

COMPASSIONATE WRATH: TRANSPERSONAL APPROACHES TO ANGER

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ABSTRACT: In this essay, two transpersonally-oriented approaches to anger are closely examined, and a radical reconsideration of anger is recommended. The first approach (Mindfully Held Anger) refers to practices in which anger is consciously contained, not affectively expressed, and transegoically attended to, with a key intention being neither to suppress anger nor act it out. The second approach (Heart-Anger) refers to practices in which openly expressed anger and compassion mindfully coexist. Working with anger in transpersonal contexts is, it is concluded, not only possible, but necessary if anger is truly to be a positive force in our lives.

There is widespread disagreement in various literatures (psychological, psychotherapeutic, philosophical, religious, and anthropological) regarding (a) the nature, value, and use of anger; (b) the relationship between anger and aggression, anger and reason, anger and intimacy, anger and spirituality; and (c) how to “work” practically with anger in various contexts (Masters, 1999). In this article, two transpersonally oriented approaches to working with anger are examined, and a radical reconsideration of anger is recommended. The two more conventional approaches to working with anger can be described as “anger-in” and “anger-out.” Advocates of both approaches continue to debate each other, citing and often making moral real estate out of the dangers of either letting anger out or keeping it in (as though it were but an endogenous entity). However, there is much more to working with anger than merely adopting a position along the anger-in/anger-out continuum. One can, for example, approach anger not just physiologically and psychologically, but also spiritually. In fact, working with anger in transpersonal contexts is, as will be argued, not only possible, but necessary, if anger is truly to be a positive force in our lives.

Transpersonal theory generally has had little to say about emotion per se (for an exception, see Welwood, 1990, 1996). Yes, transpersonal theory does devote a significant amount of attention to love and compassion, but these are, arguably, more *states*—or even *choices* or *disciplines*—than actual emotions, despite their affective valence. Yet emotion clearly persists, even when egoity is no longer the main center about which one’s experiences are constellated (the anger of Jesus being but one example). Anger itself is generally quite sloppily approached in transpersonal theorizing, usually being viewed as no more than an undesirable, “lower” emotion, all but indistinguishable from aggression (e.g., Boorstein, 1996, pp. 408-409¹). Its negative influence on spiritual practice has been noted both in contemporary (e.g., Dubs, 1987) and historical contexts (e.g., Shantideva, 1979).

In Buddhism, for example, anger generally is conceived of as a merely unwholesome or afflictive state, all but devoid of moral value (Nhat Hanh, 1998, p. 92). Given that many of the mindfulness practices characteristic of much of contemporary Western spirituality are largely derived from Buddhism, there has been an unfortunate (and largely unquestioned) adoption of Buddhist views of anger as well, resulting in a spirituality that tends to be rejecting of anger, or at least of the direct expression of anger. That Buddhism generally equates anger, as a hindering aversion, with aggression and even hatred (Chagdud Tulku, 1998; Nhat Hanh, 1998; Shantideva, 1979) has been largely overlooked in contemporary spiritual practice—it has been easier just to dissociate from anger.² Yet such dissociation, reminiscent of unskillful anger-in strategies, simply drives anger into subterranean refuges that, through their very contractedness and darkness, can infuse it with “unwholesome” or even malignant intent.

There are, of course, exceptions in Buddhist practice to this viewing of anger as a merely afflictive state, as exemplified by Rinzai Zen and Tantric Buddhism. In these traditions, the energies of “unwholesome” states (including hatred and anger) are, under the right conditions, accepted and worked with as sources of knowledge and power, in order to be transmuted into realization-serving forces. The Dalai Lama (1997, p. 30) refers to this as using “anger on the path.” Transmuted aggression, says Chögyam Trungpa (1976, p. 154), is “called ‘vajra’ anger since it is the diamond-like aspect of energy”—that is, an energy capable of piercing or cutting through almost anything. In his commentary on the Tibetan Book of the Dead, Trungpa (Fremantle & Trungpa, 1975) says that the “wrathful deities” of Tibetan Buddhism—58 enormously fierce, blood-drinking, terror-inspiring energetic configurations apparently “met” about a week after one’s death—have as their main function the cutting of “the continuity of the self-preservation of the ego; that is their wrathful quality” (pp. 66-67). “Wrath” in a Tantric context has nothing whatsoever to do with even the subtlest egoic fierceness; it is “the purified form of hatred/aversion which actively transforms delusive states” (Coleman, 1994, p. 418). It is anger completely devoid of hatred. Like the anger of the God of the Old Testament, it is a transegoic awakening force, inviting deep transformation. The fear (or shock) that it inspires may be enormous, but such fear (or shock), in its very intensity, may be so immune to distraction that one’s mind is brought into a radically acute single-pointed focus, thereby permitting, at least in potential, a kind of insight and action not otherwise possible. A similar use of anger—to jolt significant others into wakefulness—may sometimes occur in the master-disciple relationship, perhaps most famously (and infamously) in the “Crazy Wisdom” and Zen traditions. Here, anger from the Master is a kind of caring, a sublimely rude/rough compassion (unless, of course, the Master is actually acting out an ego-rooted agenda through such anger).

However, as will be discussed, the fruitful blending of anger and compassion need not be limited to spiritual masters, and the transmutation of anger does not necessarily have to occur for anger to be a beneficial force.

Anger

Anger can manifest as an affect, a feeling, or an emotion. As I define them, *affect* is an innately structured, noncognitive evaluative sensation that may or may not register in consciousness; *feeling* is affect made conscious, possessing an evaluative

capacity that is not only physiologically based, but often also psychologically (and sometimes relationally) oriented; *emotion* is psychosocially constructed, dramatized feeling. Affect is a given; feeling involves our conscious experience of that given; and emotion is how we frame and what we do with that given.

As an emotion, anger is an aroused, often heated state which combines a compellingly felt sense of being wronged or frustrated (hence the moral quality of anger) with a counteracting, potentially energizing feeling of power, both of which are interconnected biologically, psychologically, and culturally (Masters, 1998a, 1999).³ Rather than being a single entity with a clear perimeter, anger appears to be a complex process, a shifting, fluxing interplay of many states of mind and feeling. Desire, frustration, aggression, self-pity, righteousness, confusion, hurt, pride, calculation, blame, feelings of abandonment—all these and more may arise and pass or overlap in a very short time, during which we conceive of ourselves as “being angry.”

Anger, contrary to much of popular opinion (both secular and religious), is not necessarily the same as aggression. Aggression involves some form of attack, whereas anger may or may not (Averill, 1982; Young-Eisendrath, 1993, p. 139). Aggression is devoid of compassion and vulnerability—it is, says John Welwood (1990), “hardness cut off from softness” (p. 164)—but anger, however fiery its delivery might be (or might have to be), can be part of an act of caring and vulnerability. Jean Baker Miller (Miller & Surrey, 1997) argues that the usual way of thinking in contemporary culture does not significantly consider anger in the context of relationships, but rather links it with aggression. Aggression may not be so much an outcome of anger as an avoidance of it and its frequently interpersonal nature and underlying feelings of woundedness and vulnerability. Viewing anger as necessarily aggression—or even as the cause of aggression (Williams & Williams, 1993, p. 12)—gives us an excuse to classify it as a “lower” or “primitive” emotion; something far from spiritual.

Nevertheless, anger is far from “primitive,” though what we do with it may be far from civilized. Rejected anger easily mutates into aggression, whether active or passive, other-directed or inner-directed. Thus, a means of communication becomes a means of weaponry. Anger assigned to do injury, however subtly, is not really anger, but hostility. Anger that masks its own hurt and vulnerability is not really anger, but hard-heartedness or hatred in the making, seeking not power with, but power over, or the “safety” of apparent powerlessness. Implicit in this, however, is a potential healing: to reverse such processes, to convert aggression, hostility, hard-heartedness, hatred, and every other diseased offspring of mishandled anger back into anger. This conversion does not mean eviscerating or drugging the energies of such negative states, but rather liberating them from their life-negating viewpoints, so that their intensity and passion can coexist with a caring, significantly awakened attention. In this sense, the world needs not less anger, but more. Especially anger arising (or even blazing) from an open-eyed, loving heart.

A Fourfold Typology for Working With Anger

The typology outlined below is not only capable of making sense out of the diverse, complex, and enormous amount of material concerning anger, it is also sufficiently

inclusive to cover both personal and transpersonal considerations of anger (Masters, 1998a, 1999).

Anger-in refers to strategies, therapeutic and otherwise, that favor the restraining and redirection of the energies characteristic of raw anger. Not surprisingly, advocates of this approach stress the importance of not directly expressing one's anger (Deffenbacher & Stark, 1992; Novaco, 1975; Tavis, 1989).

Anger-out refers to approaches that emphasize the importance of directly expressing the energies and intentions of anger (Bach & Wyden, 1968; Lee, 1993; Masters, 1989). At the core of anger-out epistemology and work is the notion of catharsis, which remains a controversial topic in psychotherapeutic practice, even though there is evidence that incorporating catharsis in anger-management work makes it more effective (Gelb, 1994).

Mindfully held anger refers to practices in which anger is consciously contained, not affectively expressed, and transegoically attended to, with a key intention being neither to suppress anger nor to act it out. This approach is strongly linked with Buddhism and its "Middle Path" philosophy. On the surface, this philosophy, particularly in its emphasis on neither repressing nor acting out emotion, would seem to offer a solution to the anger-in/anger-out dichotomy. In being wakefully present with our anger, thereby closely witnessing the actual process of it (in its affective, cognitive, perceptual, and psychosocial dimensions), we also bear witness, at least to some degree, to the very "I" who is busy being angry. That is, one's perspective shifts from "how outraged one feels to who it is who feels it" (Epstein, 1995, p. 211). Buddhist elder Thich Nhat Hanh (1992, 1994, 1995, 1998) talks of "taking care" of his anger, cradling it with loving awareness, giving it room to be and to unfold—without outer expression (except as a later calm reporting)—in the spacious presence of mindfulness.

Heart-anger refers to approaches in which openly expressed anger and compassion mindfully coexist. Put together the virtues of anger-in, anger-out, and mindfully held anger—healthy rationality and restraint, emotional openness and authenticity, meditative capacity and awakened compassion—and minimize the difficulties associated with each, and heart-anger emerges (Masters, 1998a, 1999). Such anger, at its best, is rooted both in full-blooded aliveness and in deep caring for the other. As ruthless as it may sometimes seem, it is but the essence of wrathful compassion—a potent, often fiery caring.

TAKING TEA BY THE FIRE: MINDFULLY HELD ANGER

I'll begin by clarifying my use of the phrase "mindfully held anger," in anticipation of possible concern regarding the word "held." The "mindfully" part should not be problematic, since the word "mindfully" is generally not burdened by widely varying or oppositional connotations. By contrast, "held" can be a very positive term, suggesting a close, intimate embrace, and it can also be a very negative term, suggestive of rigid confinement and overattachment. Both polarities are of use in considering how this approach can be used or misused. I mean "held" in a more neutral

sense, as is suggested by an organic, nonsuppressive containment. Mindfulness provides the “container” within which anger can be skilfully investigated; this may mean that anger is not expressed at all, or, far less commonly, it may mean that anger is, once its reactive elements have been defused, permitted some minimal or “unheated” degree of expressiveness.

Mindfulness does not try to change anger, but rather simply keeps a transegoic “eye” on anger and all the “non-anger” elements that constitute it. When we thus attend to our anger, we allow the light of awareness to clarify the various qualities of our anger, so that it is not just anger for us, but rather a complex, fluxing, richly detailed process implicating body, mind, and environmental factors. In allowing this clarity, one experientially confirms that beyond the suppression or expulsion of anger is the possibility of being *with* it, of making compassionate room for it, without getting ensnared in or seduced by its imperatives and assumptions. In witnessing the actual moment-to-moment process of our anger—its textures, its temperature, its tonal qualities, its sensations and thought-formations and intentions—we find ourselves, at least to some degree, relating not so much *from* (or *as*) the “I” who is apparently busy being angry, as *to* it. That “I,” or presumed self—which is almost always implicitly accepted as an a priori given in both anger-in and anger-out approaches—is perhaps never quite so solid-seeming or convincingly real as when we are angry (assuming, of course, that our anger is not disowned), which means that being angry can be a particularly auspicious occasion for observing one’s self-sense.

The cultivation of patience is central to the practice of mindfully held anger (Dalai Lama, 1997, p. 96). Temper is not given expression but is deliberately suffused with as much equanimity as possible. In his “Peace Treaty,” Thich Nhat Hanh (1992) advises that “when we know we are angry, we impose on ourselves a kind of moratorium on speech and actions” (p. 64). This “moratorium” is not an act of repression, he states, but rather an occasion to practice mindfulness. In it, we agree to: “(1) Refrain from saying or doing anything that might cause further damage or escalate the anger; (2) not suppress [our] anger; (3) practice [mindful] breathing; (4) calmly, within twenty-four hours, tell the one who has made [us] angry about [our] anger and suffering, either verbally or [in writing]; (5) ask for an appointment for later in the week to discuss this matter more thoroughly” (p. 61). We also need to agree not to deny that we are angry, to look deeply into our anger and its roots, and to apologize as soon as we realize our unskillfulness and lack of mindfulness, unless we do not feel calm enough to meet with the person with whom we were or are angry. In short, anger is not to be suppressed or denied but is to be taken care of through a compassionate awareness. Such awareness does not judge anger; it simply contains, illuminates, and looks after it.

When we invite anger in for tea, we do not necessarily have to put any sedating or domesticating agents in its cup; what matters is our friendliness, openness, and depth of attentiveness toward our “guest.” It is also important to remember that anger is disarmed—assuming that it needs to be disarmed—not by spiritual ambition or transpersonal legerdemain, but by unconditioned love. In staying with and “holding” our anger instead of rejecting it, we can reinforce our capacity for getting to the roots of our anger. As awareness of what specifically characterizes our anger (mentally, somatically, perceptually, behaviorally, intersubjectively) deepens and

stabilizes, we are not so much possessed (or held hostage) by our anger as we are in possession of it. Instead of merely acting out the impulses of our anger—which some may naively label as “spontaneity”—and instead of trying to “reduce” or numb them through mental manipulations, we simply witness them, along with any attending thoughts and sensations. In short, our anger becomes something to be closely observed and treated with loving kindness. This practice of “holding” anger is not an act of suppression, states Thich Nhat Hanh (1992), but of love. As such, it appears to be the epitome of nonviolence. But is it?

Critical Perspectives

The practice of mindfully held anger, regardless of how gently it is engaged in, may itself sometimes be subtly violent, as when it is primarily animated by an aversion to directly expressing or openly conveying anger. Then anger is not so much held as suffocated; in the name of peace, it may be “civilized” in much the same manner (and with much the same “spiritual” righteousness) as were many aboriginal peoples by European imperialism. Catharsis of anger is viewed no more favorably here than it is by anger-in supporters. For example, Thich Nhat Hanh claims in a talk (1994) that directly expressing anger (as in pillow-pounding or other cathartic “releases”) will lead one to “hit the real thing in society.” Pounding a pillow may make us feel better, he says, but it leaves the roots of our anger intact: “If the seeds of our anger are watered again, our anger will be reborn, and we will have to pound the pillow again” (1991, pp. 59-60). In this regard, it is worth noting that for Thich Nhat Hanh, *vyapada*—meaning “ill-will” (Guenther, 1974, p. 210) or “injuriousness or cruel tendency” (Haldar, 1981, p. 109)—translates as “anger” (Nhat Hanh, 1998, p. 72). Perhaps a more fitting translation of *vyapada* would be “hostility.” (*Vyapada* can also be translated as “hatred” [Govinda, 1969, p. 84], which, along with its other translations, gives to anger an extremely negative connotation.)

Perhaps the key misuse of mindfully held anger approaches is overemphasis on (and overvaluing of) restraint and a corresponding lack of appreciation for the potential value of directly expressed anger. The notion that directly expressing our anger will make us even angrier (or more likely to act out our anger) overlooks not only what kind of anger is being expressed, but also how it is being expressed. The Dalai Lama (1997, p. 27), though quite adamant that anger, when left unchecked, tends to compound itself, recently admitted that “it is possible to imagine a situation where it may be better to just let out feelings of anger and express them.”

Does meeting one’s anger with mindfulness necessarily have to mean not directly expressing one’s anger? (By “expression,” I mean not only communicating *about* one’s anger, but also communicating, at least to some degree, the actual feeling and energy of it.) Thich Nhat Hanh, who (like many Buddhists) appears to equate anger with aggression and violence—which would certainly reinforce his unfavorable view of anger—understandably does not recommend directly expressing one’s anger. His position—that directly expressing one’s anger is counterproductive—may be true for him, but how true is it for those who are less mature and less disciplined than him, and therefore less capable of ably handling such a highly flammable condition and its often very compelling imperatives?

Those who look up to Thich Nhat Hanh or revere him as a spiritual teacher or wise elder may tend to overlook or ignore the possibility that his view regarding directly expressed anger might not be appropriate for them. In such unwitting (or unmindful) allegiance, they may well be talking themselves out of an actual need to explore more actively and perhaps even cathartically express their anger. Many spiritual seekers may be drawn to or even adopt Thich Nhat Hanh's approach to anger, not out of caring or compassion, but simply because it apparently makes a virtue, a spiritual virtue, out of avoiding what they want to avoid (probably because of past negative or traumatic associations with abusively expressed anger). Such practices, in short, may in part select for those for whom the nonexpression (or overly contained expression) of the feeling and energy of anger means safety, security, or comfort.

For someone "filled" with suppressed rage, trying to follow Thich Nhat Hanh's practice may not always be a very wise strategy—muting the very self that is crying out for unrestrained expression may sometimes be more of an act of self-violation than of healthy restraint or forbearance. To offer that self only loving-kindness practices and/or observational strategies—as valuable as they are, when one is ready for them—may simply be reinforcing the very rejection that lies at the root of the anger that such practices are purportedly addressing. At the same time, however, mindfully held anger may be precisely what is needed for some who are "filled" with suppressed rage. My concern here is not just the improper application of mindfully held anger, but also those circumstances in which even the proper application of mindfully held anger is a suboptimal strategy.

At this point, one might well question whether anger is intrinsically part of a subject-object relationship—does it help preserve the polarities, dualities, and distinctions between us? In most cases, yes. Anger helps guard and maintain various differences and boundaries, whether for better or worse. It is a basic part of our "equipment" as human beings, a biologically rooted given, which ordinarily is strongly focused on an offending other, an object apparently clearly apart from oneself. Anger thus generally reinforces subject-object distinctions; this may be useful in the case of needed differentiation (particularly in the emergence of an increasingly autonomous self-sense), but not so useful in the case of animosity-stained biases. Yet anger may also help cut through dualistic positionings, at times even literally flaming through barriers to intimacy, so that subject and object can both be seen as different "positions" of the same fundamental reality. Essential to this is the shedding of anger's reactive or egocentric elements and the infusion of anger with some degree of compassion for the other (and also for oneself, especially when anger is turned inward), which is made possible through the approach of mindfully held anger.

And what does all this do to the original anger? Its context is altered, so that it dissolves, is redirected, or is reconsidered. In any case, it changes, often radically so. If the original anger appears to remain much the same, it is as an affect. As an emotion, it changes. Changing our relationship to it—as is so central to mindfully held anger approaches—changes it. If the object of our anger changes, so too does our anger; and if our self-sense or perspectival stance changes, so too does our anger. "An emotion is not distinct or separable from its object; the object as an object of this emotion has no existence apart from the emotion" (Solomon, 1993, p. 117).

That anger is logically indistinguishable from its object is not just a philosophical notion for practitioners of mindfully held anger, it is a living reality. Anger is not a discrete thing or an endogenous entity, somehow passing through us like a traveler completely unaffected by the vistas and circumstances he or she is encountering. Rather, anger is a fluxing, complex process that both determines and is determined by its object, as is made obvious through the application of mindfulness. How interesting it is that the investigation of anger—which as an emotion is ordinarily strongly rooted in a demarcation between subject and object—leads to a blurring of such apparent boundaries. We may feel separate from the object of our anger, but our mindful investigation brings us closer and closer to that object, so that we and it exist, at least to some degree, in a state of inseparability. Thus we become more intimate with the apparent object of our anger.

Nonetheless, whether we become more intimate with our actual anger is another question. At times, consciously sitting with one's anger may be very appropriate, especially as opposed to impulsively discharging its energies; at other times, however, sitting with one's anger may be no more than just a matter of sitting on it. At such times, it could be very useful to bring some attention to who it is who is thus sitting with anger.

As important as it is to investigate the identity of the one who is angry (as in the transconceptual inquiry "To whom is this anger arising?"), it is just as important to investigate the identity of the one who is afraid of anger or afraid to openly express or share it. (And, to bring more precision to this practice of discernment, we might also—because anger so often coexists with hurt—ask, "Who is hurt?") Are we illuminating and taking real care of that anger-fearing or anger-avoiding (or hurt-centered) "I" when we engage in the practice of mindfully held anger, or are we, however subtly, giving in to its agenda, its need to "keep the peace" at all costs? Also, even if we are sufficiently motivated and attentive so as not to be doing such a practice in order to avoid our anger, we nonetheless are still choosing to contain it, regardless of the size or merit of our particular container—we may be, in a sense, being stingy with our anger, keeping it to ourselves rather than sharing it (except perhaps as a later calm reporting), unless of course our containment of it beneficially transforms it (into, for example, increased understanding and compassion).

Thich Nhat Hanh's recommendation that we not share our anger until we are calm—which roughly translates as non-angrily expressing our anger (though some signs of the feeling and energy of anger may be present)—is laudable for its making time for "looking deeply" into our anger, but questionable in its recommendation that anger never be angrily expressed, especially for those for whom the openly angry expression of anger may be needed (such as rape or incest victims struggling to reclaim their dignity and power).

Mindfully held anger is an immensely useful practice, but there is another equally valuable approach to anger, rooted not only in mindfulness and compassion, but also in direct (and even full-blooded) expression. That approach—heart-anger—is the topic of the next section.

WRATHFUL LOVE IN THE RAW: HEART-ANGER

There is a dearth of literature regarding heart-anger. Arguably, some of what constitutes anger-out may at times in fact be heart-anger, but it is not presented as such (e.g., May, 1972, p. 87). Anger from the heart, openly expressed in a mindful context, is a topic that is all but absent in the literature (for an exception, see Welwood, 1990, p. 154). Religious literature does, however, contain some paradigmatic examples of what could be construed as heart-anger, perhaps most famously exemplified by the story of Jesus driving the money changers out of the temple. As well, the rage of the Old Testament prophets (Heschel, 1962a, 1962b) and certain spiritual masters (e.g., Marpa, Gurdjieff, Neem Karoli Baba) is often suggestive of heart-anger. Ram Dass, for example, tells a story about his guru, Neem Karoli Baba, known simply as “Maharajji.” Maharajji gets very angry at a devotee, doing so in a manner that Ram Dass judges to be abusive. Ram Dass then becomes enraged, feeling his “heart turning cold toward Maharajji.” Later, as he watches Maharajji counsel a struggling couple to give up their anger, he inwardly sneers, recalling the scene he has just witnessed. Then Maharajji says, “Do what you do with another person, but never put him out of your heart.” As he says this, he looks directly and forcefully at Ram Dass. “The words burned into my heart,” says Ram Dass, “and I heard them in the moment as applying to the married couple, to Maharajji’s behavior with the devotee, and to my own reactions to the scene I had witnessed.” Maharajji’s anger, in this and other instances, was compassion-centered, regardless of its apparent abusiveness or harshness. “[This] abuse, coupled with the underlying love,” says Ram Dass, “was a great panacea for even the most hidden and deep-seated anger” (Ram Dass, 1995, pp. 243-244).

A biblical example suggestive of heart-anger is that of Jeremiah, perhaps the most wrathful of all the Old Testament prophets. The disaster he threatens is a disaster he is desperate to prevent—hence the extreme heat and force of his anger. “He terrified in order to save” (Heschel, 1962a, p. 120). Jeremiah does not rehearse his great “rants”—rather, he simply lets the anger that is literally possessing him speak freely, apparently doing nothing to alter its course. As colored as it might be by his personal predilections, it nevertheless is permitted full-blooded articulation, so that its message is unmistakably conveyed. The anger consuming him is informed by a larger context. It is, whatever its impurities, anger that cares, and cares deeply, about the suffering of others. Jeremiah, in fact, locates “the burning fire” of his passion in his heart (Jeremiah 20:9).⁴

It is also worth noting that some feminist writings on anger emphasize the value of anger—as opposed to aggression—as a resource in restoring integrity and intimacy, both personally and socially (e.g., McAllister, 1982; Miller & Surrey, 1997). Though such writings do not overtly speak of heart-anger, their aligning of openly expressed anger and compassion as a twin force of great benefit is in the spirit of heart-anger. That spirit may also sometimes be found in rage at injustice, as when such rage moves “beyond fruitless scapegoating of any group, [being linked] instead to a passion for freedom and justice that illuminates, heals, and makes redemptive struggle possible” (hooks, 1995, p. 20.). Though in such cases heart-anger may not demonstrably be clearly mindful nor be linked to any sort of spiritual practice, it arguably

still—especially in its degree of self-transcending caring, love, and spiritedness—deserves to be called “spiritual.”

Heart-anger, at its best, has a broad enough sense of human suffering to embrace a radically inclusive morality; it possesses sufficient faith in existence to persist in its fierce caring; and it has the guts to carry all this out. If all that was necessary was that it shine, it surely would, but it knows that often it must also burn. And, because of this, it knows that it must also weep.

Phenomenology

What is the actual experience of heart-anger like? How does it feel? Heart-anger is not just “regular” anger coming from the heart—and yet it shares enough common ground, especially physiologically, with such anger to be kept somewhat close to it, as signaled by the use of the word “anger” in both cases. There may be, however, some phenomenological differences. Directly expressed anger infused with awareness and caring for the other, though often just as intense and compelling as reactive anger, tends to feel more harmonious. In speaking of such anger, a friend once said, “It was as if all the cells of my body lined up in harmony.”

Heart-anger does not emerge from or represent just part of us; rather, it is an act of totality, a process that involves our entire being. Heart-anger is a full-bodied, openly expressive, integrative experience centered by an authentic caring for the other. Though that caring may not be outwardly evident—as when its “carrier” is especially fiery—it is felt inwardly, if only as a kind of resolute vulnerability, or willingness to stay unguardedly connected with the other, regardless of his or her actions. Such caring, which is far more than just an intellectual intention, brings to heart-anger an openness and spaciousness that makes it a phenomenologically more total experience than it would be otherwise. One’s focus may be very potent and pointed, but it is not so narrow as to exclude considering the well-being of the other and relevant environmental factors. The “tunnel vision” of “regular” anger is not adopted; a bigger picture (equipped, so to speak, with binocular vision) is permitted to frame and temper one’s intentions and actions.

As heated and pressurized as this might feel—after all, it still involves anger as an affect—it has a scope and presence to it that also affords it a feeling both of spaciousness and lovingly fierce focus. But isn’t this, one might ask, suggestive of some kind of control? How can one let one’s anger flow and yet still be sensitive, spacious, and alert with regard to the intersubjective space in which the anger is occurring?

Control and Trust

Heart-anger is not a submission to anger per se—which would mean being unresistingly enslaved by its imperatives—but rather a surrender to anger, or a conscious nonobstruction of its essential energies, so that one simultaneously rides it and is swept along by it, in much the same spirit that one might successfully bodysurf a massive wave. One is out of control and yet simultaneously is not. Instead of just fighting the wave or letting it overpower one—as in submitting to it—one blends

with it, perhaps even “becoming” it. Yet however lost one may be in it, one does not lose touch with what really matters.

Of course, letting go of control is not unique to heart-anger. It is, for example, centrally implicated in anger-out practices. However, where anger-out cathartic procedures generally do little more than discharge energy (ideally in contextual, integrative attunement with the originating factors of trauma), heart-anger both discharges and expands energy, making room for a more often than not transegoic appreciation of what is happening. As such, it harnesses rather than dissipates the forces of anger, aligning them as quickly as possible with love and compassion. What is harnessed, however, has to first be made available for harnessing. If control is not sufficiently surrendered at the right time, too much of our energy may be committed to containment, with the result that our anger is handicapped with so much restraint that its expression is too pale an imitation of what it could be.

At the same time, though, it is important to realize that heart-anger involves, and has to involve, an ongoing, finely operationalized balance between containment and expressiveness. There may be some initial containment, perhaps to provide the time needed to access one’s compassion, or to take a few conscious breaths (here, heart-anger and mindfully held anger are indistinguishable). It is wise to confirm that one’s heart is indeed involved in one’s anger before seriously considering moving into relatively full-throttle or dynamic expression. Heart-anger may be very hot at times, but it nevertheless still may begin its stand by controlling its anger, assessing the circumstances in which it finds itself until it intuits that it is appropriate and timely to openly express itself. The letting-go involved in heart-anger is, to a large extent, a loss of control, but it is not a loss of responsibility. One may lose face, but one does not lose touch.

Also, one does not arrive at the capacity to deliver wrathful compassion without having considerable trust for one’s raw anger. Without such trust—and it is a trust not for the egoic use of anger, but for anger itself—there will be too much curbing, second-guessing, and detouring of anger for it to be as effective as it might otherwise be. (Developing such trust requires, in part, a mindful, in-depth experiential study of one’s anger and anger habits.) Trusting our anger does not mean that we indulge it or leave its imperatives unquestioned, but rather that we open to it and give it room to be, letting its energies coemerge with a mindful caring. (“All of our feelings and emotions,” says Welwood [1996, p. 195], “contain a certain intelligence, which we lose sight of when we become swept up in their drama.”) Central to this is an agenda-free alertness that—like an all-star free safety in a football backfield—roams our experiential terrain with a keen and sensitive eye, ready moment-to-moment to shift the context if necessary. But free safeties sometimes play less than skillfully; hence some caution is needed in evaluating one’s capacity for adjusting appropriately in a given situation.

Heart-anger may sometimes be so fierce, so seemingly out of control, that it is mistaken for everyday, reactive rage. Yet it is even then still an act of caring, literally compassion in ferocity’s disguise. Extremely few, of course, are consistently capable of such delivery, given its required degree of awareness, integrity, compassion,

and controlled abandon, but it is, nonetheless, possible. As iconoclastic spiritual master George Gurdjieff knew and so bluntly articulated, sometimes what is needed in order to awaken others is a shock. He himself made ample use of such shocks—whether through familiarity-disrupting exercises, or through his sudden ragings at hapless disciples:

Gurdjieff was standing by his bed in a state of what seemed to me to be completely uncontrolled fury. He was raging at Orage. . . . I had to walk between them to set the tray on the table. I did so feeling flayed by the fury of Gurdjieff's voice. . . . Orage, a tall man, seemed withered and crumpled as he sagged in the window, and Gurdjieff, actually not very tall, looked immense—a complete embodiment of rage. . . . Suddenly, in the space of an instant, Gurdjieff's voice stopped, his whole personality changed, he gave me a broad smile—looking incredibly peaceful and inwardly quiet—motioned me to leave, and then resumed his tirade with undiminished force. This happened so quickly that I do not believe that Mr. Orage even noticed the break in the rhythm. (Peters, 1964, p. 31)

Essential to heart-anger is a fitting balance between being in control and being out of control, as is illustrated by the above example (which presumes that Gurdjieff's rage is rooted in compassion for Orage). The capacity to be in control—specifically, to skillfully contain or “adjust” one's anger—generates a sufficient sense of safety (i.e., that one won't harm others with one's anger) to make trust in one's anger a reality. Such trust, in turn, makes being out of control—as demonstrated by letting anger's fire freely flame forth—not a problem, but rather an opportunity to catalyze needed change. At its expressive best, heart-anger is a passionate, creatively apt, and deeply responsible use of power. Its wildness is not mere savagery nor feral excess; it is simply unshackled, self-illuminating passion, a molten undamming of flaming articulation, its “No!” bursting with an even deeper “Yes!”

Such ego-transcending passion, whether it adopts the form of a lustily expansive conflagration or a quiet, deep-seated pilot flame, burns hotly but cleanly, clearing space not only for the emergence of more watery emotions, but for the full-blooded embodiment of needed stands. Heart-anger transcends aggression without losing its potency and resoluteness. It simultaneously cuts like a diamond and embraces like a concerned mother. In control of its out-of-controlness, and yet still rich with spontaneity, it is an act of potent caring.

Nevertheless, heart-anger is always a risk. What if one is misheard? What if one's delivery catalyzes a violent reaction? This is why heart-anger has to be employed with great care. Nonetheless, not to express heart-anger—assuming that one is capable of doing so—is also a risk. What if the other might have benefited from such anger? The key question perhaps is, In a situation that seemingly calls for heart-anger (assuming that we are capable of it), do the potential benefits outweigh the potential risks? And if so, how can we know? Can we trust our intuition with regard to expressing or not expressing heart-anger? If we have been able in the past to deliver such anger properly, we presumably will at least have the potential to be able to sense whether or not a particular situation calls for it.

We also need to take into account developmental prerequisites for heart-anger. Someone with minimal mindfulness and insufficient self-knowledge is probably not going to be capable (except perhaps under extraordinary conditions) of heart-anger. It is important not to forget that, as Nisargadatta (1982) says, "If you are angry or in pain, separate yourself from anger and pain and watch them. Externalization is the first step to liberation" (p. 247). Take whatever distance (and time!) you need so as to be able to observe your anger. Don't dissociate from your anger; simply stand apart from it. Paradoxically, doing so brings the anger into such focus that it eventually becomes not an "it," but only more reclaimed by us. Here, we are not our anger, and yet we are our anger.

The Presence of Caring

Equally central to heart-anger is the ongoing, unobstructed presence of caring, especially a caring that is untainted by self-serving aims. Because heart-anger cares, it is vulnerable. Its heart shows, regardless of how angry its face might appear, or how fierce its voice might be. What seems to matter most here is not so much the presence of anger, but the degree and quality of caring (and vulnerability) with which it is infused (and thereby altered by, at least to some degree). Caring and anger can coexist, regardless of which one emerges first. When anger is communicated with caring, it has moved beyond what we normally would call "anger." Nevertheless, it still incorporates anger as an affect, employing its fiery intensity and forcefulness for its ends. As such, heart-anger is arguably still anger, but, as was described earlier, it is not just "regular" anger coming from the heart. It is, so to speak, a "higher" anger, being not just a mere emotion to witness or mindfully contain, but rather a potentially spiritual force in its own right. The caring with which it is infused radically alters it, but not enough to warrant leaving "anger" out of its name.

Consider Tibetan spiritual master Marpa. He treated his disciple Milarepa with a harsh, sometimes even brutal anger, to enforce the discipline he deemed necessary for Milarepa's spiritual purification. One might argue that this constituted not compassion, but abuse—and it certainly would for almost all of us—but Marpa's apparent maturity and lucid purity of intention is suggestive of what the Dalai Lama describes as "recognizing that there is no way to dispel [a particular] vice than through an act of violence" (Goleman, 1997, p. 175). About his anger, Marpa says:

I was angered at Milarepa, and although my anger recoiled upon me like a wave of water, it was not like vulgar, worldly anger. Spiritual anger is a thing apart; and in whatever form it may appear it has the same objective—to stimulate repentance, and thereby to contribute to the spiritual growth of the person. (Evans-Wentz, 1980, pp. 130-131)

Heart-anger, like mindfully held anger, asks for a radically inclusive kind of caring, through which we open ourselves to what we might normally disown or reject in ourselves. Implicit in accessing heart-anger is not only the need to disidentify with one's anger, but the need to consciously and compassionately face one's darker aspects—one's shadow, one's demons, one's "inner Nazi"—so that one is not so averse to such qualities in others. In heart-anger, unconditioned love (or love that

does not depend upon or require certain conditions for its emergence) is permitted to be present, or at least contextually present. Such anger, at its full-flamed best, is *not only the wrathfully compassionate sword* of what Welwood (1996, pp. 56-58) calls “sacred combat,” but is also perhaps the prime empowerer of our capacity to say a grounded, clear, and solid, yet caring, “no,” a “no” that affirms rather than negates life. Here, love and mindfulness are accessed not to reduce, tame, or “make nice” our anger, but rather to make an ally out of it (as Plato recommended [*Republic*, IV, 442]), so that its fiery energies, resoluteness, and moral intensity might support and empower us.

The caring that is essential to heart-anger may not always be readily accessed, however. Initially, our anger may not really be heart-anger; we may have to work internally with it for a while to give it a chance to mutate into (or at least toward) heart-anger. The point is not to disinhibit one’s anger, but to ground it in a context in which harm is not the goal, but rather healing and intimacy. Heart-anger does not overpower, *but instead empowers; the other is not “cut down to size,” but is treated as an equal.*

On the Practice of Heart-Anger

Anger appears to occur at all levels of development as a psychobiological given. “Do you realize,” asks Nisargadatta (1982), “that as long as you have a self to defend, you must be violent?” (p. 507). And even when the separate self is unqualifiedly transcended, as in the case of those who have fully realized the nondual nature of all that is, anger may still arise. Even the remarkably peaceful sage of the nondual, Ramana Maharshi, showed temper at times, as when he would be given a larger portion of mango than his visitors (Osborne, 1970, p. 133). Is the presence of anger indicative of “an error in the system,” or is it a natural phenomenon? And if it is indeed the latter, *is it fair to view it always as a problem, impediment, or spiritual obstacle?* If our anger reinforces our sense of separation, is that anger’s fault, or is it more a matter of how we choose to deal with it? Anger, particularly as an affect, may be a given, but what we do with it is not.

Prior to being able to engage in heart-anger, one must be reasonably adept at anger-in and anger-out strategies, knowing not only the mechanics of each, but also the appropriate conditions under which to animate them. Also, some degree of self-transcending awareness is necessary; this may sometimes arise spontaneously as anger is expressed, but mostly it ought to be an already established practice, ideally engaged in not only in meditation halls, but also in the marketplace of daily life. In my experience, heart-anger flourishes best when it is permitted to coexist with mindfully held anger approaches—one needs as much facility with containment (and boundedness) as with decontainment (and unboundedness) *if heart-anger is to be of real use.* Heart-anger begins with the bare acknowledgement that one is indeed angry, along with an awareness of one’s degree of identification with and investment in the content of one’s anger. Such anger is not an avoidance of anything. It is *almost immediately vulnerable.* As we become more intimate with it, we learn to make room for it without, however, vacating the room, letting its fire both clear and light our way. To be practiced with any significant results, heart-anger requires not

only a firmly anchored capacity for love and compassion when “under fire,” but also the following know-how:

1. a well-established capacity for mindfulness, so that one can bring an ego-transcending attentiveness to whatever is arising;
2. familiarity and ease with emotional release practices (both with oneself and with others), so that one has ready access to cathartic procedures when they are needed;
3. an experientially based and well-tested knowledge of one’s psychological makeup and leanings, so that one can recognize one’s own agendas and investments in particular outcomes;
4. a thoroughly tested commitment to and capacity for being empathetic, conscious, and appropriately nondefensive in relationships, so that one can be truly present for the other; and
5. respect and love for passion, so that one will neither shrink nor withdraw when it arises.

When these skills are used, anger is not just held in a larger context (as in mindfully held anger approaches) but is permitted, at least some of the time, to actually play a formative role in that larger context, if only by exposing and burning through vision-obscuring psychic debris. That is, heart-anger can help open doors to deeper realities, cutting through unnecessarily constrictive boundaries. Its wrathfulness awakens, rather than crushing or indicting.

Nevertheless, its risks must be kept in mind. Though heart-anger may be demonstrated, at least to some degree, by those who have not cultivated mindfulness, it can—outside of the “safety” of conducive settings—only be fruitfully adopted as a deliberate, ongoing practice by those for whom mindfulness is stably established. If one is not yet capable of practicing mindfully held anger (especially in the most trying circumstances), one should not attempt to practice heart-anger, unless one is in the presence of a skilled and trusted guide. Also, the less rigid the distinctions between subject and object, the more life-enhancing and spiritually efficacious heart-anger will be. When the inherent inseparability of all that exists is completely obvious—as in the case of those rare few who are stably anchored in (and as) nondual awareness—heart-anger is simply unconditioned love in action, delivered solely for the liberation of all beings. Given that those “rare few” are exceedingly rare by most estimates, heart-anger must be recognized not as a given or already-complete act based on a preset recipe (i.e., mix caring, mindfulness, and fieriness, stir vigorously, and pour into fitting circumstances), but rather as an ever-evolving process in which personal concerns are not necessarily transcended, but kept under, as aware an “eye” as is necessary.

Heart-anger is ultimately unconditioned love’s “No!”—the power of which is intended to awaken rather than merely hurt us—a “No!” that simply deepens our “Yes!” to existence. Yet one does not have to be a Jesus or a Wrathful Deity to practice heart-anger, just as one does not have to be a Ramana Maharshi to practice self-inquiry. The practice may be far from perfect, reflecting as it does our level of maturity, but it nonetheless can still be engaged in with beneficial results, if one is adequately prepared.

Critical Perspectives

Heart-anger is not immune to abuse. For example, it may be treated as an ideal, yet another assembly of "shoulds" upon which we, in our do-good ambitions, can impale ourselves. Another possible danger is that we might, however subtly, get ensnared in recruiting the vital expressiveness and caring of heart-anger for self-aggrandizing purposes. What if the "good" we intend for another person through our anger is not actually in his or her best interests, but rather only reinforces the egoic investment we have in demonstrating that we are helping that person? Whatever pride we may have with regard to our capacity to express anger with mindful compassion needs to be clearly exposed; otherwise it will surely pollute our heart-anger. If our motivation for heart-anger is not firmly rooted in genuine compassion for the other, we will be expressing not heart-anger, but only everyday anger dressed up in caring's clothing. If I'm busy thinking that my giving you my anger is right for you, I may not notice if it truly is right for you; in fact, if I'm not genuinely caring for you while I'm angry at you, I probably won't even be concerned about whether or not my anger is good for you.

Another misuse of heart-anger occurs when we confuse it with anger-out. Both anger-out and heart-anger let anger out, but the latter, unlike the former, does so in a context that is both mindful and caring. True heart-anger does not make an automatic virtue out of anger-expression; if it recognizes that such expression is not appropriate, it lets go of its intention to express anger, containing it in the spirit of mindfully held anger. Heart-anger that sees itself as "better" than mindfully held anger is in danger of denying itself access to being mindfully held anger, even when circumstances demand it. Genuine heart-anger is arrogance-free; this does not mean that its deliverer is without arrogance, but rather that he or she does not animate it while angry. Ignorance, idealism, arrogance, righteousness, self-aggrandizement, *do-gooding*—such are the main enemies of the efficacious practice of heart-anger, and yet when they are brought under a sufficiently wakeful eye, they are no longer enemies, but only phenomena in need of compassion, including (at the right time) the wrathful compassion of heart-anger.

Also, heart-anger—even when the preconditions for it have been met (and it may take a long time)—does not, as we have seen, necessarily arrive fully formed. To reach it, one may have to begin with grosser or more reactive forms of anger, so long as they are quickly suffused with a witnessing capacity disciplined enough to provide sufficient inner spaciousness for one's reactivity to illuminatedly unfold. A friend, in describing a difficult and necessary confrontation with an apathetic school principal and a very hostile teacher, talked of having to start with where she actually was, namely already shaking with fear and rage: "I had to get messy [reactive] in order to get clean. But if I didn't have the awareness of that—that I was getting messy—then I wouldn't have been able to get clean." That is, she not only noticed her initial (and very short-lived) reactivity, but also trusted its energies, allowing them to be raw material for the cleaner, loving anger that she was soon able to embody and fruitfully share. (As she let go of having to get through to the others, she was able to get through in a manner that was in the best interests of all concerned.) Her resolute observational ability made room for her reactivity to show itself more blatantly—this, however,

did not lead to more reactivity, but rather to an outshining of it. The very permission to be reactively angry—and I speak here of conscious, compassionate permission—expands reactive anger’s pasture and sky, giving it room to find its way into a more life-giving form, such as that characteristic of heart-anger.

CONCLUSION

Anger, particularly reactive anger, has its own perspective, which is mostly constellated around a perceived (and often inflated) sense of injustice—an offense has apparently been committed for which anger provides some form of retaliation or judicial intervention. However, anger is far more life enhancing, both for those giving it and those receiving it, when it is provided with a perspective beyond that of its typical indictment-seeking stance, a perspective rooted in awareness (or mindfulness) practices. Intellectually knowing the difference between reactive anger and nonreactive anger may be of some value, but it is not enough—thinking about what needs to happen in the midst of anger may not register very deeply when anger compellingly arises. Being mindful during anger is far more difficult than being mindful while quietly sitting. Being mindful during angrily expressed anger is generally more difficult than being mindful during calmly expressed anger, but it is possible, and it is necessary if anger is to be a truly positive and caring force.

Where anger-in and mindfully held anger approaches seek to contain anger, and where anger-out seeks to empty the “container” (usually equated with the body), heart-anger seeks, at least at some point, to radically deconstruct the container (including the very intention to contain), engaging in a deeply embodied consideration of anger in which the very notions of “container” and “contained” are permitted sufficient transparency to all but shed their outlines (or definitional certitude).⁵ Expression here is not necessarily repressed, rethought, kept to oneself, or evacuated, but rather is infused with wakeful attention, without any requisite dilution or muting of its passion. If heart-anger could be said to have a “container,” it would be love: open-eyed, passion-embracing, unconditioned love, love that remains intimate with awareness. Heart-anger connects. Like all anger, it is “against” something, but its “against” is in the service of a deeper, more inclusive “for” (and “with”). Ultimately—as in the case of realizers of the nondual—it is anger devoted to the liberation of all beings, anger free of any sort of self-serving agenda.

Heart-anger is not necessarily devoid of ego, but in its expression, ego mostly assumes a peripheral position to Being—heart-anger could be said to be the soul’s shout, wrathful compassion in the raw. Though it is far from egoically centered, it is still usually individuated, indicative of the presence of strongly held, distinct preferences. At its most sublime, it is, so to speak, but sacred fire, the heat and light of divine caring (or self-transcending love), untainted by any trace whatsoever of personal investment. Here blooms a radically different kind of flame, exemplified by the awe-inspiring presence of Tibetan Buddhism’s Wrathful Deities, Hinduism’s Kali at her fiercest, the Old Testament’s blazingly raging Lord, all burning, burning with a hyperbole-transcending enormity and luminosity in the service of a context that, although always beyond the grasp of the rational, self-possessed mind, is intuitively known by the awakening heart.

Such anger—or Holy Wrath—only serves to awaken, and to awaken in the most radical sense; it is pure compassion in action. Heart-anger, however, does not have to be this pure to be deservedly called heart-anger. So long as caring for the other and mindfulness are significantly present during and after the expression of anger, the label “heart-anger” can be applied without qualification.

Heart-anger incorporates the best of anger-in, anger-out, and mindfully held anger. However, if we do not have sufficient “hands-on” familiarity with each of these, we will generally not be capable of heart-anger—we may still have moments when we are angry and yet still heart-centered, but such a practice will be far from stably established in us. Anger-in must be learned—healthy, efficacious, emotional regulation is essential so that we are capable of stepping back from rising anger when circumstances dictate that its amplification and/or expression would only do harm. So too must anger-out be learned—not to have the capacity to directly and strongly express anger all too easily disempowers us. Practicing mindfully held anger is also essential—not only with regard to learning to investigate closely (and patiently) in the moment whatever characterizes one’s anger, but also with regard to developing compassion for one’s anger and angry “I’s.” (The recent debates [e.g., McDermott, 1996, pp. 44-45; Wilber, 1996, pp. 30-31] over the polemical tone in some of Ken Wilber’s endnotes in *Sex, Ecology, Spirituality* [1995] might have been more fruitful if the anger and angry “I’s” of those involved had been more openly and compassionately considered and explored.)

To practice heart-anger is to simultaneously honor mind, body, and spirit. Such practice, like that of mindfully held anger, means to no longer resort to blame, to take responsibility for keeping one’s heart open in hell—an admittedly far from easy undertaking, but an immensely rewarding one. In heart-anger, we can find not only a moral and fittingly expressive fieriness almost seamlessly aligned with a deep caring for the other, but also our grief, our joy, our interconnectedness (and *ultimate identity*) with all that is. *Our heart-anger announces not that we are detached, but that we care, and care deeply, so deeply that we will not sit back and passively watch desecration and abuse occur. In such caring, we contact not only our personal grief, but also our collective grief, finding in it not defeat or impotent sadness or powerlessness, but rather a fathomless sense of communion with both the pain and the joy (and all-pervading Mystery) of what is.*

Heart-anger seeks not dissociation from the world, but engagement, wherein love, rather than negotiation, shines at the hub of relatedness. As such, heart-anger uses separation to create connection. It is the swordplay of healthy criticism, unconditioned love’s war cry, the firm yet receptive release of needed forcefulness. It honors differences, even as it cultivates intimacy with that depth of wisdom in which it is tacitly obvious that differences do not really make a difference—seeing that the many are one does not stop it from also seeing that the one is many. Heart-anger does not let its embrace of the universal separate it from the particular—it does not seek transcendence of the personal, the particular, the crystallized, but rather illumination. Heart-anger is a warrior, yes, but it is a warrior who, in nakedly facing suffering, must sometimes also weep.

The fiery intensity at the heart of anger does not ask for smothering, spiritual rehabilitation, nor psychological marginalization, but rather for a mindful embrace that

does not necessarily require any dilution of passion, any lowering of the flames, or any muting of the essential voice in the flames. If such fire destroys, it is only in order to create—and heal. In its flames, the phoenix is more than a myth. In its fiery heart, love burns brilliantly, ever replenished, illuminating more than we can imagine.

Bringing one's anger into one's heart is not only an act of love for oneself, but for all beings, since such a practice greatly increases the odds that anger will not be allowed to mutate into aggressiveness, hostility, and hatred, but rather into compassion-centered activity. In no longer abandoning or destructively harnessing our anger, we move a little closer to *being* the very love that we most desire from others.

Anger can be love—may we permit it to be so.

NOTES

¹ When the rage level in a patient is great, Boorstein (1996) recommends "the judicious use of certain medications" (p. 412)—anything other than permitting (with skillful guidance) the actual expression of what the patient is feeling. Certainly, medication may be appropriate under some conditions, but why not at least consider or attempt some rage-releasing work? When we treat our anger as an untrustworthy or savage "it" in need of sedation or elimination, we may be marooning ourselves from its benefits.

² Too closely linking (or at times even equating) anger with hatred or ill will, as Buddhists both ancient and modern are generally inclined to do, makes the Buddhist classification of anger as an afflictive or unwholesome state (i.e., not conducive to liberation) quite understandable. Nevertheless, the considerable ambiguity in what is actually meant by "anger" in Buddhist literature does not make possible any definitive statements about what Buddhism is really saying about anger per se (Masters, 1999, pp. 99-115). How are we to know if a text is actually speaking of anger, or of hatred, or of aversion? There are, to put it mildly, serious problems in translating these terms linked with anger, and it is hard to know whether a word translated as "anger" has anything like the contemporary connotations of anger. Even so, the Buddha's teachings on anger can largely be seen as prescriptions for dealing with ill will (*dosa, vyapada*); when we are angry, says the Buddha in the *Anguttara Nikaya*, we do not wish "our enemy" well, thereby engaging in various kinds of serious misconduct (Nanamoli, 1964, p. 10).

³ Anger may also be based on a sense not of being wronged, but of wronging oneself, of not meeting one's own standards, as exemplified by states like self-contempt or guilt. Such anger is not a primary emotion, but a secondary one, a reaction to shame, hurt, fear, neediness, or other states judged as "bad" by oneself.

⁴ Christianity has in general distanced itself from the tradition of prophecy and the memory of an angry Jesus, treating anger more as a sin than a resource, say James and Evelyn Whitehead (1995), arguing that without the return of a robust spirituality of anger, "we will be left with a moribund religious tradition of anger as a deadly sin and a cultural heritage of violence as the ordinary and acceptable voice of anger" (p. 143).

⁵ One might argue that mindfully held anger approaches also seek to deconstruct the "container"—and they obviously do in very advanced practitioners, for whom the nondual is more home than goal—but for almost all who advocate such approaches, containing anger is a key element, to be maintained until anger has disappeared or has being divested of its reactive elements. Heart-anger, by contrast, does not significantly engage in such containment, except sometimes in its early stages.

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