

Quench all Resentments

Bhante Bodhidhamma · Tips of the Day · 3 min read

Resentment burns. Old wounds smoulder in the heart. Fantasies of revenge fan to flames. And the desire for vengeful acts, retaliation, becomes more and more violent. Sometimes we shock ourselves at the fierceness of our imaginations and then quickly suppress them and with them the blazing. And this malevolence begins to manifest in more subtle ways, such as the passive aggression of sarcasm. The Path of Purification was written by Buddhaghosa in the 5th Century CE. My teacher told me I had in my hand the whole of Theravada Buddhism[i]. It is considered one of the great spiritual manuals of all religions. It is not a book you would want to read from page to page, but to dip in when needed. This is a summary of an extensive section of how to dissolve resentment at Chapter IX 14[ii]. The first remedy is to develop metta towards the person who has hurt us. This would begin perhaps by not dwelling on the person's negative characteristics. In this way we can undermine the anger and develop patience, which is the willingness to bear with the unpleasant and not to react with ill-will. 'If bandits brutally severed limb from limb with a two handled saw, he who entertains hatred in his heart on that account, would not be one who carries out my teaching' M i 129. If that approach fails to dampen, then bring to mind the person's good qualities. I remember my niece when she about five telling her father how she could not stand her brother. He reminded her that he makes her laugh. There was a moment of recognition and she went away happy! Everyone has a good side that can be appreciated. But writes, Buddhaghosa, failing all that, if the person has no redeeming qualities, then they are deserving of our compassion. If this approach fails, then consider the damage resentment is doing to us. Such negative mental states, when we dwell on them as feeling, are very unpleasant – hot agitation. And, of course, the chemicals produced are not doing the body any good either. Seemingly it takes 90 seconds for the chemicals caused by anger to dissolve once we are patient. Hence count ten ... slowly! Failing that, then the reflection on kamma: All beings are the owners of their actions (kamma), heirs of their actions, born from their actions, related to their actions, and have actions as their refuge. Whatever action they do, whether good or evil, they will inherit its results. In other words, we suffer the consequences of all our actions – good and bad. There is no need to punish. And, of course, this leads to a reflection on our own past unkind, perhaps callous behaviour. We would not want people to bear grudges against us. From a rebirth point of view, that person may have been a parent of ours in a past life. The Buddha says we would not repay our parents even if we carried them on our shoulders throughout our lives, such are the gifts we have received from them. According to rebirth theory, groups have been revolving around each other throughout countless lifetimes. If even now, resentful feelings are not soothed, then bring to mind the blessings of Metta, Loving Kindness, one of which is good sleep. How exhausting it is to wake up in the middle of the night, the heart burning with resentment. Still finding it difficult to let go, a more subtle contemplation is to ask what is it I actually

resent? Breaking the person up into parts – is it the hair? The knees? And so on. Seeing the person through the Elements of Earth (solidity), Water (fluidity, elasticity), Fire (heat and cold) or Air (movement). In other words, by dissecting the person, one finds there is nothing solid, substantial to be angry with. When all has failed, finally, most difficult, buy the person a present! An act of generous forgiveness is a powerful way to douse the flames. All these techniques can be used where we see resentment towards ourselves. [iii] An exercise: list all resentments towards others and ourselves. Work your way through them. It takes time. May all our resentments dissolve into generous patience and caring benevolence! [i][i] there is also Venerable Sariputta's advice: Getting rid of Resentment and the Buddha: Getting rid of Resentment. [ii] This essay complements Towards the End of Forgiveness [iii] A poem on self-forgiveness by Dilruba Ahmed: Phase One

Transcriptions produced locally using Swiss low-carbon electricity. Corrections and rewriting by cloud-hosted AI.