

## Q & A on Anger for *Tricycle Magazine*

Below is Lama Palden's answer to a question about anger that was printed in *Tricycle*.

Question: I often find myself torn between lashing out at someone and trying to remain equanimous. I know it's ideal not to explode at someone, but sometimes it still seems like the right thing to do—or like it would be "good" for me to express how I feel directly. Is it ever right to let anger show?

### Lama Palden Drolma:

Let us look at this question from three levels of increasing profundity: the outer level, the inner level and the level of suchness or true nature. We are engaged on all three levels whether or not we realize this, so all three are important and are worthwhile to examine.

When we are angry it may be important for us to communicate what we feel to the other person or people. *How* we do this is the critical point. Simply blasting another person with our anger is not skillful or kind. First of all we need to calm down before we can actually communicate our feelings in a way that the other person can truly hear. You may think, "Well, in order for them to hear me, due to their thick-headedness, I need to yell to get through to them." But in actuality, it is hard for people to truly hear, to take in what another is saying if they are being yelled at. When someone is attacking us verbally our defenses are instantly mobilized. Then it is like trying to talk to someone who has headphones on, and who is listening to loud music. They are not open to actually listening to what we have to say. The headphones are the defensive walls that go up, and the loud music is the angry or hurt thoughts that are running loudly in the other person's head.

If we calm down first, which may mean waiting until later to address the situation, we can work on letting go of our own defensiveness and anger. There is then the opportunity to think through what is going on within our self and the other person. It is not possible to actually think objectively when we are in the throes of strong emotion. If we take the time to calm down, this gives us the space to

think clearly, to see what is really bothering us, and then to decide what it is that we actually want to communicate. Then it's possible to articulate what we want to say much more accurately and effectively. It is more likely that we will be heard if we deliver our message without triggering the other person's defenses.

The second issue is generating a chain of cause and effect where we are at war with another person. This does not lead to mutual understanding, and it does not lead to happiness for our self or the other person. Perpetuating aggression actually hurts both of us. We may feel better initially, due to having dumped our painful feelings onto another, but eventually we feel worse because our mind streams, our bodies are filled with the poison of anger and resentment. We may try to cope with this inside of ourselves by going over the whole story in our minds again and again, justifying our position, fortifying our walls, making sure our canons are in position, but this simply serves to further bind us to suffering. When we feel that someone "deserves our angry attack" we are indulging in hurting them in order to try and get rid of our own hurt. Hurting to get rid of hurt never works.

Inherently we suffer because we do not understand the complete openness and radiance of our true nature. This is the basic ignorance that the Buddha taught as the root of all suffering. The essential nature of the radiance or luminosity of true nature is compassion. The more we construct fortresses around ourselves, ratifying our position, the more we actually cut ourselves off from our true nature. The more we are cut off from our true nature, the more we suffer, and the less likely it is that others can or will listen to us. If we take the time and shift to a place where we can actually rest in openness and loving-kindness our suffering loosens and releases naturally. Anything that we feel needs to be communicated will naturally be articulated more effectively from this place.