sake of others in countless previous lives. For instance, when he was Prince Dhammapala (Jat.III.181) or Ascetic Khantivadi (Jat.III.39), he did not harbour ill-will even others harm his life. Patience or forbearance is the highest and most excellent virtue that should be cultivated in the heart of a bodhisattva who aspires to attain Buddhahood (Dhp.V.184). When bodhisattvas confront with difficult circumstances and hatred, they practice loving kindness and compassion towards their enemies. Thus, by calling to mind the virtues of patience and selfless service of those bodhisattvas regularly, it will subdue one's anger and expand positive emotions—loving kindness and compassion toward all other beings.

2 Development of the four divine abiding

Negative emotions are seen as destructive if people perceive that the self is an independent, autonomous, and permanent entity. However, through meditation on the four affective qualities of divine abiding (loving kindness, compassion, sympathetic joy, and equanimity), people are more likely to promote calmness of mind, insight, and selfless care for others (Silva 2005, p. 59). These four positive emotions can be viewed as attributes that underlie the nonjudgmental feature of mindfulness (Hofmann 2011, p. 1128). The empathetic nature of the four divine abiding reminds the meditator of 'inter-being' or non-separateness with the world and all sentient beings. Subsequently, this has the effect of cultivating a right state of mind and allowing our hearts to be 'radically opposed to our habitual experience of self-versus-world-and-other' (Weber 2006, p.4). Contemplation of these four divine abiding can help one in developing virtues and weakening the attachment to 'self' (Harvey 2003, p. 278). Anger emotion arises because of self-defensive at most of the time. Anger emotion will be reduced when self-attachment is weakened.

2.1. *Loving kindness*

Loving kindness (*mettā*) also means ‘friendliness, benevolence, amity, goodwill, concord, fellowship, non-violence, and inoffensiveness’ (Harvey 2016, p. 53). Loving kindness is the aspiration for the welfare and happiness of others, extricated from mere friendliness that grounded on self-centeredness. Loving kindness is an unselfish, universal, and all-embracing love which acts as an antidote to ill-will and hatred. The meditator radiates loving kindness pervading all directions and to all beings, resembling a mother’s love for her child, but without affection, possessiveness and sentimentality (Harvey 2003, p. 279). Firstly, the meditator cultivates loving kindness towards oneself by wishing “may I be well and happy”, and then extending this genuine goodwill towards the dear person, the neutral person and finally to the hostile person (Buddhaghosa 1991, p. 301). By repeatedly practice it, barriers towards these four persons (oneself, dear person, neutral person, and enemy) will collapse, and the mental state of the meditator will become unbiased.

2.2. *Compassion*

Compassion is an aspiration which wishes all beings will be free from suffering and acts as the antidote to cruelty. When loving kindness matures into its fullness, it will develop into compassion naturally. Compassion and concern for others’ suffering will also be developed if one can fully understand the meaning of *dukkha*. Compassion is also appropriate towards evil people—who are without any positive quality and will suffer significantly in future lives, as a karmic result of their actions (Harvey 2003, p. 266; Vism.340). Compassion resembles the feeling of a mother who wishes to alleviate the suffering of her child but is directed toward all beings (Dalai 2001).

Mahayana tradition practices ‘exchange of self with other’ to cultivate compassion. Shantideva says that one should protect others equally as one protects oneself because all beings are the same in desiring happiness and disliking suffering. Furthermore, Shantideva argues that suffering is just suffering, due to its ultimate sense—suffering is ownerless and devoid of ‘self’, where there is no

difference between others' or my suffering (Bca.VIII.90–96, cf. 103). Compassion and loving kindness are closely linked to the Buddhist concept that all beings are inextricably connected (Hofmann 2011, p. 1127). Hence, careful attention in protecting others through patience, harmlessness, loving kindness and sympathy also protects oneself. One who possesses a compassionate heart would not outburst his or her anger emotion toward others.

2.3. *Sympathetic Joy*

Sympathetic joy is a wholesome act of rejoicing in all sentient beings' virtues and happiness. It is the antidote for jealousy and discontent. It assists in making people less self-centered and promotes an appreciation of others' karmic fruitfulness (Harvey 2003, p. 279). When one always rejoicing others betterment, one will have a good and positive emotional attitude.

2.4. *Equanimity*

Equanimity is the neutral attitude regarding all beings and acts as an antidote for clinging and aversion. Equanimity is a quality of unruffled serenity and even-mindedness, which functions to see equality in beings. Equanimity is rooted in the profound understanding of the principle of *karma*—each action bear result, with a realization that suffering is an inevitable part of the life of one and others. A compassionate person who still has the feeling of anger, greed, and jealousy, can try to accept such emotions with equanimity and cultivates the mind—by letting such negative mental states arise and pass without identifying or acting upon them (Harvey 2003, p. 279). It allows one to look at the nature of existence and experience 'as they really are' without attachment or resentment (Weber 2006, p. 7).

These four divine abiding form the basis of Buddhist ethical system. People may pay present-moment experiences mindfully, gain insight, and free from mental suffering or distressing emotions through the cultivation of these four divine abiding. Otherwise, one would probably have a ruminative mind when he or she confronts with unpleasant or distressing anger emotions. Compassion mindfulness focuses attentiveness on the elimination of suffering of beings while loving kindness mindfulness focuses attentiveness

on the well-being of beings. People can practice mindfulness in any postures at any time. People may practice these feelings towards oneself, specific subjects or to all beings in all directions (Hofmann 2011, pp. 1127-8). These four types of divine abiding are altruistic mental capabilities that combine meditative approach and wisdom, which are important for spiritual development, and to live in harmony with all beings in the world.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, cultivation of mindfulness, wisdom and compassion are the Buddhist approaches that can reduce the anger emotion effectively. The first Buddhist approach in controlling anger is through the cultivation of mindfulness. When focusing on breathing meditation, one may acknowledge his or her arising anger mental state, and then prevent the anger emotion from emerging into physical deeds. The second method in reducing aversion feelings is the cultivation of wisdom. One shall reflect on the doctrine of *karma*, disadvantages of anger, advantages of loving kindness, positive qualities of the hostile person, and the principle of rebirth. Ultimately, one understands that all existence is impermanent, suffering, and devoid of 'self'. When one has the right understanding of *dharma* and possesses wisdom, delusive views and negative anger emotion will be eliminated gradually. The third Buddhist approach in controlling anger emotion is through the cultivation of compassion. When facing any adversity in life, one practises the forbearance virtue and learns the sacrificing spirit for the well-being of others. At last, practising the four divine abiding can help one to develop an unbiased mind and has an aspiration to free beings from suffering and gain happiness. Other than reducing anger or ill will, one also may eliminate other negative mental states, such as jealousy, cruelty, clinging and aversion through these Buddhist approaches. The main aims of practising the Buddhist path are to uproot the unwholesome mental states, cultivate wisdom and compassion to attain *nirvana*. Buddhist approaches in controlling anger will prove to be extremely useful in promoting emotional, physical and mental health, enhancing stronger relationships with others, and creating a sustainable and harmonious society. These Buddhist approaches of anger management offer the world a range of skillful means that

would suit well in many different situations.

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ABBREVIATIONS

A	Āṅguttara Nikāya
Bca	Bodhicaryāvatāra
D	Dīgha Nikāya
Dhp	<i>Dhammapada</i>
Jat	Jātaka
M	Majjhima Nikāya
S	Samyutta Nikāya
Vism	Visuddhimagga