

A Practice For When You Find Yourself Annoyed by Other People

It's a common thing to be frequently annoyed by other people — added to our regular interactions with family, friends and coworkers are the online habits of people on various social media, and they can all irritate the hell out of us.

What can we do when other people are being annoying, frustrating, inconsiderate, irritating, even aggravating?

Well, assuming we're not in real danger and we don't need to take action to protect ourselves ... often the best practice is an *internal shift* rather than trying to change the other person's behavior.

That suggestion in itself can be frustrating for some — why should we have to change our own behavior when it's the other person who is being aggravating?

That's because with one simple shift, you can be happy with any person. But if you try to change every other person, you're just going to be miserable.

This is illustrated by a metaphor from legendary Buddhist teacher Shantideva:

Where would there be leather enough to cover the entire world? With just the leather of my sandals, it is as if the whole world were covered. Likewise, I am unable to restrain external phenomena, but I shall restrain my own mind. What need is there to restrain anything else?

In this metaphor, imagine that the surface of the Earth were covered in shards of glass or some other sharp surface ... you could try to find a covering for the whole world, so that you could walk in comfort ... but you'd never be able to do it. Instead, just cover your own feet, and you can walk around just fine.

This is the idea of shifting your own mindset, so that you can deal with irritating people.

Let's look at a practice to work on that shift.

A Simple Practice

Whenever you find yourself irritated by how someone else is behaving ... first notice that

your mind starts to create a story of resentment about them. It's about how they always act in this irritating way, or why do they have to be that way, or why are they so inconsiderate, etc.

This story isn't helpful. It makes you unhappy, it worsens your relationship with others, it makes you a person you probably don't want to be.

So the practice is to **drop that story**, and instead try this:

1. Recognize that you don't like the way the person is behaving. You are not happy with your current experience. In this way, you are rejecting this part of reality, rejecting a part of life. Consider opening up to all of life, without rejecting.
2. Reflect on a river that flows downstream ... imagine wishing it would flow upstream. It would just bring you unhappiness to wish that the river were different than it were. Now imagine that this other person is the river. Wishing they were different just brings unhappiness.
3. See them as they are and open your heart to them, just as they are. See them as a suffering human being, with flaws and habitual ways of acting that can be irritating, but are actually very human. How can you love humanity just as it is?

Open up to all of life, without rejecting. Accept the river as it is. See the suffering human being in front of you, and love them fiercely, as they are.

See how it shifts you. And see how it opens you up to connecting to your fellow human beings, and the vast experience of life, just as it is.