Expanded Guide: Anger

The Stoic Fellowship Meeting Guide · Everyday Problems

For facilitators. Read before the meeting, after the Meeting Primer (about 15 minutes).

The Meeting Primer introduces the readings and key terms, and the meeting guide gives the sequence and timing. This guide explains what each part of the meeting is for and what to listen for.

What this meeting is for

This session picks up the fourth topic of *What Is Stoicism?*: judgments and emotions. It also uses *What's in My Control?*: the jolt isn't up to us, but our assent is.

A participant should leave able to notice the jolt, name the judgment that follows it, and test whether it's true. Two points matter most:

- **The jolt is natural.** No one needs to feel ashamed of a first reaction. The practice starts afterward.
- **Firm is not the same as angry.** Seneca doesn't ask us to accept wrongdoing. He asks whether anger adds anything good that a clear, fair response can't supply.

Leading it Socratically

- **Ask for an example.** Talk about anger stays vague until someone describes a real moment.
- **Separate fact from story.** "They cut in front of me" is a fact. "They think I don't matter" is a judgment.
- **Welcome defenders of anger.** The disagreement is real and worth having. Ask what anger adds.
- **Keep examples ordinary.** Traffic, queues, emails, and small slights work best. Raw conflicts don't belong in a group exercise.

The discussion: five questions

Each question has a purpose, two follow-ups, and something to listen for. The meeting guide prints the first follow-up as the probe.

1. What happened, and what did you tell yourself about it?

Purpose: separate the event from the judgment, using the examples from Open.

- Which part was fact, and which was story?

- Did the story change how strongly you felt?

Listen for the moment a fact becomes a judgment: “He didn’t reply” becomes “He doesn’t respect me.”

2. After the first jolt, where could you have stepped in?

Purpose: locate Seneca’s second movement in real experience.

- What were you telling yourself at that moment?
- How long was the gap between the jolt and your response?

Listen for how short the gap can be, and how naming the judgment widens it.

3. Seneca thought anger is never useful. Do you agree?

Purpose: take the objection seriously.

- When has anger seemed to help you? What did it cost?
- Could the good it seemed to do have come from something else?

Listen for claims that anger motivates or protects. Seneca’s answer is that reason can do both, without the damage anger does to judgment and relationships.

4. What’s the difference between anger and a firm, fair response?

Purpose: show that the Stoic alternative isn’t passivity.

- What would the firm, fair response sound like in your example?
- What’s different about how it’s said, and why?

Listen for responses that name the problem clearly without contempt: “Excuse me, I was in line” rather than a glare or a confrontation.

5. What would a pause change: counting, walking away, waiting?

Purpose: connect the theory to Seneca’s remedy of delay.

- What makes a pause hard to take in the moment?
- What pause has actually worked for you?

Listen for concrete techniques people already use. Seneca calls delay the greatest remedy for anger (*On Anger* 2.29).

Going deeper, for a room that is ready: Is there such a thing as justified anger, at injustice for example? What would Seneca say, and what do you say? Seneca says we can oppose injustice firmly without anger, and often more effectively. The question is whether anger adds anything good that reason can’t supply.

The practice: catch the second movement

> You've been waiting in line for ten minutes. Someone walks up and steps in front of you without a glance. You feel the heat rise.

Use the case, or a volunteer's mild example if one is ready. Reveal one step at a time and take two or three answers at each.

1. Feel the jolt. Notice it without acting on it. Ask what the jolt feels like: heat, tension, a quick breath. No one needs to pretend it isn't there.

> **Sample response:** "My jaw tightens, and I'm already composing what I'll say."

2. Finish the sentence. "I'm telling myself that…" Take two finished sentences.

> **Sample response:** "I'm telling myself that they saw me and decided I don't count."

3. Ask if it's true. What fairer judgment fits the facts? Ask for a restated judgment, said aloud, then a response.

> **Sample response:** "I don't know whether they saw me. I can say, 'Excuse me, I think I was next,' calmly."

The reveal (if time allows). The person turns, sees you, and says, "Sorry, I didn't see you there." What happens to the judgment now? What did the jolt assume? Most of the anger rested on a judgment about their intention, which turned out to be false.

Misunderstandings to watch for

IF YOU HEAR…	THE MISUNDERSTANDING	TRY
"Stoics don't feel anger."	The jolt means failure.	Seneca says even the wise feel the first movement.
"So I should let people walk all over me."	No anger means no response.	"What would a firm, fair response look like?"
"Anger is just honest."	Expressing anger is the only honest option.	"Is the judgment behind it accurate?"
"I should push the feeling down."	The practice is suppression.	The practice examines the judgment; it doesn't bury the feeling.

Facilitating the people in the room

WHO	WHAT IT LOOKS LIKE	TRY
The defender	Argues anger is necessary.	“What does anger add that a firm, fair response wouldn’t?”
The venter	Retells a grievance at length.	“What was the judgment underneath that?”
The self-critic	Feels ashamed of getting angry.	“The jolt isn’t yours to prevent. What came after it?”
The quiet one	Listening but not speaking.	Offer an easy entry: “What would you tell yourself in that line?”

When an example is painful. Anger often sits on top of real hurt or real injustice. If an example is still raw, thank the person, don’t press for details, and move to the shared case. The group is for philosophy, not therapy; check in privately afterward if someone seems to be struggling.

Questions you may be asked

“What about anger at real injustice?” Seneca says we can oppose injustice firmly without anger, and often more effectively. Many people disagree; it’s a good going-deeper question.

“Isn’t the jolt the same as anger?” For Seneca, no. The jolt is a bodily reaction. Anger begins when we agree to the judgment that we’ve been wronged and should strike back.

“Do I need to read anything?” No. Newcomers need no preparation. The Meeting Primer is optional.

Adapting the meeting

- **Mostly newcomers.** Use the shared case, and give questions 1 and 2 extra time.
- **Mostly experienced members.** Leave room for the going-deeper question on justified anger.
- **Online.** Put the sentence “I’m telling myself that…” in the chat.
- **A large group.** Try step 3 in pairs, then hear one restated judgment from each pair.
- **Short on time.** Skip the reveal or shorten question 5.

Adapted from the Kit’s meeting guide, Anger.