



Practical Ways of Overcoming Anger

“Conquer anger by forgiveness, ego by humility, deceit by straight-forwardness and greed by contentment.” - Mahavirswami

In just one sentence, he said it all and yet left enough for us to contemplate on for a life time! So simple, yet very profound. After reading this in our scriptures, an immediate question arose in my mind, why aren't we Jains any closer to overcoming Kashays than the other communities? Why aren't we the exemplary citizens leading the way to spiritual progress? Two reasons came to my mind. 1. Ignorance: For one reason or the other, Jain Shravaks have refrained from studying our scriptures. We have almost entirely relied on the second hand knowledge from our monks. Our blind following of many of our traditions have perpetuated this ignorance. 2. We got caught-up in ritualistic activities and lost sight of the goal itself. (I define ritualistic activity as any activity carried out without understanding its meaning or its purpose)

The next logical question arose: Then what is the solution? How does one overcome Kashay in a practical sense? I found that I had to first clear my mind off all the prior conditioning that was clouding my thinking. (Like seeing through a foggy window). Once that was achieved, it was easy to see through with an open mind. I broke down each kashay in to its detailed meaning and its causes as well as its antidote as described in our scriptures.

For the purpose of this discussion let us concentrate on Anger. It can be viewed as internal anger, which may or may not be manifested externally as well as external one which may or may not have an internal component. The causes of anger: mainly two 1. Old resentments 2. Failed expectations.

I found overcoming anger to be a two step process 1. Stop 'New' anger from developing (Samvar - I took a little help from 'Nav tatva'). The cause of this new anger is usually the unfulfilled expectations from others. It could be your spouse, parents, children, siblings or other family members as well as a friend, a neighbor, a co-worker or a boss! Typically with elders or superiors, anger tends to be internal and is generally suppressed. However with the loved ones or with subordinates where one can get away with, we tend to externalize our anger leaving deep scars in people we care the most for! One effective way to stop new anger from developing is to develop a new motto in life. "Expect only from your-self, accept others the way they are". Once we make this an integral part of our life, this becomes an achievable task, since now there are no failed expectations! Occasionally, we tend to use anger as an external tool to get something done without an internal component to it. Here however, one has to be careful not to hurt the other person.

Another great tool that helps stopping new anger, comes from our traditional greetings. "Jai Jinendra". Instead of viewing it as a glory to Jinas (who are already liberated!), view an image of Jina in the other person. You certainly would develop a different level of respect for all individuals you greet this way, melting down your anger as well as your ego. We need to bring Jina out of our temples and in to our day to day life!

2. Getting rid of old anger (Nirjara). This I found to be a difficult one. Forgiveness helps here.

However it has to be a genuine one, as well as it has to be unconditional. Then only it can help overcome old resentments. Here you have to be careful of a pitfall. You may feel or say I forgive him/her as if you were superior and become arrogant and egotistic!

I have heard many people suggest that when anger comes, be aware and not to let it get expressed. This method certainly spares grief for the opposite person. However, I also found out hard way that this can often lead to the suppression of anger. 'Conquering' anger does not mean suppressing it, since that makes things even worst. You will have a volcano within you that can irrupt at any time. Thus Mahavirswami's 'replacement theory' makes a lot of sense; Replace anger with forgiveness. This is easier said than done. Here I took help from modern behavioral science, namely 'Neuro-linguistic programming' where one learns to 'scratch' out old memories and linking the triggers to new positive memories. This way your attitude and behavior is independent of the 'other person'.