



The Cow in the Parking Lot: A Zen Approach to Overcoming Anger

Leonard Scheff, Susan Edmiston

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The Cow in the Parking Lot: A Zen Approach to Overcoming Anger Leonard Scheff , Susan Edmiston Road rage. Domestic violence. Professionally angry TV and radio commentators. We're a society that is swimming in anger, always about to snap. Leonard Scheff, a trial attorney, once used anger to fuel his court persona, until he came to realize just how poisonous anger is. That and his intense study of Buddhism and meditation changed him. His transformation can be summarized in a simple parable: Imagine you are circling a crowded parking lot when, just as you spot a space, another driver races ahead and takes it. Easy to imagine the rage. But now imagine that instead of another driver, a cow has lumbered into that parking space and settled down. The anger dissolves into bemusement. What really changed? You—your perspective.

Using simple Buddhist principles and applying them in a way that is easy for non-Buddhists to understand and put into practice, Scheff and Edmiston have created an interactive book that helps readers change perspective, step by step, so that they can replace the anger in their lives with a newfound happiness. Based on the successful anger management program Scheff created, *The Cow in the Parking Lot* shows how anger is based on unmet demands, and introduces the four most common types—Important and Reasonable (you want love from your partner); Reasonable but Unimportant (you didn't get that seat in the restaurant window); Irrational (you want respect from a stranger); and the Impossible (you want someone to fix everything wrong in your life).

Scheff and Edmiston show how, once we identify our real unmet demands we can dissolve the anger; how, once we understand our "buttons," we can change what happens when they're pushed. He shows how to laugh at ourselves—a powerful early step in changing angry behavior. By the end, as the reader continues to observe and fill in the exercises honestly, it won't matter who takes that parking space—only you can make yourself angry.

The Cow in the Parking Lot: A Zen Approach to Overcoming Anger Details

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From Reader Review The Cow in the Parking Lot: A Zen Approach to Overcoming Anger for online ebook

Rand says

A useful entry point for those curious about how to apply Zen precepts in their life, suitable for all.

Even those who consider themselves practiced or well-read on the subject will find something new because, as the author admits, even seasoned Zen Buddhists get angry sometimes. And everyone has room for improvement.

The book is a workbook with spaces for the reader to jot down triggers, ways in which anger is expressed but also how to identify one's personal mythology and how to deconstruct that in order to shed the false self.

Fun parts: the Dalai Lama once commented on himself thusly: "One day Nobel Prize, next day pile of shit!" & Andre Agassi confessed to not enjoying the game of tennis.

Anger is treated holistically, as a destructive force and an "emotional addiction". The Christian concept of "righteous anger" is not discussed although using anger as a tool to recognize the need for effecting transformation is.

The bibliography at the end is extremely useful as well, for those seeking more depth.

In my life this book has helped me recognize when and why I allowed anger to override my mind.

Tom Shannon says

I was looking for a book that could explain some buddhist concepts in an easy way and the book did that so it deserves three stars.

I did feel that it was over simplistic and at times repetitive. It was easy to read, but not my favourite. I might try something by the Dalai Lama and see if that improves things.

Andy Beal says

This book doesn't try to tackle the big things in life that make us angry--death, illness, etc--but instead helps you to handle the anger that is often a waste of time--like someone stealing your parking space. By tackling those things, the book "trains" you to ultimately handle the bigger causes of anger.

What I like about this book is that, as a Christian, there's really not much in the way of Zen teaching that conflicts with Christianity. If anything, I found that the lessons found in Buddhism are quite practical and complementary--at least as far as handling anger.

This is a great book for anyone trying to handle their anger and equally good for anyone that has someone in their life dealing with anger. It's a quick read, but one you may find yourself going back to again.

Edison G.S. says

Wonderful book

I have learned so much from this book. We all struggle with anger, but few of us notice it is there. Most people act as if anger is normal and let it thrive. But when you realize you can choose not to feel anger, and that anger damages you, then a lot of doors open. You have then the power to change the meaning of situations. We all experience anger, so it should be easy to understand what the other person is feeling and that they don't really want to feel it. This book is marvelous in the sense that it reminds you how important it is to keep anger on check. I absolutely recommend it, to keep peace of mind.

Fred says

You are at the grand opening of a new shopping mall on the edge of town. You've been driving around looking for a parking space for ten minutes. At last, right in front of you, a car pulls out of a spot. You hit your turn signal and wait as the car backs out. Suddenly, from the other direction, comes a Jeep that pulls into the space. Not only that, but when you honk, the driver gets out, smirks, and gives you the finger. Are you angry? Now change the scene ever so slightly. Instead of a brash Jeep driver, a cow walks into the space from the other direction and settles down in the middle of it. When you honk, she looks up and moos but doesn't budge. Are you angry? —The Cow in the Parking Lot, A Contemporary Zen Parable

This was a really good book and something that I enjoyed a great deal. It was a very pleasant and easy read that was well written, easily understandable, and practical as well. Practical is a big thing for me as some of the more esoteric and obscure texts end up losing my interest. I'm more interested in practical and useful knowledge and random religious dogma and other nonsense.

I became aware of the many times that I had ascribed malevolent motives to people even though my thoughts had no basis in reality.

The above is a real flaw of mine and it was made worse because of my time in the military where there really were and are careerist people out to get you. It's a flaw that I know of and so then it's something that I can work on. Not everyone is out to get me, and sometimes co-workers will in fact disagree with me or have motives that aren't inherently malicious to me personally. I can only hope that eventually it's something that I can overcome and no longer suffer from.

Using anger to solve a problem is like grabbing a red-hot coal to throw at the other person. —Tibetan Proverb

Anger is not constructive ever. It may make you feel good at the time, but the older I get the more I accumulate personal experiences in which I can say I wish I had not been angry and had not done something or said something. The thing about being angry though is that once you say it or do it, you can't take it back and so the only way to make it better is to learn to avoid it altogether and avoid the situation entirely.

Happyreader says

Anger deconstructed. Puts anger back where it belongs - on you. Don't be thinking you can blame someone else because you're pissed off or impatient or at your wit's end. The good news is if you're the problem, you're also the cure and not dependent on others to clean up their acts to get relief. An easy read on becoming an adult emotionally and learning to take ownership of your own reactions to creatively transform the maddening into opportunities for fresh responses and improved interactions. A logical progression with practical applications to compassionately release tension and torment.

Nick says

This book eloquently shows the price we pay for anger and provides many techniques and ideas for dealing with anger in creative and healthy ways. Highly recommended.

Andrew says

Good book, so long as you don't just read it, but try the exercises. So it's a good book.

Azra Bleki? Aydo?an says

Imagine a following scene: You are at the grand opening of a new shopping mall on the edge of town. You've been driving around looking for a parking space for ten minutes. At last, right in front of you, a car pulls out of a spot. You hit your turn signal and wait as the car backs out. Suddenly, from the other direction, comes a Jeep that pulls into the space. Not only that, but when you honk, the driver gets out, smirks, and gives you the finger. Are you angry?

Now change the scene ever so slightly. Instead of a brash Jeep driver, a cow walks into the space from the other direction and settles down in the middle of it. Remember this is on the outskirts of town. It so happens that the cow has spent every afternoon in that spot for years. When you honk, she looks up and moos but doesn't budge.

Are you angry? The answer for almost everyone is, "No, I'm not angry; I'm amused."
So the question is, "What is the difference?"

This book hopes to convince you that there is no difference. Whether it was the guy in the Jeep or the cow, the outcome is exactly the same: You need to find another parking spot.

The only thing that changes is your reaction to the outcome. In other words, no one causes us to be angry. Anger is not inevitable. Anger begins and ends with ourselves

thewanderingjew says

This little handbook attempts to teach the reader how to have peaceful responses to stimuli, rather than angry reactions. I believe the author feels it will make the reader a happier person, and by doing so, he/she will contribute to the happiness of others and contribute to a more peaceful world.

There are questions and exercises to complete. The book asks and expects you to answer, very personal queries and will make you examine your behavior and the motives behind your reactions. It might be very helpful to someone trying to figure out how to have less impulsive, confrontational interactions with people. It attempts to help the reader deal with situations without having a knee jerk angry reaction, but instead choosing a more thoughtful peaceful, less incendiary response.

Reading the book dredged up thoughts I thought I had put away for good, which is a goal this book attempts to help you finally accomplish. Holding onto anger, the author asserts, is more dangerous to the angry person and has far reaching effects on others, totally unrelated to the original incident causing the feeling.

I found it a bit too simplistic and the assumption that it can be achieved en masse, unrealistic, but nevertheless it is a worthy goal. I also found the slim little book, to be lacking in its purpose as a primer. It was not nearly extensive enough to effect major change, although it will certainly make the reader introspective and might serve as a stepping stone to further research into the Zen approach to life.

I would not have chosen this book on my own. My face to face book club chose it which is why I like book groups. They afford the opportunity to read books you might not normally select or even be aware of, and sometimes they are great finds even when they are not five stars! Regarding a book group conversation, it could get too personal for some people, especially if the exercises are discussed or worked out at the meeting.

Erin says

An extended exercise in working through angry feelings. I wasn't overwhelmed by new information, necessarily, but I enjoyed the careful picking apart of anger. Walking through the emotion and taking note of its causes and effects will -I hope- make me more observant not only of my own anger, but help me to deal with it in others. It also helped to identify ways that anger sneakily finds its way in. Yelling and cursing are not the only ways anger manifests itself, but even subtle anger should be dealt with.

Most practical for me was the trick to reframe a situation in which I am becoming angry by picturing the cow in the parking lot. In the few days I spent reading this I found myself seeing annoying cows everywhere. But I also noticed that by taking the time to think of a cow, I could step back from anger, frustration, and annoyance before I allowed them to overtake my actions and spoil my behavior.

I have found patience thin on the ground with three young children. Lack of sleep combined with repetitive, largely thankless tasks makes it difficult to articulate anything calmly or coherently. It is difficult to break through the mental fog to identify, much less express, my own anger. This is a book I might turn to again, simply as a reminder and extended meditation on better ways of dealing with angry emotions.

Christy says

I spent some time wondering if this was the book for me, because I am not outwardly expressive of my

anger. I am viewed as a gentle person, patient with difficult people, slow to anger, and usually, the last to say a harsh word. Nevertheless, I have found myself increasingly angry, ruminating and ranting inside my own head. My hatred for being angry and my belief that it is a destructive emotion has done little to stem the tide of fury. Since ending my relationship with my mother last year, I have been filled with chronic rage toward her for abusing me, and toward a politically polarized society that seems to increasingly lack empathy for those who are victimized. I have had difficulty sleeping at night, rehashing internet conversations that happened months ago. The author might say I was coping with an unmet demand for my voice to be heard. In the end, it doesn't really matter where the demand came from. It's clear I am attached to it, and this is causing me suffering.

What I came to realize as I read this book, though it was not explicitly stated, is that I'm doing just as much damage to myself with my internal rumination than I would be if I were taking a baseball bat to the bedroom furniture. I think what most resonated with me was the idea that we are all the time ascribing assumptions to other people and casting them as the villains in our own narrative. I am able to transform one unkind remark on the internet into a sweeping epic. That one hapless person, whatever his true motives, becomes representative of all that I hate and that I'm fighting against. Viewed with a certain level of detachment, it's quite absurd. We are continually the noble protagonist in the stories we tell ourselves, but if we really look at the nature of thought, and of attachment to anger, and of attachment to these unmet demands, they are revealed for what they are: mere stories.

It's going to take some time to put into practice the insights gleaned from this book. I appreciated the advice that we start with minor irritations and work our way up to deep hurts. I do wish it had contained a section specifically on navigating political outrage. The book occasionally made vague statements such as (paraphrased) "anger about true oppression is justified" but didn't explain where screaming at racist people on Facebook fit in with that. I am forever seeking the line between fruitless anger and standing up for those who are powerless.

Jacqui Rose says

Leonard explains the same concept over and over again in different creative and inspiring ways so you have no other option but to get it. He is encouraging and forgiving, allowing the reader to take what they need from his work. I would highly recommend this for anyone, especially the folks who don't consider themselves angry or having anger problems. It's more about philosophy of the mind and our relationship to ourselves and insecurities. Leonard teaches us profound ideologies in a practical way, dropping effective tips and tricks along the way.

Monk says

Amazing book. Drawing on Buddhist thought, he thoughtfully examines anger and provides some valuable insight as to how not to let anger get the best of you. Best book I have read on the subject. Over the couple of weeks that I listened to it I found myself practicing its principles--successfully. My entire family will blunder orders to read this one.

Alison says

If someone stole your parking spot, you'd be mad. If a cow wandered down the lane and took your space, you'd laugh. With all the fighting going on in the world, and an election season to survive, this book was a great reminder that anger is a choice.
