Meeting Primer: Anger

An optional read-ahead and quick reference, about 10 minutes

The Stoic Fellowship Meeting Guide · Everyday Problems

Guiding Question: Is it the thing that happened, or what I tell myself about it?

At the Meeting

- **Today's readings: Seneca, *On Anger* 2.4** and **Epictetus, *Enchiridion* 5**. We'll read them aloud together.
- **The practice:** Catch the Second Movement, in three steps.
  1. **Feel the jolt.** Notice it without acting on it.
  2. **Finish the sentence.** "I'm telling myself that…"
  3. **Ask if it's true.** What fairer judgment fits the facts?

Anger

Someone steps in front of you in line. Before you've thought anything, your face is hot. A moment later you're thinking, "Who do they think they are?"

Epictetus says we are disturbed not by things but by our judgments about them. Seneca shows where that judgment fits. Anger comes in three movements. The first is an involuntary jolt, which isn't up to us. The second is a judgment we agree to: "I've been wronged, and they deserve to pay." The third is a passion that runs away with us. Seneca's point is practical: we can step in at the second movement, by examining what we're telling ourselves before we act on it.

This isn't about suppressing feelings or letting injustice pass. Seneca thought we could respond firmly and fairly, often more effectively, without anger.

For ancient texts, use any translation you like.

Optional Reading (about 8 minutes)

1. **Seneca, *On Anger* 2.4** (2 minutes) This is the passage we'll read aloud. Which of the three movements is up to us?
2. **Epictetus, *Enchiridion* 5** (1 minute) What disturbs us, according to Epictetus? Who does he say to blame?
3. **Seneca, *On Anger* 2.29.1–2** (2 minutes) Seneca calls delay the greatest remedy for anger. What does delay give us?

4. **Marcus Aurelius, *Meditations* 11.18** (3 minutes) Marcus lists reminders for when someone offends him. Which one would help you most?

Think About

We'll work through a shared case aloud. You can use a made-up example.

- **Feel the jolt.** When did you last feel irritation rise before you'd thought anything?
- **Finish the sentence.** What were you telling yourself about what happened?
- **Ask if it's true.** What fairer judgment fit the facts? How might you have responded from it?

Key Terms

For reference during the meeting. No need to memorize these.

First movement. The involuntary jolt: a quickened pulse or flash of heat. Seneca says even the wise feel it.

Judgment (*dogma*). The evaluation we add to what happened: "This is an insult," "They meant it."

Assent (*synkatathesis*). Agreeing that an impression is true. Anger, for the Stoics, depends on assenting to the judgment that we've been wronged and should strike back.

Passion (*pathos*). An excessive impulse built on a mistaken judgment. Anger is the Stoics' leading example.