

**A BUDDHIST COUNSELING APPROACH TO ANGER
MANAGEMENT (BASED ON *VITAKKASANṬHĀNA SUTTA* AND
ĀGHĀTAPAṬIVINAYA SUTTA)**

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Introduction

Anger is a common emotion that everyone feels and faces within their life time. Not only human beings but also other living beings such as animals and even insects get angry. According to the American Psychological Association (APA), “Anger is a completely normal, usually healthy, human emotion. But when it gets out of control and turns destructive, it can lead to problems—problems at work, in the personal relationships, and in the overall quality of individual’s life.” Also, it’s harmful to the individual as well as other beings and things surrounding him/her and the harm can be both visible and invisible. In some ways and times, it can be a good thing to find a solution for certain problems and a way to express negative feelings. But if someone gets always angry, it makes the person unhealthy psychologically, physically and socially. Therefore, everyone should have a huge effort to manage their anger.

There are many and different techniques shown in the western counseling to manage anger; such as relaxation, cognitive restructuring, problem solving, better communication, using humor, changing environment, timing, avoidance and finding alternatives etc. But, controlling anger - especially, sudden burst anger - is not an easy job. Loss of control is a major problem with sudden anger. Therefore, it should be practiced over a period of time, by steps.

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Methodology

The study is mainly based on book research. More important teachings of the Buddha on anger and how to cope with anger were searched in the study, referring the *Suttapiṭaka*. Of the *sutta-s*, *Vitakkasanṭhāna Sutta* of the *Majjhimanikāya* and *Āghātaṭṭapaṭivīnaya Sutta* of the *Aṅguttaranikāya* were selected. Websites and other electrical materials were used for more information.

Discussion

The lord Buddha has talked on anger very widely. According to the state of the anger, it is defined by many words in the *tripitaka* such as, *vēra*, *aghāta*, *paṭigha*, *vyāpāda*, *dosa* etc. It directly influences to the one's mental cultivation and *nibbāna*. Therefore controlling anger and overcoming the hatred is well appreciated in the Buddhist philosophy. In the *tripitaka*, there are so many *sutta-s* and other teachings which can be used in the Buddhist counseling approach to anger management. Of those teachings, *Vitakkasanṭhāna Sutta* of the *Majjhimanikāya* and *Āghātaṭṭapaṭivīnaya Sutta* of the *Aṅguttaranikāya* can be identified as very important on anger management. Therefore, only these two *sutta-s* are discussed in this paper to identify the utility of using Buddhist counseling techniques for anger management.

In the *Vitakkasanṭhāna Sutta*, the lord Buddha indicates five techniques to control evil thoughts, such as the thoughts of greed (*candūpasanhitā*), hatred/ anger/ wrath (*dosūpasanhitā*) and delusions (*mohūpasanhitā*). Viz,

1. *Aññanimittapabbaṃ* - Pay attention on another thing (*aññaṃ nimittaṃ manasikātabbaṃ*). It means, change your anger thoughts and think on another subject.
2. *Ādīnawapabbaṃ* - Think about the harmful effects or results of anger and related activities (*ādīnavaṃ upa-parikkitaṃ*).
3. *Asati Pabbaṃ* - Do not think of or do not pay attention on things, people etc. which make you angry (*asati amanasikaro āpajjitabbo*). Simply, it means, forget the anger.

4. *Vitakkamūlabhēdapabbam* - See the root cause of your anger (*vitakka sankāra santhānaṃ manasikātabbā*). You should find and understand what the reason for your anger is.
5. *Abhinigghanapabbam* – Should have a huge effort to stop, to suppress anger by tightening tooth, tightening palate by tongue. (*dantēnadantamādāya, jivhāya tāluṃ āhacca*). It means, if the anger is very powerful you should stop it roughly.

These five techniques are very significant in the Buddhist counseling for anger management. The clients can be guided to practise these, when they feel anger.

The *Āghātaṭṭhavinaya sutta* of the *Āṅguttaranikāya* is absolutely on anger management. The meaning of the *Pāli* word ‘*āghāta*’ is anger/ hatred/ wrath. *āghātaṭṭhavinaya* means controlling; suppressing; managing anger. In the *Paṭhama Āghātaṭṭhavinaya Sutta*, the Buddha teaches five techniques to control anger and then, in the *Dutiya Āghātaṭṭhavinaya Sutta*, Sāriputta Mahā Thēra illustrates and explains to the *Bhikkhu-s* that teaching. According to the *Paṭhama Āghātaṭṭhavinaya Sutta*, the Buddha indicates these five techniques. Viz,

1. When you feel angry against someone, you should cultivate the thoughts of loving-kindness on him/her (*Mettā tasmim puggalē bhāwētabbā*). If someone can practise and develop the loving-kindness (*mettā*) meditation, he/she is able to generate and maintain better relationships with fellow human beings as well as other living beings.
2. When you feel angry against someone, you should spread thoughts of compassion (*karunā tasmim puggalē Bhāwētabbā*).
3. When you feel angry against someone, you should spread the thoughts of indifferent (*upekkhā tasmim puggalē Bhāwētabbā*).
4. When you feel angry against someone, you should not think of or should not pay attention on those people (*asati amanasikāro tasmim puggalē āpajjitabbo*). Simply, it means, forget, and neglect the anger and the person who makes you angry. Don’t care and let it go away.
5. When you feel angry against someone, you should think of his/her *kamma* (deeds). The acts from mind, body and mouth and its results/ consequence are called deeds (*kamma*). According to the Buddha,

people have been born with the *kamma*; *kamma* is a relative of the person; Karma is gifted; and Karma is the refuge of life. Everyone will have the consequence of the *kamma* done by self. When you think of and realize this teaching of *kamma*, you can control your anger on the person (*kammassakatā tasmim puggalē adhiṭṭhātabbā*).

In this *sutta*, the Lord Buddha emphasizes that if someone practise these five techniques, he/she is able to completely control, manage, suppress his/her anger.

Conclusion

These techniques which indicate in both *sutta-s* can be used very significantly for controlling one's anger. When we compare the teachings of these two, we can see some equal techniques too. The Buddhist counselor should be skillful to guide his/her patients to practise these techniques in a practical manner when they feel anger. Also, these techniques should be practiced for a long period of time to have a capability to control their anger. What-so-ever, the sudden burst anger will not be able to control.

Keywords: Anger management, Buddhist counseling, *Vitakkasanṭhāna Sutta*, *Āghātapativinaya Sutta*

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