

2019-02-17 Anger

Wed, 8/12 11:13AM • 43:19

SUMMARY KEYWORDS

anger, angry, people, mindfulness, possessed, discharging, pull, thought, conversation, story, kinds, study, mad, clarity, stuck, emotions, buddhism, empathy, talk, understand

SPEAKERS

Gil Fronsdaal

When is it loud enough my volume?

Yeah. Okay.

So

I would like to talk about a tender topic, a topic that I think should be approached with a lot of care and respect and maybe even, maybe reverence and that is the topic of anger. And the reason for the care around the topic is that it's probably nice to think of the sources of anger and human being come from a place that's quite deep and tender place of you know, touching some of the deepest issues. human life. And so to talk about anger, to do it respectfully and carefully, it's a little bit hard because it's easy to make statements about it as if it's an easy topic or you know, just don't be angry. Sometimes Buddhism is criticized for having a unrealistic attitude towards anger, because the general Buddhist idea is you want to overcome that anger, uproot it or not be angry. Whereas in the West, there's all kinds of justified anger that people have. And it has some truth to it to that that is distinction, but this mostly around the fact that in Buddhism, the Buddhist in word for anger or the Buddhist understanding of anger is very kind of narrow, whereas the western use The word is quite wide and covered, covers a wider expanse of, of emotion. And in the in Buddhism in anger always has hostility as part of it. So if you hear Buddhist discussions about anger, then you should always kind of just substitute hostility. And then I think you'll find your way. But I'm not going to keep it that narrow today. We might want to keep this in mind, because even justifiable anger can be misdirected or can be, can be acted on in very harmful ways. And, but one way or the other anger is toxic. In many ways it can, it can certainly hostile anger is toxic, it can ruin lives, it can ruin relationships, it can ruin all kinds of things, when it kind of festers or builds up or it gets You know, expressed in variety of ways, and so to, to bring mindfulness into all aspects of our lives. It's necessary to bring it into the area of anger, and to really take it on as a subject of mindfulness that's worthy of mindfulness. And not only worthy in and of itself, but because it's connected to deep roots inside of us. It's worthy for really dropping into the depths of who we are and connecting to us in ourselves in a very important way. And the issue around anger that I want to kind of or the how I wanted to frame it or approach it today is that is not worth the word anger, but rather with the word mad. I asked last night, my wife I said, What's the difference between anger and mad? And she said, There is no difference. So that's the authority from home.

So I, you know, I took it to heart and, and, and then I saw that I looked it up in the dictionary. And, and the deck my dictionary said that the word mad in English English you have this in American English as well but in English English mad is also means insane and so I kind of like to distinguish these for the

purposes of this talk between anger and mad and for me to be mad is to be possessed by the anger or to be caught in the anger or to have sunk into the anger to draw to kind of and so we're attached to it or we're somehow Not free of it, but we've identified it quite strongly. So it's possessed us a little bit. You know, none of you of course, but little little bit insane with the anger and so and so one of the functions of mindfulness practice is not necessarily to get rid of things like things like anger, but rather to help us not be stuck in it, to help us not be possessed by the emotions that we have to be able to kind of pull out of it to be able to see it in a clear way, a spacious way, in a wise way so that we can be wise with whatever emotions we have weekly wise about the anger and that even justifiable anger if there's such a thing we could get stuck in and not really get possessed by in such a way we don't do our wisdom is not there. The you know, classic image in Buddhism is the idea of being stuck in quicksand. And, and you know, you're very difficult to get out my image that is the image of kind of putting my sticking one foot deep into not just a puddle but a big hole of mud. And it takes a lot of work to pull the foot out, pull it out, especially so the foot doesn't cut, the shoe doesn't fall off. And you know, it's going to work to pull it out, pull it out, finally, you pull it out and it feels so good to be back on dry ground and you can look at that big mud hole and you know, you're not in it. So the same way mindfulness can pull us out of the mud holes that we get stuck in the emotions emotional reactivity that we get, fall into and we get possessed, we identify with it, it becomes who we are. And we don't have any sense of healthy distance or separation or spaciousness around it. We are at the emotion in such a way that There's not access to a lot of clarity or wisdom or, you know, it's almost like the anger then is speaking, rather than we are speaking, and not a few people have discovered that they have tremendous regrets about things they said in anger, that weren't planned weren't thought about, I just got blurted out. And sometimes that's just two seconds of some angry statement can cause years and years of problems in a relationship or in life. And they say, what was I thinking what took over and I was, you know, I was possessed by the anger. So the question about whether when I tried to do that is to talk about seven approaches, seven, maybe approaches or maybe steps about how to pull ourselves out of the mode of anger, so that we're not possessed by it. So I so out of the out of Matt, so I call it from Mad to madalas and madalas is just kind of a cute thing because it's I make it into an acronym. And so I'll talk about this acronym. And so it's motivation awareness dissipation, discharging and learning empathy story and then less s because we're at an SS there's two s's. It has great has to have functions for two things. And that is speaking and sharing. So really eight, but you won't get angry if I call it seven. I couldn't get myself to add just add and add another s to madalas madalas like a snake

So, so these are different areas that we can look at. And pay attention to, if what we want to do is not to be sunk into the anger into the madness. And so motivation with this is what is the purpose of the anger? Not necessarily what your intention is at the moment. But what is the what's the what's the it's what is it trying to do? What is it trying to push the anchor trying to accomplish? I think it can be a great question. Because sometimes we don't we don't think about it. We just are angry and we don't kind of that just it. And, but anger I think of anger, it's always having some trying to accomplish something. What is it trying to accomplish? accomplish? psychologists talk about that anger. Sometimes it's connected to the fight versus flight instinct. So it wants to fight or sometimes it wants to run away. It wants to push something away. It wants to make a very difficult intuitive and clear, no stop. It wants to blame it wants to attack it wants to defend, it wants to protect. There's a whole slew of things that anger can be involved in. Some of them which in know themselves be quite healthy, some of them which are can be unhealthy. And even if they're healthy, is anger, the best way to accomplish what what we're trying to do when we're angry? So to begin asking yourself, what is this trying to accomplish, for me, is a beginning is a beginning of separating ourselves from it, to take an honest look at it. And if we can see what he's trying to accomplish, then some people say, Well, I don't know if I want to do that. I've known people who who would they angry, will blame people, other people. And the blaming, sometimes it's unconscious. They don't connect it to themselves to the anger that they have. But it's really kind of,

you know, closely connected. And so they start to see seeing that they're looking to find Blaming people, if that's really what they want to do, is that reasonable? Is that what should be done? Or should that energy of anger go someplace else or be held some other way or approach some other way? And so to consider carefully, what is it that we're trying to accomplish, what's the purpose of the anger, maybe this subconscious purpose that we haven't even thought about it? The this next one, and that's supported by the first is to bring awareness to the whole process of being angry. And this is, you know, a big part of what mindfulness is that mindfulness has to do with bringing careful attention to our experience and what's going on. And anger is not only a worthy subject for mindfulness, there are times when it's a crucial subject for mindfulness, if the alternative is to cause harm through our anger. And so to stop and take a good look at anger, Become aware of it, study it, understand it as it manifests can teach us a variety of different things. It's very helpful to understand all the different expressions within us of what anger is, the physiological expressions of it, the heat and the anger and attention we carry. It's helpful to focus on the mental energies and understand what goes on there. It's helpful to understand how we act and react when we're angry. Some people can be angry. And that's a setup to be triggered by all kinds of things in the environment that normally they would not be triggered by. And so by paying attention to when we're angry, studying our anger, being aware of it, we start seeing what what's going on within us. And we start seeing what consequences we have or how we react based on that. That will both of those will give us a platform by which to learn to see and recognize anger in the future. So we can be wiser about it, you can sometimes see it coming. Oh, here it comes like that feeling in my stomach. You know that heat? I think it's coming. And so now Okay, like, I better be careful, I better be careful what I say now. Or maybe this is a time to go to the bathroom. And, you know, and all kinds of things can be discharged in the bathroom. So, the so become familiar with our personal experience of and how does it work for us, I think every individual person probably has their own unique ways of that anger is expressed or found or how latest within them. So become you know, don't read a book about it so much as you read the book inside of you. Take time to learn and get to know it. And,

and to do so, to clearly learn how to recognize it and see it to be mine. It is a very important step in this pulling ourselves out of the mud. Because what we're looking for in mindfulness is not only to study the experience, but in its essence mindfulness is also to discover a clarity of attention, a clarity of awareness, clarity of recognition, where we are distinct or independent from what it is we're being aware of. There's such clarity, such kind of strength or omit behind that knowing that the knowing is really free from what is known. And, and that creates, you know, that's the pulling out of the mud. And you can feel that sometimes you can feel sometimes if you're sitting and you're very centered and meditation, very peaceful, and the mind is not caught by anything. And, and you kind of need a lot of clarity then You know, no effort on your part. Your mind remembers, you know, the high school, sweetie. And what happened. And you can, you can feel the pull of that memory. You can feel the sinking into the mud that has a very different feeling than standing clear and standing separate from it. We feel we're diving in. So in a sense, it's become possessed by it again. And that's a phenomenal thing to be able to watch and see, in your own mind, to watch to really watch the forces of the mind of how what it's like to be free and peaceful, and what it's like to start being pulled down into the mode of our preoccupation. And so, to practice mindfulness of anger is a way Beginning to pull ourselves out of the mode. Some people do not want to do this. Some people absolutely, clearly, definitively do not want to not be in their anger. People are so invest, some people are so invested in anger, it's so important for them. They're so stubborn. It's such a powerful strategy for protecting themselves for defining themselves for for establishing some kind of self versus other boundary that they think somehow is going to do something good. That that there really be it's really committed to the anger. And to hear the idea that you're supposed to do mindfulness and really see it clearly enough. So you pull out of it, and not be it is, you know, as a foreign idea or a threatening idea even. But this is part of what mindfulness

is. So the awareness practice To be aware of it is to become aware of what it actually is how it's experienced in the moment, how we're triggered by the anger, how we act based on it. And then to learn how to have this be pulled out of the mud. The third way of helping us get out of the mud is dissipation, dissipation of the energy of the charge discharging. And sometimes there's so much charge around the anger of the whole system is kind of like ready to burst or pop or there's so much churning, it's like a volcano in there sometimes. And it's not a good It can be sometimes not a good space or good kind of way of being in the world. Because we can be so ready to be just kind of triggered by whatever happens. And, and so we can't speak with clarity or wisdom or you try to have a conversation about the conflict you have. But the volcano is just you know, too big. To be able to have a reasonable conversation. And so how do you discharge all that energy and that tension? So first is to recognize that it's important to do that. It's important to do the bathroom break, or it's important to go walk around the block. I remember many years ago here at IMC, I was sitting right here Actually, I was teaching with someone, and we had a disagreement. And so we have to go talk. So we went to the conference room. And it was hard conversation. And, and I could feel the charge building up. And at some point, I said, I think we just sit quietly for a few minutes rather than continuing with the conversation, so I could recognize what was happening to me and you know, this is not i'm not going to be any use for anybody

in this conversation, can we just sit quietly for a couple of minutes, so we did, and then the whole thing, the end That unhelpful energy dissipated enough that then we could have a productive conversation and then the whole thing worked out fine. So, you know, exercise a journal, talk to friends, you know, neutral parties, you know, have some way of discharging it. Somehow settling it a powerful one for some times, it's just time. Sometimes people are in a hurry to resolve things, and some things are better be resolved after the things have been discharged a little bit. So then we can come back and be in a much more reasonable space. And time is often a good healer of the charge of anger. And, you know, just wait a bit, wait a few days, wait a week, and things will settle down, settle down, and then there'll be more space and then you can be ready. So if you want to be kind of not be possessed by the madness and be able to pull out, then you know that learning how to discharge is helpful. And then the L of madalas is to learn. And this is involves studying your anger. It's different than mindfulness. But this become becoming a student of anger. what is really going on when you're angry? What are the underlying psychological factors that come into play with anger? What are the roots of the anger in you? And I think I like to think of anger. I don't know if it's always true. But I often take this perspective, when looking at anger, that anger is a symptom of something deeper. And the task is to discover that deeper thing. And at times when I've been really angry, the thing I find that works really well for me, partly because it dissipates some of the energy, but also because it allows the energy to kind of course through me in a more fluid way and that is I go for a long walks. And there's something about the long walk like the hills or something, something about a lot that the, the energy of the walk that that frees up the thinking around it, I don't get stuck in it, I don't get attached to it. And so then it begins to flow more in my thinking starts to flow more. And that's flowing in my thinking. I'm kind of letting my my thoughts do what they do. I'm watching what's happening. I'm allowing myself to be angry. I'm just being with the experience being with experience being with experience, until In my case, I see one of two things. Either I am hurt, or I'm afraid. And when I see that, then Bingo. Then I know I've kind of dropped below the symptom, the symptom to the cause of the underlying condition and then the Whole thing whole can, the whole situation begins to shift. And then I understand so much what really needs to be addressed and touched with. And it's almost like the anger is like the, I don't know, it's like the packaging. And I've opened the package I get to, you know, I get the present. So then to work with, then then to talk work with the fear, and the sadness. And sometimes it's also so I said, hurt or let's say, hurt and fear in my case, but sometimes it's sadness that people have. So those three and, and, and once that's recognized those things, then it's easier to step back from the anger. So a lot easier not to be possessed by the anger. In fact, sometimes the anger becomes an interesting incidental you know,

just kind of like, who cares about the anger now, we can now that we got into what's more primary. So to learn about the anchor to study and how it works, is good And there's all kinds of things we can learn. But, but you know, and study anger. You know, read about it, then there's books, there's books, things. If you don't like reading books, you know, there's probably articles and if you don't like articles, read the Wikipedia entry in anger. And I read it this morning as homework for my talk. And the, and I thought it was kind of interesting to read it what it had to say. And I learned about one Buddhist sutra on anger that I didn't know about. And so I follow the link and read the whole thing. Well, thank you Wikipedia. It taught me about Buddhism.

And, but I thought it was best that some of the things they said there, I thought were quite provocative and quite evocative. It's almost like you go through it and stop but just think about it for a while. Thank you. how this worked for me, how does this work for me? Anyway, so study it, learn about it. And then the E part of madness is empathy. So to have empathic attention to the other, end to yourself, and empathy is closely related for some people to compassion to really feel what's going on recognize what's happening at an emotional level with people, other people who are angry, it's often appropriate. ourselves as well. It often represents their suffering in some way. And can we understand that suffering? People will often act angry impulsively, when they're under a lot of stress. I've known people who've been very ill, I have a relative who's quite ill, and sometimes has no bandwidth. And so there's kind of this, you know, a little bit of a snarling Kind of pushback, you know, or you feel kind of the anger there. You know, makes sense. So the stress and exhaustion of it all, and people who have some kind of tragedy in their life, you know, there's a person might have, you know, someone's dying in their family, it's very stressful situation, and they go to work and they don't have any bandwidth to handle any kind of stress added stress at work. And so they're just suddenly blare out and are angry. But if we understand people, what they're struggling with, life is difficult for people. And to really take that in understand, then we don't forgive people necessarily, for their anger because of that. But we can have a lot more empathy and care and compassion and more space and, and not take it so personally. And same thing for ourselves. It's hard to be a human being. It's hard to find our way in this life and to deal with all the stresses and challenges that we have growing up and with life in general. And some of our angry impulses, you know, we it's best not to take it too personally, it's just kind of like the whole system is just struggling with, you know, all this deep stress that human life can be about. So it have empathy and care and compassion. And there's a whole kind of slew of emotions and come along with empathy and there might be forgiveness. There might be kindness, there might be generosity and, you know, just, you know, all kinds of things. So that's another way to pull out to stir is to take the timetec empathic connection to yourself and to other people involved. And then the first S is story. I think that most forms of anger, certainly the mankind I was trying to figure out what's the difference between anger and mad, and I tried out for a little bit to sit and wonder if it's the same distinction Between fear and anxiety. Fear is more of a general emotion that has a lot to do with it it can be used have to do with standing on the edge of a cliff or mountain, the mountain lions coming, you know, makes sense to have fear. Psychologists sometimes reserve anxiety to fear that has an imaginary component. Not that it's you know, that has to do with imagining a future predicting future thinking about a future in some way. And people have anxious. So I was wondering if you know, we can say that anger is more the general You know, sometimes if something someone does something, suddenly that's threatening, you know, be angry. But that mad has more to do with imagination and stories. But that didn't go over with my wife. So she's the one who kind of taught me a lot of my English so I'm good, careful. You're still teaching English. It's not my native first language. So it's kind of hard sometimes the English thing So,

so, but still a story, the story that we make the, the imaginations we have the imagine stories we have about the future where this is going stories but what this is all about stories by why a person's doing that. There's a lot of story making assumptions that go into being angry, or being mad at least. And, and

so to learn, study look at the story making mind the beliefs we have, what are we telling ourselves and we're angry. This also can be this can be somewhat subconscious. But if you have the idea, what is the story and maybe even get a journal I started writing out the story. You might start seeing that you actually you have a belief system you have ideas of what's really happening. And I suspect that a percentage of people's anger has more to do with the stories they tell than anything else. Someone got angry with me Recently, they said that because I hadn't responded to an email. And this anchor was kind of strong. I was surprised by this, and said, and then I thought, well, I thought I did. But I didn't say it because I couldn't quite remember. And I went back and look, and sure enough I did. Now, you know, so so. So the story was that Gail hadn't responded to the email. And so that's a story, is it true? And sometimes you can go check, or the person you know, anyway. So it can be quite simple to story. It could be quite elaborate. So what's the story connected the anger, a fascinating thing and very helpful thing to do if you have if you're angry with someone that you can have a conversation with, is, you tell each other each other's story. This is my story of what it's all about. And this My story of what you did and why you did it and all that and tell me your story. And then sometimes we discover that the stories are quite different. And if it's really different than it's like, you know, turns out that you're like two ships passing in the dark, even though there was light and you saw each other. So story. So that also can pull us out of being possessed. And then the next step is to speak. It's sometimes it's very important to speak the anger, to speak about it, and hopefully having done all the other processes First, the speaking can be wise and, and useful. But sometimes anger is because of conflict and difficulty between people and they need to be addressed. Sometimes we have to go sit down and talk to people and work it out. And, and this whole Buddhist thing about mindfulness is not an alternative. To talking about things, but rather it's a way of talking and working out conflict in healthy ways, hopefully. So go talk to people speak it. And sometimes what we're angry about, like social injustice needs to be spoken about and spoken up. Maybe we do it without being mad, but we do with passion. So what is it has to be talked about, it has to be spoken with or angry, so that we're not in meshed in it caught in it. Sometimes we need to be able to tell the person we angry with that we're angry with you in a way that doesn't threaten them. And that's why understanding whether there's there's fear hurt or sadness underneath it is so helpful. Because if you go to someone say I'm angry with you, a good percentage of people will immediately put up their defenses. But if you go to them and say, you know, when you said x, I felt really hurt or really big. I became afraid Then the defenses usually don't go up. And they're all really Oh, they'll say, tell me more than then then they're willing to have a conversation it's easier for them. But you're still talking about the issue. And then you might even want to say later you have to talk to him you know, and you know, I had so much I was tell I was hurt so much that I've spent the last 24 hours fuming and but they've had this whole conversation beforehand that maybe it's good for him to know the impact they had. But But you know, by the time you get around to say you're fuming they're not their defenses are down and there's been rapport and smell they talked about the last s that shouldn't be there is kind of like a

some sometimes it's just a good you know, caffeine thing to do at the very end of it. Certain kinds of bouts of difficult anger, we have people conflict and arguments and stuff. And sometimes it's the strategy of last resort, nothing else works. They try this. So sometimes it's the kind of the combination of a good process and sometimes it's because nothing works. Give them a gift. Share so that were to share, share something. Giving is a tremendously powerful medicine in our social lives. And to figure out what you can give, I mean, it doesn't have to be big and dramatic, but people are it's hard for people to hold stuck in their attachments, their their stubbornness and their if something is offered here to have this, and it could, you know, please, I was thinking about you and, and you know, you know, there was really nice brussel sprouts in them. markets. And I thought about you and I know you're like brussel sprouts here, and they can't resist the brussel sprouts. So, you know, so they're gonna take it. And so the So, study the motivation. bring attention to the whole phenomena of your anger. dissipate

the charge, learn about the anger, study it in all kinds of ways you can study it. have empathy. Study the story, understand the stories connected to the anger and speak and then share. If you want to not be if you want to not be mad if you don't want to be patient By the anger sunk in the mode of your anger,

but if you do,

just to warn the rest of us.

So, those are my thoughts. So, we have about five minutes and many years ago. Now, I went to it was a sitting group in a living room someone's house in. In San Jose, it's now the center of San Diego, San Jose San Jose sitting group at the Quaker meeting house down there with starting someone's living room. And I showed up to give a little talk and I said, Today, I'm going to talk about enlightenment. But before I do, do you have any questions? And so we never talked about enlightenment. Because we spent a whole evening then hope the 45 minutes talking about anger Seemed like anger was more interesting than enlightenment. And maybe because it's, you know, more pertinent or more directly pertinent for people. So, do you have any questions now about what I talked about or about enlightenment? Please.

Thank you, Gil.

Can you expand your perspective beyond the private to the public?

Our body politic perhaps?

Yeah. I think that the important distinction there is recognize what kind Have passionate, maybe anger, strong anger is useful and what is not. And if someone holds very strong political views feels very threatened or feels very angry, but what's what's happening? How to have that anger without being possessed by it. And so that's this whole process here. So that I talked about today. But if you but the danger, I think in the public sphere, is when people are possessed by their anger. And, you know, there's, it's, you know, it's so easy to get caught up in the drama, and the politics and the views of the moment. You know, there are trends over time about views, and politics, and people change their views over time. And so we need to look a little bit about how we relate to what goes on in the public sphere. When it doesn't directly affect us, we get it from the news. Are we identified with it? Are we identified with our opinions? We have to look at how we hold our opinions. And do we do we are using it to define ourselves and define ourselves against other people. There's a whole bunch of stuff to study there to look at, that might be on the edges around this passion and know that passion, that sense of, you know, this has to stop or something that if we don't look at that stuff that's around the edges, we can actually cause a lot of harm. And so I think this kind of practice of mindfulness and what I'm teaching today for the public sphere can kind of clean up the edges so that we can be in conversation with people for example. You know, imagine that. Imagine that you're there's a politician that you're really angry with the politician does, but then you turns out you find yourself sitting next to each other on the bus. You know, and like, wow, you know and person that asks you, how are you? And you call you can have a conversation and, and so then you just dump all your anger on the person. Maybe that was a lost opportunity. Maybe you had, but if you weren't angry, maybe you could have a reasonable conversation, maybe there's some possibility of some kind of discussion. So you know, you want to be prepared. So those are my first thoughts. Is that the adequate? Good starts a good a good Zen teacher only answers 30% of it a question. So I'll take that as a compliment.

So I saw a hand yes and straight straight back into Audrey. If you could take the mic, please. So I was so I'm so fond of Audrey today, specifically, so nice that you're here and that you're speaking, because I went through yesterday, all the imcs newsletters to see the history of what we did. And Audrey's name popped out in 2003 as being the volunteer director, and I felt so touched that you mean how long it's been? I was felt so it was so warming to see that there. I kind of forgotten how long ago that was. And here you are. So I just wanted to share that I was just seeing you stand. Next question I was touched and

well, thank you. I often think of those days with great fondness. What I was thinking of is that I have found that anger, that we use anger sometimes to justify an action that we want to do or not do, like not Oh, I'm not going to go to that meeting because I was angry or I'm not going to speak to that person because they made me angry. And once I realized that, then I can deal with the issue underneath.

Great. That's that's a great point. And, and that raises kind of another issue I didn't touch on. But I think related to strong their strong desire that leads to anger have to have my way. It's the chances are there's a lot of self centeredness, selfishness in that. And I had this suspicion that when anger becomes hostile hostility, I think I have a suspicion that one of the underlying things for hostility is selfishness, self centeredness, so to be able to look deeper down into study that so and so I think maybe also with a desire if I have to have what I want, and get out of my way, or I'll just gonna be angry in order to get it. That's a great point. Thank you. Great. So. So madalas is a good thing to be. So maybe during this week, if you have the occasion to get, you know, slightly irritated or more. Why don't you don't just go go on with your business as usual, whatever you usually do, why don't you figure out some way or other to fully stop and go sit someplace or go for a walk, and then just maybe review this talk or look at it in a new way. See if you can really study it, look at it, try to understand it and delve into it and see if some of these steps that the madalas are useful to or all of them are useful. Run the exercise, learning about your anger, studying it, respectfully, tenderly with reverence because of how deeply rooted is in us is a really worthwhile enterprise. If we just treat anger as a surface phenomena, we miss the opportunity to go deep inside. So take that opportunity. Thank you