

21 Ways To Turn Ill Will to Good Will

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Introduction

- Ill will creates negative, vicious cycles. But that means that good will can create positive cycles. Plus good will cultivates wholesome qualities in you.
- Avoiding ill will does not mean passivity, allowing yourself or others to be exploited, staying silent in the face of injustice, etc. There is plenty of room for speaking truth to power and effective action without succumbing to ill will. Think of Gandhi, Nelson Mandela, or the Dalai Lama as examples. In fact, with a clear mind and a peaceful heart, your actions are likely to be more effective.

How to prevent or transform ill will

1. Be mindful of the priming, the preconditions for ill will. Try to defuse them early: get rest, have a meal, get support, talk things out, read the dharma, etc.
2. Practice non-contention to undermine the heat that creates ill will.
3. Inspect the underlying trigger, such as the sense of threat or alarm. Look at it realistically. Are you exaggerating what happened in any way? Are you focussing on one negative thing amidst a dozen good ones? Was something actually an "injury" to you? Be skeptical of your justifications; be especially wary of grievances that seem reasonable! Try to see events and your responses as just aggregates assembling and dispersing and not mattering so much.
4. Be careful about attributing intent to others. We are often just a bit player in their drama; they are not targeting us personally. Look for the good intentions in others beneath the action that made you feel mistreated. Look for the good in them.
5. Put what happened in perspective. It's impermanent and empty of an inherent, fixed, solid nature. It's also part of a larger whole, most of which is fine.
6. Cultivate the Brahmaviharas: lovingkindness, compassion, sympathetic joy, and equanimity. In other words, cultivate good will.
7. Practice generosity. Much ill will comes when we feel taken from, or not given to, or on the receiving end of another person's bad moment. Instead, let the person have what they took: their victory, their bit of money or time, etc. Give to them not giving to you. Let them have their bad moment. Think of it as an opportunity for dana on your part: the dana of forbearance, patience, the gift of no cause to fear you.
8. Investigate ill will. Take a day, a week, a month - and really examine the least bit of ill will during that time. See what causes it . . . and what its effects are.

9. Regard ill will as an affliction upon yourself. It hurts you more than anyone.
10. Settle into awareness, observing the ill will but not identified with it, watching it arise and disappear like any other experience, empty of importance or solidity.
11. Accept the wound. Experience the feelings of it. Do not presume that life is not supposed to be wounding, Accept the unpleasant fact that people will mistreat you.
12. Do not cling to what you want instead of what you got.
13. Let go of the view that things are supposed to be a certain way. Challenge the view that things should work out, that the world is perfectible. Suzuki Roshi: "*. . . . that is how everything actually exists in this world. Things that exist are imperfect. Nothing we see or hear is perfect. But right there in that imperfection is perfect reality.*"
14. Release the sense of self, that it was "I" or "me" who was affronted, wounded.
15. "*. . . ill will is suppressed by the first jhana based on lovingkindness and eradicated by the path of nonreturning.*" [Footnote 14, Chap 8, In the Words of the Buddha, Bhikkhu Bodhi]
16. Resolve to meet mistreatment with lovingkindness. No matter what. The Buddha: "*Even if bandits were to sever you savagely limb by limb with a two-handed saw, a person who gave rise to a mind of hate towards them would not be carrying out my teaching. You should train thus: 'Our minds will remain unaffected, and we shall utter no evil words; we shall abide compassionate for their welfare, with a mind of lovingkindness, without inner hate. We shall abide pervading them with a mind imbued with loving-kindness; and starting with them, we shall abide pervading the all-encompassing world with a mind imbued with loving-kindness, abundant, exalted, immeasurable, without hostility, and without ill will.'* That is how you should train." The Simile of the Saw, Majjhima Nikaya.
In this world, hate has never dispelled hate. Only love dispels hate. Dhammapada
17. Cultivate positive emotion, like the happiness ("sukha") that is one of the five jhanic factors. Positive feelings calm the body, quiet the mind, buffer against the impact of stressful events, and foster supportive relationships -- which reduce ill will.
18. Communicate. Speak (skillfully) for yourself, regardless of what the outcome may be. If appropriate, name your experience to release it; feel it as you speak it.
Try to address the situation with openness and selflessness. Less selfing means more attentiveness, more attunement to all that's going on in the other person. And you'll be freer and calmer to be more skillful.
19. Have faith that they will inherit their own karmas one day, and you don't have to be the justice system.

20. Realize that some people will not get the lesson no matter how much you try. So why burden yourself with trying to teach them? Further, many people will never actually experience your ill will - such as politicians. So why carry it toward them?

21. Forgiveness. This doesn't mean changing your view that wrongs were done. But it does mean letting go of the emotional charge around feeling wronged. The greatest beneficiary of forgiveness is usually yourself.