

## 2nd Zen objective: Overcome conflicts

There are endless things for couples to clash over. Anger takes over and constructive confrontation becomes impossible.

Disagreements over the children's schooling, sharing household chores, holiday plans... Disagreements turn into accusations and criticisms into indictments. Anger takes over and constructive confrontation becomes impossible.

### **How to: recycle anger**

Anger is at the source of every conflict. It explodes even more easily in intimate relationships, which aren't governed by the same social rules as others. Anger feeds on resentment, a sense of injustice, or when a partner finds our weak spots. In Zen Buddhism there is no shame in anger, as human an emotion as any other. Letting it build up inside you is not good for you or the other person.

Using it to gain the upper hand leads to deadlock. However, we can use this energy to move forward together in a constructive manner; in Zen philosophy anger only becomes destructive if it is used to hurt others.

### **How to: breathe deeply and recompose yourself**

The Zen teacher Thich Nhat Hanh recommends a simple exercise to let off steam. When you feel overcome with anger, taking just a few minutes can calm you right down. Breathe through your nose deeply whilst smiling and saying to yourself: "inhaling I smile" then breathe out deeply (always through your nose) saying 'exhaling, I exhale my anger': (in "Be free where you are" – Dangles 2003).

### **Recompose yourself**

'Hot, cold, you are the ones who are experimenting!' shouted the Buddhist master Taisen to his students, reminding them that each personal experience is subjective in the same way. Cold water will be cold for one person and freezing for another. In other words conflicts become worse as soon as you try to convince your partner of the infallibility of their point of view instead of just expressing your opinion – something that should not be judged or commented upon. Everyone should be able to finish what they are saying without being interrupted or attacked. When anger threatens to prevail, it is always possible to suspend the discussion by saying: "I'm too angry to talk, I need to calm down." Admitting difficulty in continuing discussion at an extremely emotionally charged moment can bring the tension down a notch or two. Compose yourself and get your anger under control – this time by yourself helps you to concentrate on the present, and not encroach on the other person's territory.

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