The Ninth Applied Precept:

I bear witness to the reality of my own ill will and the pain of divisiveness in the world, and aspire to respond with care when difficult situations and emotions arise.

Traditionally: Do not be angry, or, Do not hold on to anger.

Why do I get angry? The popular image of a Buddhist is of someone who never experiences anger, who remains always cheerful and smiling, and perhaps it's the fantasy that *this could be me* that is part of Zen's attraction to us. The traditional wordings of the precept seems to follow this line: do not get angry, and if you do, then let it go! Our Ordinary Mind phrasing is different from this in that it links anger and ill will to *divisiveness*: anger separates us from each other, and also within ourselves: when we are angry it's difficult or impossible to *respond* with *care* to what's actually happening here and now. But rather than being my enemy, could we think of anger as a true spiritual friend? Is it possible that by really allowing ourselves fully to *experience* our anger, it can indeed become our teacher?

What do we actually mean by 'anger' or 'ill will'? What might link all those very different experiences we might include under this precept? Some people, including many of those I've met in prison, would like to limit what counts as anger to the 'red mist' kind: a blind rage that makes us unaware of anything outside itself and demands expression *right here and right now.* Hot anger burns: as I become angered I feel the rush of blood as the entire balance of my hormones shifts, adrenaline is secreted, and while some of my sensations are heightened, others are suppressed, exactly as when we are 'under the influence' of 'drink' or 'drugs'. The call to action is real, and it's deeply physical. Those tense muscles *demand* release, *demand* action: this kind of anger calls for immediate *expression*! To 'express' is to take something from *inside* and push it *out* of me: I'll feel a huge sense of release as I lash out with my tongue or my fists, pushing you back with my hands or the force of my words.

'Ill-will' fits better a *cool* anger: no adrenaline rush, no burning in my muscles that demands release. Ill will is altogether slower and more considered, and if I do notice it in my body, it's more as a diffuse tension. It lives in me as a resentment that emerges *after* the event. Rather than being an immediate 'acute' response to the situation it becomes 'chronic', acting over time and so becoming more of a mindset, a predisposition, even a world-view. It's anger that's quiescent, but always looking for the cutting remark, the shared put-down. It puts a subtle tension in my body, hardening both my muscles and my thinking. We all probably have this to some degree: do I find myself unintentionally coming back in my thoughts over and over again to the same annoyance or felt injustice? Do I find myself endlessly justifying my own actions to myself, or find that I can't help doing so to other people? Ill will is less exciting than hot anger, and can rarely find more

than a momentary and partial release, unless it re-ignites as rage. The biggest danger is that the more thoroughly and unconsciously we experience it, the more it can come to frame the world as a whole for us.

Can I own up to all these things as I see them in myself? Can I *open* to it? Can I hold even my thoughts of self-*judgement* about my anger without getting lost in self-*justification* or self-*reproach*? As always, Diane Rizzetto offers us a detailed way into our practice with this precept as a non-judgemental investigation of our *experiencing*:

> Become curious about what triggers your anger as you go about your daily activities. What events set anger into motion for you? Someone cuts you off on the freeway. There's a moment of madness and you make a rude gesture. You know there's nothing positive or helpful about your reaction, but you get some sense of satisfaction—momentarily. It'll take a while, but if you have the intention to be open and observant, you'll begin to pick up on what thoughts are present when the energy rises. At first, in all likelihood, several things will happen. First, you won't remember to turn the mind towards the inquiry until after the event. Then, you will judge it—I shouldn't be thinking that way, or I did it again, or I'll never get over this. You may also find that thoughts develop into a story about who did what, and so forth. If this happens, when you finally notice you've been off into a story (which can take seconds, minutes, or hours), just make a mental note of the thought by repeating it—"having a thought that…" By keeping the intention to not try to solve anything but to allow awareness of what type of thinking triggers anger reactions, you will begin to experience a little space in which your awareness can deepen so that your experience resonates and speaks. Your particular pattern of thinking and feeling around anger will emerge. Be patient. You can't recognise years of collected requirements in just a few exercises. (WU, 155-6)

As before, Diane uses that insightful but double-edged term *requirements*. What do I feel I *need* or *demand* right here? Having 'requirements' sound *bad* and 'not very Buddhist'. I think a good question to ask of all of our requirements is '*who* is it that requires things to be *this* way?' We can't demand an answer, but just stay holding the question and see what responds to our invitation. Whatever does arise is likely to be in terms of some specific aspect of our *selfing*, how we came to be and act as the self we were in *that* moment. The way some Zennists talk—'the self is unreal!…just be a *no*-self!'—you would think our requirements can only be 'hindrances'. However, from our perspective of becoming *aware* of this process of our selfing, they simply invite further investigation, and are not good or bad in themselves. So why *this* particular 'requirement' and to what aspects of my self does it connect? To be able to do this, I have to learn to listen non-judgementally.

> Once you more frequently notice your reactions, it is important to *allow* their presence in open awareness, so if judgemental thoughts arise you can just repeat them to yourself and move on: Having a thought that I'm still getting angry over… Or, I don't feel anything and I should… Sometimes people will say that they know they are angry but don't have a feeling in their body. (WU 156-7)

This also works in reverse: have you ever been challenged, '…hey, you seem really angry!' only to thunder in response 'I am NOT ANGRY! None of us seem to be as good as we might be at connecting up our *feelings* (emotions) with our… *feelings* (bodily sensations), so whether I really do think that I 'never get angry', or that I just don't seem to *feel* it, we are experiencing *dissociation*. What's going on here is analogous in it's way to the complex of emotions we examined in relation to *shame*. Many families make it perfectly clear to their children that anger is not an acceptable emotion, and that it must never be displayed but instead be swallowed down and, ideally, repressed. Within the family this is, like shaming, a strategy of *control*, of power, one that minimises any challenge to those holding authority (=parents!). Of course this is often a strategy our parents learnt from *their* parents, and that they may not even be consciously aware of: it is simply *unthinkable* that one would display anger, and contrary to one's core (received) values. So, to *avoid* being shamed I will have learnt to *deny* my conscious anger by channelling it into ill will, (where I can more-or-less banish it from my awareness, though not from having its effect on how I act), or alternatively I may have learnt not to *feel* my anger: I 'know' I'm angry, but… I come to believe that anger is shameful, and hence tied to all the complex of other things that are shameful: I might even think (have been implicitly or explicitly told) that I appear to be bad, ungrateful, lower class, a sinner, or even mentally ill if I display anger. In order to be *good*, to be *safe from the exclusion that is part of being shamed*, I make sure I never feel any anger… or at least not *show* any anger, and from there become able not to be *aware* of the anger I am feeling. I might displace my feeling of anger on to my sense of injury... 'I'm not angry, just sad...' or I might even try to repress that feeling too. It may not even feel *safe* to experience my own anger, so I become afraid of it, either because I think my anger may hurt or even destroy me, or that it might provoke other people into harming me, as shaming or even physical violence. If as a child my carers appeared frightened by anger—whether their own or other people's—then this becomes even more likely. This complex of feeling and emotion around anger as *shame*, as *badness*, as *vulnerability*, and so as *fear*, is registered moment by moment in my *experiencing in my body*. Diane reports a group conversation with her students that offers real insight here:

Diane: …the belief, then, is that it's destructive in some way?

Student: Yes, the belief is anger is always destructive.

Another Student: If I were a better person, I would have some better way of dealing with this situation than getting angry about it.

Diane: So what's wrong with anger, what's the belief?

Student: It's a sign that there is something else wrong, that I have bad coping skills or something. Then anger shows I'm a failure…

Diane: If the belief is that anger can hurt people, are you included in that hurt?

Student: What I'm really afraid of is that it will show my weakness.

Diane: It will show weakness: yes, that is the belief we've been circling around as it comes into the light — anger will reveal my weakness.

With 'weakness' we reach the *central paradox* of anger in its relation to shame, and return to James Gilligan's work to understand the mechanisms of violence. Gilligan shows how shaming is the *non-physical violence* of the *breaking of mutual recognition*, a violence that may call forth greater, physical violence in an attempt to compensate, and that anger is the emotion that triggers this violence. In this sense our anger is one form of our *displaced* shame. Or perhaps better: *anger is the displacement of this shame into the emotional and physical experiencing of a need to act*, whether in the immediacy of the heat of this moment, or in the cool of a long-contemplated revenge. If shame is the (fearful) experiencing of our 'weakness', and anger our flight from this experience, it makes the experiencing of this anger itself highly ambivalent and problematic. We don't *want* to *experience* our anger, but to *displace it in turn onto real or fantasised action*. Our sense of weakness is itself shaming, and to connect this to our anger is to place us in a tight double bind. My *anger* is an assertion of my identity and agency in the world, but the *fear* that has brought about this anger is shaming, because this fear is in itself always an acknowledgement of a potential lack of control, of weakness. The angrier I get, the greater the potential for shame: it's a delicate balance! The experience of shame itself is shaming (the shame spiral!) …which may either cause my anger to collapse, or on the contrary increase into blind rage…

If, as a would-be 'good Buddhist', I attempt to *not* feel anger, I fail to get to grips with any of this. I retreat from the reality of my anger into a world of goodness, but one into which my ill will is in constant danger of breaking through. I remember a Dharma talk by Martine Batchelor about her own experience living in a community of 'passive-aggressive' Buddhists, superficially all smiles and 'goodwill', but *ill* will constantly showing itself in their fault-finding and sniping at each other. What was in itself utterly trivial could assume cosmic levels of significance: who washes out their teacup and who *doesn't*? Pretty much anything could and did become an opportunity for the display of injured and resentful virtue. None of this will help me become better aware of my anger, or learn to work with it. The problems we exacerbate with attempting to deny or suppress our anger just aren't discussed nearly enough. So we return once more to Joko Beck...

> When anger arises… much of traditional Zen practice would have us blot out the anger and concentrate on something, such as the breath. Though we've pushed the anger aside, it will return whenever we are criticised or threatened in some way. In contrast, our practice is to become the anger itself, to experience it fully, without separation or rejection. (NS, 85)

This isn't simple or easy. To use one of Joko's favourite formulas: we don't because we *don't want to*, because it hurts. What does *becoming* our anger mean? Just to sit with the *experiencing* of it, not hardening ourselves *against* it, not *rejecting* it or holding it tight in self-judgment. Root our experience in *this* body that I am: the rush of blood, the muscle tension, pain even. The sense that I need to *move* and *move now*, but that I am not allowing myself the escape of *actually* moving, but holding myself steady. Feeling the emotions that sweep over me as waves, or lurk in the pit of my stomach, or as tension in my neck. Noting the images, the thoughts that accompany them, and whether they fade, repeat or hold steady.

There's no point pretending I'm not angry, or exhorting myself not to be. There's no point pretending it's all ok. My anger is a part of me, and it needs acknowledgment and care, it needs *experiencing* without *acting it out* on someone (including acting out on *myself*). If I don't *judge* myself for feeling angry, don't think I'm *bad* for feeling angry, that I *shouldn't* feel this way, then I can be honest with myself about how I actually *do* feel, and *be* my anger and *be with* my anger: taking care of it as a part of myself. But this can be hard, hard work. Back to Diane Rizzetto: the important point…

> …practicing with habitual patterns of mind and body is to allow an open inquiry into their workings. …we must explore anger events in all their forms whether it's a simmering upset or a full-blown harangue. We slowly learn to face it and embrace it. We come to know its face intimately. Invite it in and call it by its true name. This can seem very frightening. It is difficult to do when we are in the heat of it …we move slowly…
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> Be patient… Just opening, inviting, what naturally wants to reveal itself will come to the surface in time. You may begin to notice that tightening in certain areas of the body or breath holding is subtle associated with certain emotions or thoughts, such as frustration or jealousy. Try to relax and rest in the experience of Just This. In time you will notice that whatever you experience is just a passing wave of energy. The key is to allow—don't try to change it, manipulate it or get rid of it. (WU 154-5)

So: '…just a passing wave of energy'. Well yes and no… It's absolutely true that *all* our feelings are '…just a passing wave of energy', and that our anger is no exception. Diane is reminding us that anger is 'nothing special' in this respect, *despite* it's tendency to overwhelm or preoccupy us, to drive us towards doing foolish things, and connect with our fear and shame. But this equally importantly doesn't mean we should think that the ideal is to ignore or minimise either the experiencing of it, or its effect on us. As always, it's *both/and:* anger is 'just' energy *and* the Great Matter of Life and Death as it shows up in our feelings, thoughts and actions. Our anger *is us*, not a detachable part we can choose what to do with (or feel bad about *not* 'doing' whatever it is we think we are supposed to 'do' with it). What is the alternative to this? As Joko suggests, simply experiencing my life as it is, the reality of my anger as it is, without covering it over or hiding from it. Experiencing my anger as it arises, and the suffering it brings. Of course, perhaps 'simply' is not so simple.

Anger is Relationship

So let's ask again: why am I angry *now*, here in this present moment? Why do I *ever* get angry, and harbour so much ill will? To start with, I'll probably reply...'it's *you*, you *made* me angry... (…by what you did, or what you didn't do that you should have). It's *your fault* I'm angry!' Just as my muscles are tensed and ready to express my anger by acting to *push* you away, so in my mind I create an image of you onto which to *push away* (displace) my anger. But this image, these words I speak to you, are actually just a *story* about my anger, the story I tell about a separate me and a separate you that justifies my anger towards you. Becoming aware of these stories, and learning to hold them as 'just' being

stories (and hence *not* judging them at this point as 'true' or 'false') is a vital step. But it's easy to slide from here into what I'll call the naive-Buddhist attitude of *making it all about me*: it's *my* 'self', *my* badness, *my* unskillfulness, *my* karma… These two approaches form a pair, both ignoring how anger holds us in connection to the other: that we are paradoxically tied *together* by the anger that separates us. And we are both also tied to the world *outside*: whether this is the very first time that you and I have met or we have already spent half our lives together, neither of us came here today empty and immaculate, but always as complex social beings engaged with the world. What is it that is *really* making me angry?

Because we are social, relational beings, 'who *I* really am' is always itself about 'who *we* really are'. Bound up both with some sense of our many *identities*, and with our mutual *recognition*. So while anger will always be a reaction to fear, that fear is fundamentally of a *threat to my relational sense of self*, and it is this that will give it the specific quality of anger. I experience my sense of self as being challenged by your implicitly *mis*-identifying me, because you are breaking the 'lawfulness' (in Jessica Benjamin's sense) underpinning our real or assumed relationship. In *your* eyes do I really even exist as the person I think I am? And, given our *mutual* necessity, if I am not *recognised* by you, do I really exist at all? How *dare* you treat me like that!

So there is a *relative* but very *real* difference between the anger I feel when my computer acts up, and my experiencing anger at *your* denial of recognition to me. But also a difference between your 'stealing' 'my' parking space and the automated letter I receive refusing my application for disability benefits. None of this is simply *about me*, nor about some generic idea of a 'self' I do or do not think 'I' possess, but about the different actual kinds of relationships: the world's worlding *as* 'me', the 'me' that is always *this* person in *this* society. Because my anger is so often experienced intensely and intimately, it offers me a superb opportunity to begin to see myself '*selfing*', not as negative 'ego' or 'selfishness', but as this specificity of *this* 'me' in *this* relationship at *this* moment. My anger can actually help me come to experience this absence of any final fixed form or inner essence to my 'self', and so help me *experience* directly that I'm much more a *process of relationship* than a fixed or permanent *thing*. My anger, your anger, our anger is always in this sense a 'relationship problem', a reaction to the fear of real or imagined shaming.

Important too, to recognise that this isn't just about my *direct* relationships. If someone's unkind to my child I might well get angry, and it's still easy to see my personal relationship here, and hence how my own sense of self comes in to question. That's *my* child, whom I dearly *love* and for whom I'm *responsible*: both my immediate emotional investment and my sense of personal identity as a parent are directly involved! I need to respond in some way, but should that be to *break* relationship with the other child or adult concerned, and in becoming angry deny *them* recognition? Will that help in any way? Drawing the circle wider, *our anger can also be triggered by much broader and less immediately personal issues*: the graffiti or vandalism in my community, the need for food banks, child poverty at the national and international scale, the climate crisis… In all of these, both intimate and distant, what rouses my anger is the sense of the *failure* of some aspect of a relationship, a failure that poses a threat that's not simply physical but in some way existential: 'this is not how things should be!' impacts my core sense of *who I really am*.

So if I see pictures, say, of 'migrants' or 'illegal immigrants' arriving in my country in boats and being being detained as they reach land? I might well get angry *either* at this swarm of invading potential terrorists intent on freeloading while they destroy the fabric of my nation, *or* at the inhumanity with which the authorities meet the *other* when they are poor and desperate. In neither case am I directly threatened physically or emotionally. But nevertheless, when viewed relationally there *is* a subtle existential rupture in both cases. It's not only in our *directly* meeting each other that Jessica Benjamin's idea of relationship as mutuality grounded in a sense of lawfulness applies. Because *all* our relationships are based in mutuality—we can't recognise ourselves *except* through recognising each other—this sense of lawfulness grounds the possibility of meaningful relationship, and so a challenge to this sense of lawfulness (a sense we often experience as 'fairness') is felt as a failure of recognition towards *me*, and so as a fear-provoking potential *existential* threat. Anger always implies a 'should': the separated-out other ('they') *should* act in *this* way *not* that way! We *should* help all those in need/we *should* only look after our own! So are these two attitudes simply equivalent? Is it all just down to how we feel?

The Problem with Anger?

To answer this, we might want to come at the question from a different angle: is 'all' anger 'bad'? Against the grain of more traditional Buddhist approaches that would seem to ask us to struggle wholly to banish our anger, contemporary Zen, drawing on the variety of phrasings of the precept, and both serious therapeutic practice and pop psychology, tends to show a more tolerant and even positive attitude towards *some* anger. While 'do not be angry' suggests that as it deludes and blinds us, anger in any of its forms is best avoided, 'do not hold on to anger' supposes that it's more the mindset of ill will that's the real issue. Hence a 'clean burn' of anger lived in the moment is no problem, it's the residue and rumination left when it *doesn't* burn out that's the damaging part. We might also argue that 'justified' or 'righteous' anger is a positive emotion, as we can use the great energy that anger gives us in a good and unselfish cause... Diane Rizzetto seems to combine these ideas in an interesting but nevertheless problematic way in drawing a distinction between what she calls *self-centred* and *life-centred* anger.

> The key is to really know whether the anger motivates action that benefit the well-being of ourself or others, or if it motivates actions that are hurtful to ourselves or others. One action we can say is life-centred; the other action we can call self-indulgent. Life-centred anger has the power to be open and transformative… It rises and falls quickly and is never held onto.' WU148

We are offered a classic anecdote about Joko Beck herself in support of this view. The seventy-five year old Zen teacher is walking on the beach when she sees two young men fighting furiously: feeling the sudden burn of anger she rushes over and pushing them apart yells "STOP IT!"… which they duly do. For Diane this is 'skilful action that responds to circumstances…' (WU149) Happily, this incident turned out well, but how would we tell the story if a mis-aimed punch had instead ended the life of this agéd interloper? There's no threat to Joko's sense of identity here, no sense that the pair were threatening her image of self, the threat is only to our sense of 'lawfulness', of how people *should* be.

She's not foisting an identity onto anyone else, just STOP IT! But thinking it through, this is actually a story about *relationship*: a relationship that has literally 'come to blows', and the effect of an outsider working *across* this relationship: confronted by this stranger the pair revert to being an 'us'….stopping fighting and running away.

A second, very different example Diane offers—but one still centrally concerned with relationship—is that of the 'Mothers Against Drunk Drivers' campaign group founded in response to the 'rage and pain' of mothers whose children had been killed on the roads. Truly, an example of a life-centred response to such a devastating loss, and to the overwhelming and complex feelings that would inevitably follow. But 'response' is the key word here: my 'reaction' would probably be just to reflexively demand extreme punishment for the individual that took the life of my child. This mother's actual response is *not* about anger 'never held onto', but anger directly *addressed* through creating connection with others, through relationship. Founding a non-profit organisation engaging in wide-ranging support and educational work is certainly 'life-centred', because instead of acting-*out* to *ex*-press and hence *evade* that anger, it *engages* with it, allows it, and connects it in awareness to the fear and pain which lie underneath it. This is anything but a 'clean burn' quickly rising and falling, as she 'moves on' with the rest of her life. It is the itself-painful ongoing work of holding the experiencing of anger as it continues to continue, quite possibly *forever*, allowing it to find its own speed and direction of transformation into… whatever becomes possible within the space of the relationships that now hold it. There *is* a sense of identity here: what could ever be as catastrophic as losing a child to whom one is 'mother'? But the damage to this identity doesn't lead to a withdrawal and to setting boundary lines of exclusion, but to connection and inclusion in the creation of new and evolving partial identities within relationship: 'road safety campaigner'. The point here is connecting 'my' pain and 'my' anger to a wider field, as a way of affirming the mutuality of relationship, a *non-separation* that releases us from the *separation* of fear and anger. Hence for 'self-centred' or 'life-centred' I'd substitute *separating* and *connecting* anger, emphasising the difference between an anger that is the turning away from *both* self *and* world and so can only ever spiral endlessly on its own axis, and the anger that is a plea for its own *transformation* in *turning towards* connection and relationship with both self and other. Anger that becomes my teacher.

Thich Nhat Hanh always spoke of it not being enough to *want* peace or even to *fight* for peace. We have to *be* peace. This is the potential trap in every fight against injustice, because insofar as we make ourselves separate by wanting a clear distinction between *their* wrong and *our* right we amplify the problem itself. What are my chances of meeting you with openness and possibility if I'm still burning with anger at you? In my (moral?) self justification, can I really stand so detached that I will not be speaking of my own superiority and denigrating you? And how will you respond in that case? So we need to consider the Fourth, Sixth and Seventh Precepts. And we can also recognise anger as one of the forms of intoxication that relate to the Fifth Precept, in the clouding of our responses in the rush of blood and adrenalin. The question is hence more about: what is at stake with our anger in this specific situation? Is it *more* about the challenge to my sense of identity, or my sense of the lawfulness of the way *our* 'world' works (there is more than likely an element of both)? More importantly, does this anger show up as *turning away* from possible relationship (separating), or *turning towards* connection and relationship?

We're now in a better position to answer about our anger around the arrival of the 'small boats' and similar issues that polarise a 'them' and an 'us'. Are we drawing lines of separation (it's them or us!) or of connection (what can we do to help?)… But note again that making these connections involve *restraining the reactivity* of our anger and hence its *expression* through force, and so seeking instead that anger's *transformation*. Hence the real danger of *demonising* the other, in effect *becoming that we oppose*. (… 'life would be fine if only we could take all the racists, the misogynists and the bigots and put them on their own island'… well, ok, but *they* are *us* too.) Do we break in advance any possible relationship with those of different views, or try to understand their complexity, how their own fears, anxieties and frustrations lead them to frame their own sense of fairness and lawfulness in this way, albeit one based on *exclusion*, on *othering* and *separation*? *Without* the 'should' that underlies our shared sense of lawfulness, our relationship has no guidelines: you might do anything at all! That's frightening both physically—what *might* happen?—but even more importantly at the level of recognition: without *your* recognition I don't *fully* exist… and depending on the significance of our relationship I may feel that without that recognition I don't *really* exist at all. How *dare* you do that to me?

We can once again remember here anger's connection to shame and to shaming. Anger is a risky strategy, and as we have explored above, the experiencing of anger can itself come to feel shameful insofar as it potentially exposes our own weakness. If we understand anger as always being a *displacement* of our fear of a potential existential threat that we don't want to *experience*, then we can understand that our anger is always also the displacement of our experiencing of shame. So: anger connects to shame when we deny or threaten to deny our recognition to the one who has *become* the other, and this may well be the anger we come to experience when we feel it is *we* ourselves who have been shamed by being denied recognition. Will we allow this reflexive anger to separate us further, and attempt to shame back, or do we need to Bear Witness positively to that anger and that hurt? Can we find responses that will allow us to reconnect, or at least approach with the possibility of being open to connection and the establishing or repair of relationship?

How *do* we Bear Witness to our anger when it is provoked by the personal or structural injustices we encounter in our lives? How do we speak our truth? There is no magic formula, but I'll offer an example. This was in the context of a discussion about the Church of England's attempt to come to terms with the exposure of the decades-long cover up by very senior clergy of sexual abuse committed by those placed in authority. A representative of a group of those who had been abused spoke not of the abuse itself, but of his and their feelings in response to having been initially vilified for complaining, and that subsequently, even when the truth of their accusations had been acknowledged, there had still been no sense that their human suffering, ongoing in its consequences, had been put at the centre of the Church's inquiry. No sense that they were ever really *recognised.* He spoke with an intensity that was almost overwhelming. 'Almost' because his huge but controlled rage was held in balanced tension with despair at the seeming impossibility of ever being truly recognised. That their shaming had thus been even further deepened, not healed. It was both an accusation and a plea for help, one that he expected to fall on well-intentioned but ultimately deaf ears. His kept his voice under control, *just*. You could not hear him without feeling anger, outrage, deep sadness and, yes, despair. I felt his pain. But

the anger here was searching for *connection*, and so for transformation and healing through a form of *recognition* that would demand real change within the Church.

Feeling Anger

Important too to remind ourselves once again that it's not just in the extremes a 'red mist', or in the results of chronic and life changing trauma that anger (both our own and that of others) needs our care, our kindness, and above all our awareness. In their own ways the minor irritations that cause anger in my day to day life are equally involuntary responses to this sense of the failure of relationship. And of course this is why I may well come to feel the hurt most strongly in the minutiae of my most intimate, long-term relationships: the dishwasher not emptied, the offhand remark, the lack of response in the others' eyes… I don't want it to feel this way, I don't want to feel this hurt, this fear, and so I push *out* this feeling and *express* it by acting out, or push it *inwards*, and dissociate from it or repress it.

Are we brave enough to allow ourselves really to feel our pain? If so, our anger may truly become our teacher, but to ask this question has to come 'without judgement', because there are so many reasons why we evade our pain, and many of them good ones. Our own suffering and particularly our trauma, whether acute or developmental, will render our pain difficult and sometimes impossible to hold. This *being-with* my anger, coming to *be* my anger, is always only ever work in progress. Experiencing the reality of my anger means *not* expressing it (and so avoiding *experiencing* it), but also not evading it by distracting myself or justifying myself, but instead offering my open awareness. When I stop trying to avoid it, and instead can simply *be* with it (whatever the stories I am telling myself about what has caused it), then I don't need to separate off from you by blaming you, or from the angry part of myself by blaming me, or trying to hide what I actually feel.

This is my practice whenever I can bring awareness to the presence of anger in me and am able to take a breath, a mental or physical step back. Sometimes, when I'm face to face with you, feeling the confrontation and the anger rise, then taking that step back, or breathing in that slow breath may be all I can manage. Such simple physical, embodied actions can still be enough to check my outburst or hostile response. I may even have to hold silence ('keep my peace'), in order not fill the space with unwise words. If I do feel I *have* to leave, (and sometimes this really may be the best option) then in doing so my shrug, the *way* I turn my back to go, may still speak volumes (wisely or unwisely so…). I can at least note my posture: stiff and closed, arms folded(?) and how this relates to the anger I'm feeling. But how would it be, if from this position I could still *open* to the other, to you? Arms wide, offering not defence but vulnerability, and without any submission on my part, still *meeting* you undefended with openness and possibility? How would you then respond? Thich Nhat Hanh advised that if someone annoys you, then give them a present. Not to try to change *them*, not to be 'kind', but to help me mend my *own* sense of separation from them. How *do* you and I, how *can* we meet each other, here in this situation? You and I disagree, because one way or another we have broken the implicit sense of lawfulness that has held us in relationship, and so now feel threatened in ourselves. How do we heal that? Of course, one or both of us may *really* need the space to be alone right now, but *just* for now. But if not? Our shared sense of lawfulness isn't some legal contract to be rendered null and void if 'broken', or with specified penalty clauses for

failures fully to comply. *Our* sense of 'lawfulness' is multi-dimensional and multi-layered, largely implicit and felt within us, and often only articulated in thought and speech when we already have the felt sense of its having been broken. From the most basic empathy we can feel for *any* living thing (the struggling fly, the neglected pot-plant), through the shared sense of being 'people like us', and so to the absolute specificity of being *you* and *me, here* and *now*. Our more important and enduring relationships have resilience precisely because there is always somewhere else to go: our shared experience, our common goals that make us *mutually* necessary to each other, *not-separate*. Of course, if my actual safety (physical, emotional, sexual) is being threatened, then I need to get out of there *now*, as swiftly and safely as possible. But you and I, here and now, can't we get over this?

The Teacher

How then, might we best think of, and work with, the anger we all experience? As an enemy to be vanquished? As the shame-filled marker of our weakness, our failure to live up to our fantasised self-image? Better I think to see it as a part of our 'life as it is', and so as a teacher, and often a very great one. If we can distinguish carefully between the actual experiencing of our anger, and the *acting-out or acting-in that prevents us experiencing it*, anger is, as Diane Rizzetto herself emphasises, a wake-up call. Why am I angry? Because I am suffering. How do I experience this? I can feel it in my body (I am this body...), I can experience the physical and emotional tension, the pain of *not* shouting, *not* lashing out, *not* turning my back, *not* searching for the release of the put-down or cutting remark. There's a real *demand* from my body—a desperate need to act, to turn away from this pain and to *do something!* I can experience too the cycling of my thoughts, justifying myself at the expense of the other, trying to convince myself...(I am these thoughts...) I can observe the pain of the emotions I'm feeling (I am these emotions...).

If I stay with these feelings and thoughts they *will* shift and change, and may open onto others, leading me deeper into this sense of hurt itself, and widening the scope beyond what I wish to see as the immediate trigger of my anger. What is *this* anger showing me about *our* relationship? About our relationship when seen in its widest sense, beginning with you and me as we are right here and right now in this moment, but extending outwards to past and future and potentially to All Beings? Allowing the stories, the *prapañca*, to settle and still themselves, and to feel into the experience of this anger as it is in this moment. And allowing that the 'us' here may have to include both my experience and experiencing of different parts of myself, and include too the actually known or merely 'faceless' representatives through which I engage with the myriad organisations, private or public, with whom I have to deal. To do any of this well I have to learn to discipline my *reactions* into *responses*. I can always put it as a question: am I acting *out of experiencing* my anger by responding to its deeper call and its questioning, or am I *acting it out* by reactively pushing it away as violent words or actions? I'll emphasise again that acting-out of course includes the different kinds of acting-in: as aggressive thoughts aimed at my sense of self, or as violent actions against my body; or swallowing and suppressing the conscious experience of my anger through dissociation, only for it to show up as depression or in the festering of ill will.

Here's the beginnings of a process for practicing with anger. **Feedback would be appreciated, how could we improve it?**

Notice that I'm getting angry! How do I know? Is this because others are telling me?

Feel into the actual physical sensations within my body, and the involuntary call to *move*, to *act*. Notice the tightness, changes in the pumping of my heart, my breathing.

Allow the thoughts and emotions that connect to these feelings to unfold. *Do not* to act on them: feel my *resistance* to not moving, the nervous tension in my body.

Connect to the *other*. Whether ours is a momentary encounter or deep, ongoing relationship, what *specifically* has brought us to this point?

Exchange places imaginatively. *How* do they feel? *Why* do they feel this way? *Recognise* that we are both deluded beings 'doing our best'.

Widen the circle. What *social forces* have brought us to this situation? Can we do anything to help each other? How might I/we better *connect* with each other and with the world to transform this anger?

Bear Witness: to my anger, as honestly as I can. *Repeat* the cycle.

Vulnerable

This is patient, long-term work. Learning to recognise anger in all its forms as it reveals itself in the tension in my body, the tone of my voice, the train of my thoughts. Learning to stop, to check, to pause, to breathe into it. Learning to feel and to listen underneath the flow of thoughts and stories to allow the deeper connections to begin to reveal themselves. It is in this way that 'my' anger ceases to be 'good' or 'bad', 'right' or 'wrong'. I cease to hold tight to it as 'mine' at all, and it can then become a good spiritual friend and teacher. But only if I allow it to be so, by learning to experience it. If I fail to do so, the result is violence. There is an intimate connection between anger, violence and our shared vulnerability. The experience of anger brings us forcibly back to our actual mutual necessity and interconnection, and so to our infinite vulnerability with each other. Our violence, whether the sharp word or the knife or gun, in attempting to turn away the potential shame of that exposure to each other, instead only confirms it. Our society, which does so much to celebrate and elevate our actual inequality and engage us in perpetual competition, both programmes and compounds this sense of fearful vulnerability. In our moments of relationship we can nevertheless come to experience the *joyful* vulnerability that is the precondition of our self-sense of mutuality and connection. We do this in our *caring*: our caring *about*, our caring *for*, and our *receiving* care. Relationship is never without risk, and rarely without rupture: it's the reality of not-knowing. It is the deep joy of our being *not-separate*.