

Twenty-five Ways to Let Go of Anger and Bitterness

By Susan Gammage ¹

Get Clear with God

1. Clear your heart from all save God:

God has given us everything, except the human heart, which He wants us to reserve for His love; and when we have anything or anyone in it, He retreats:

O SON OF DUST!

All that is in heaven and earth I have ordained for thee, except the human heart, which I have made the habitation of My beauty and glory; yet thou didst give My home and dwelling to another than Me; and whenever the manifestation of My holiness sought His own abode, a stranger found He there, and, homeless, hastened unto the sanctuary of the Beloved. Notwithstanding I have concealed thy secret and desired not thy shame. (Bahá'u'lláh, The Persian Hidden Words 27)

2. Eliminate all traces of love or hate:

He wants us to cleanse our hearts so that no remnant of either love or hate may linger. If we don't, not only will we be bereft of His immortal Face, but we will stray far from His mysteries and roam shepherdless through the wilderness of oblivion and error:

He must so cleanse his heart that no remnant of either love or hate may linger therein, lest that love blindly incline him to error, or that hate repel him away from the truth. Even as thou dost witness in this Day how most of the people, because of such love and hate, are bereft of the immortal Face, have strayed far from the Embodiments of the Divine mysteries, and, shepherdless, are roaming through the wilderness of oblivion and error. (Baha'u'llah, The Kitáb-i-Íqán pp. 192-193)

3. Remember that all things are from God:

This includes all the wrongs that are done to us:

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Say: all things are of God.' This exalted utterance is like unto water for quenching the fire of hate and enmity which smouldereth within the hearts and breasts of men. By this single utterance contending peoples and kindreds will attain the light of true unity. Verily He speaketh the truth and leadeth the way. (Tablets of Baha'u'llah, p. 222)

4. Look Towards God:

He has the answers! We can't learn how to change a bitter heart by looking towards other imperfect souls.

Look ye not upon the creatures, turn ye to their Creator. See ye not the never-yielding people, see but the Lord of Hosts. Gaze ye not down upon the dust, gaze upward at the shining sun, which hath caused every patch of darksome earth to glow with light. (Selections from the Writings of 'Abdu'l-Bahá, p. 73)

5. Recognize God's love for us:

All of the negative thoughts need to be replaced with a certainty of God's love.

For love of God and spiritual attraction do cleanse and purify the human heart and dress and adorn it with the spotless garment of holiness... (Selections from the Writings of 'Abdu'l-Bahá, p. 202)

6. Recognize the power of the Holy Spirit:

There is only one power that can help us, and that's the power of the Holy Spirit:

The only power that is capable of delivering man from this captivity is the power of the Holy Spirit. The attraction of the power of the Holy Spirit is so effective that it keeps man ever on the path of upward ascension. ('Abdu'l-Bahá, Bahá'í Scriptures, p. 546)

And this is clear: a power above and beyond the powers of nature must needs be brought to bear, to change this black darkness into light, and these hatreds and resentments, grudges and spites, these endless wrangles and wars, into fellowship and love amongst all the peoples of the earth. This power is none other than the breathings of the Holy Spirit and the mighty inflow of the Word of God. (Selections from the Writings of 'Abdu'l-Bahá, p. 53, #23)

Focus on Ourselves

7. Change our thoughts:

When we think negative thoughts towards others, it is an act of war.

I charge you all that each one of you concentrate all the thoughts of your heart on love and unity. When a thought of war comes, oppose it by a stronger thought of peace. A thought of hatred must be destroyed by a more powerful thought of love. Thoughts of war bring destruction to all harmony, well-being, restfulness and content. ('Abdu'l-Bahá, Paris Talks, p. 29)

8. Cleanse our hearts from even the slightest trace:

Once we've cleansed our hearts from the slightest trace of hatred and spite; we must set about being truthful and honest, conciliatory and loving to everyone:

They must cleanse their hearts from even the slightest trace of hatred and spite, and they must set about being truthful and honest, conciliatory and loving to all humankind -- so that East and West will, even as two lovers, hold each other close; that hatred and hostility will perish from the earth, and universal peace be firmly rooted in their place. (Selections from the Writings of 'Abdu'l-Bahá, p. 244)

9. Detach:

Although God wants you to forgive the people you have bitterness against, if they do not respond to you, then it is not your problem. You have to come before God personally to get your freedom. The resolution comes from God.

Separate thyself from all thoughts, strip thyself from the unclean garment of attachment to this drossful (or earthly) world, arise for the service of thy Lord, the Clement, and be clothed with the robe of assurance (or certainty) so that thou mayest behold the hosts of confirmation from thy Lord arising from all sides. (Tablets of 'Abdu'l-Bahá v3, p. 650)

10. Don't give thoughts of bitterness any importance:

This will help you step off the "hamster wheel" of negative thinking.

Attach no importance to ... rejection, arrogance, oppression and enmity. Heed them not. Deal in the contrary way. (Abdu'l-Bahá, Baha'i World Faith, p. 217)

11. Focus our attention on ourselves:

There's only one life we're responsible for; and that's our own and it requires all of our attention, will-power and energy to root out our own faults and overcome our own failings:

Each of us is responsible for one life only, and that is our own. Each of us is immeasurably far from being perfect as our Heavenly Father is perfect: and the task of perfecting our own life and character is one that requires all our attention, our will-power and energy... On no subject are the Bahá'í teachings more emphatic than on the necessity to abstain from fault-finding, while being ever eager to discover and root out our own faults and overcome our own failings. (Shoghi Effendi cited by the Universal House of Justice, *Lights of Guidance*, p. 91)

12. Have the Right Intentions and Goodwill:

If we have the intention to change our bitterness into forgiveness, love and acceptance, it will be granted to us.

Certain philosophers have considered intention superior to action, for the goodwill is absolute light; it is purified and sanctified from the impurities of selfishness, of enmity, of deception. ('Abdu'l-Bahá, *Some Answered Questions*, p. 302)

13. Pay attention to Our Thoughts:

We need to pay attention to our thoughts and separate the lies from the truth.

Reflect that man's power of thought consists of two kinds. One kind is true, when it agrees with a determined truth. Such conceptions find realization in the exterior world; such are accurate opinions, correct theories, scientific discoveries and inventions.

The other kind of conceptions is made up of vain thoughts and useless ideas which yield neither fruit nor result, and which have no reality. No, they surge like the waves of the sea of imaginations, and they pass away like idle dreams. ('Abdu'l-Bahá, *Some Answered Questions*, p. 251)

14. Stop!

As the Bible tells us: “Be still and know that I am God”. We can’t make changes when we’re rushing through life, doing things the way we’ve always done them. We need to stop rushing to become conscious and able to hear God’s wisdom.

For thousands of years we have had bloodshed and strife. It is enough; it is sufficient. Now is the time to associate together in love and harmony. (Abdu'l-Bahá, *The Promulgation of Universal Peace*, p. 31)

15. Stop the animal side from becoming dominant:

Our lower nature’s job is to destroy us; to keep us from God. Our job is to defeat and overcome it.

As we have before indicated, this human reality stands between the higher and the lower in man, between the world of the animal and the world of Divinity. When the animal proclivity in man becomes predominant, he sinks even lower than the brute. When the heavenly powers are triumphant in his nature, he becomes the noblest and most superior being in the world of creation. (‘Abdu'l-Bahá, *The Promulgation of Universal Peace*, p. 465)

16. Turn away from ideas that degrade:

By turning away from the negative thoughts we harbour towards others, we are free to return to our true station and purpose in life. We can’t know and worship God as long as we are focusing on our bitterness towards others.

He must turn away from ideas which degrade the human soul, so that day by day and hour by hour he may advance upward and higher to spiritual perception of the continuity of the human reality. (‘Abdul-Bahá, *Bahá’í World Faith*, pp. 265-266)

17. Wake Up:

If we’re going through life on auto-pilot, we can’t make changes.

Those who are asleep must be awakened; the indifferent must become mindful and attentive. But all this must be accomplished in the spirit of kindness and love. (‘Abdu'l-Bahá, *The Promulgation of Universal Peace*, p. 397)

Heal Relations with Others

18. Emulate the Institutions:

Look at the letters of the House of Justice – no doubt they see the limitations of individuals and communities; but every one of their letters focuses on the positive, helping us move towards unity and agreement. This is worthy of emulation!

Therefore mankind must continue in the state of fellowship and love, emulating the institutions of God and turning away from satanic promptings, for the divine bestowals bring forth unity and agreement whereas satanic leadings induce hatred and war. ('Abdu'l-Bahá, Baha'i World Faith, p. 233)

19. Find a point of agreement:

There's no better way to stop an argument than to find a point of agreement and working from there:

The purpose of these new laws is to destroy antagonism by finding a point of agreement. (Abdu'l-Bahá, Divine Philosophy, p. 84)

20. Forget and Lay Problems Aside:

We can't move forward with the tasks that lie ahead if we don't entirely forget all confused issues and unpleasant memories; and lay aside all animosities, suspicions, accusations and wounded pride:

The immediate past, with all its confused issues and unpleasant memories must be entirely forgotten, if the task that lies ahead is to be efficiently prosecuted. Personal animosities, suspicions, accusations, wounded pride, controversial issues must all be laid aside. (Shoghi Effendi, The Light of Divine Guidance v I, p. 155)

21. Forgive:

The key to getting free is to forgive, and leave them in God's hands. When you don't forgive someone else, why would God forgive you? He tells us "We are all sinners", so we all need forgiveness. We have to eliminate bitterness through forgiveness in order to be free.

When trying to deal with a lifetime of anger left over from childhood abuse, and unable to forgive my parents, I wrote to the House of Justice who replied:

As a devoted believer you are urged to strive to develop forgiveness in your heart toward your parents who have abused you in so disgraceful a manner, and to attain a level of insight which sees them as captives of their lower nature, whose actions can only lead them deeper into unhappiness and separation from God. By this means, you can liberate yourself from the anger to which you refer in your letter, and foster your own spiritual development. (The Universal House of Justice, 1985 Dec 02, Child Abuse, Psychology and Knowledge of Self)

This was an interesting concept for several reasons:

It put forgiveness before insight! This (as with most of the Writings) is the exact opposite of what most therapists' recommend.

Second, we don't have to develop forgiveness with the individual, but "in the heart". For years I wasn't able to forgive what happened to me, but I knew that God had the power to forgive, so I asked Him to forgive my abusers. It was the best I could manage at the time. When I was finally able to forgive, I realized it was a 4-step process. I had to forgive:

- my abusers for what they did
- myself for believing that being abused meant I was unworthy, unlovable, not good enough etc
- God for letting it happen

Then I had to ask God's forgiveness for letting anger become a veil between us.

I've covered forgiveness in a book all by itself, which you might want to read, but to summarize, forgiveness is a 7-Step process:

- Ask God to forgive you for holding on to the negativity
- Forgive yourself
- Forgive others
- Forgive God
- Ask God to replace your negative thought with the virtue you want instead

- Thank God for all the ways you see him intervene in your life – a good way to start is by thinking of 5 things before you get out of bed in the morning; and 5 more before going to sleep
- Repent and atone for your “sins” (everything that goes against God’s word, big or small) by focusing on your spiritual development. This includes:
 - Prayer, morning and night
 - Obligatory prayer and 95 Alláh-u-Abhás
 - Reading the Writings morning and night
 - Fasting
 - Teaching
 - Service
 - Giving to the Fund; paying your Right of God

22. Overlook the Shortcomings of Others:

The House of Justice tells us to overcome the shortcomings of others; forgive and conceal their misdeeds, search for their praiseworthy deeds and be forbearing, patient and merciful.

You also ask what one should do to 'handle depression and anger with someone' one feels 'very positively about'. The Universal House of Justice suggests that you call to mind the admonitions found in our writings on the need to overlook the shortcomings of others, to forgive and conceal their misdeeds, not to expose their bad qualities, but to search for and affirm their praiseworthy ones, and endeavour to be always forbearing, patient, and merciful. (Universal House of Justice, Lights of Guidance, p. 90)

23. Postpone discussion:

When enmity and threats are about to occur, it’s time to postpone the discussion until a more propitious time:

When you notice that a stage has been reached when enmity and threats are about to occur, you should immediately postpone discussion of the subject, until wranglings, disputations, and loud talk vanish, and a propitious time is at hand. (‘Abdu'l-Bahá, Lights of Guidance, p. 178, #587)

24. See others as friends:

We must see that each one of us is a sign of God; created through His divine favour and supreme energy; and stop looking at the violence, force, evil intentions, persecution and hostility:

And in this new and wondrous age, the Holy Writings say that we must be at one with every people; that we must see neither harshness nor injustice, neither malevolence, nor hostility, nor hate, but rather turn our eyes toward the heaven of ancient glory. For each of the creatures is a sign of God, and it was by the grace of the Lord and His power that each did step into the world; therefore they are not strangers, but in the family; not aliens, but friends, and to be treated as such. (Selections from the Writings of 'Abdu'l-Bahá, p. 24)

25. Use Gentle Speech:

Gentle speech helps us attain to knowledge and causes us to better ourselves:

A harsh word is like unto a sword, but gentle speech is like unto milk. The children of the world attain to knowledge and better themselves through this. (Bahá'u'lláh, Star of the West, Vol1, p.8)

Now that you've read the list; go back and make a list of the ones that will help you let go of your anger!

I hope this helped give you new tools for dealing with your anger.