

6 Steps to Stop Reacting + Start Responding with Intention
YOGA JOURNAL
YOGA 101

BY **LAMA SURYA DAS** | MAY 11, 2015

Practice mindful anger management and open the door to better relationships with author Lama Surya Das's "six Rs of intentional responsiveness."

START WITH Mindful Anger Management: Deepen Your Understanding of the Emotion

(<http://www.yogajournal.com/article/yoga-101/mindful-anger-management-und-erstand-emotion/>)

After much trial and error, I have come up with my own self-awareness practice for regulating strong emotions; it helps me become a better and more patient person. I've definitely found that creating mental space for conscious, intentional responsiveness—the opposite of blind reactivity, which so often leads us to regrettable actions—has consistently saved the day and saved my ass too, from all sorts of unintended and even disastrous consequences.

The Six Rs of Intentional Responsiveness

Recognize, recollect, reframe, relinquish, recondition, and respond. In combination, these six gestures of freedom are like a cool, fresh breath of mindful awareness, helping us to relax and let go, releasing a large amount of built-up negativity that comes from the tumultuous bumper-car ride of modern living. They can free us from falling into all kinds of regrettable reactivity and the undesirable outcomes caused by knee-jerk retaliation to anger and harm—what we might call "tit for tat."

See also [Forgiveness Heals](#)

(<http://www.yogajournal.com/article/yoga-101/forgiveness-heals/>)

1. Recognize

Notice with equanimity the stimuli that push your buttons and trigger an unfulfilling, retaliatory response. Things like abuse and harsh words, false accusations and betrayals, or unfair treatment might very well provoke retaliation in kind. Stop for a moment, however brief, and breathe and collect yourself—for the moment, at least.

See also [Deepak Chopra's 2-Minute Meditation for Love + Forgiveness](#)

2. Recollect

With mindfulness, remember the downsides and disadvantages of returning hatred with hatred, anger with anger, harm with harm. The Buddha taught that

hatred is not appeased by hatred. Hatred is appeased only by love. Recollect the significant advantages of practicing patience, forbearance, tolerance, and acceptance of karma and its repercussions. In this second step, find and use the sacred pause. Take time to pause and mindfully reflect, between any stimulus and your response. Rest in the space of the sacred pause, as if counting to ten before striking back. Take another breath. Breathe out, release, relax, rest, and smile.

Also see [Awaken to Your Potential for Change: The 5 Kleshas](http://www.yogajournal.com/article/yoga-101/awakening/)
(<http://www.yogajournal.com/article/yoga-101/awakening/>)

3. Reframe

Reframe the situation and see things from the other's point of view; begin to cultivate feelings of genuine compassion for those who harm you. Acknowledge that—through their harmful actions, words, attitudes, and the like—they are just sowing the seeds of their own unhappiness and bad karma, not yours. This is a genuine cause for compassionate concern. To take it one step further, recognize the adversary or critic as a teacher, friend, or ally who helps you develop patience and overcome unconscious, habitual, and unproductive reaction patterns. Think, notice, and inquire into this statement:

There must be some reason this karma is ripening upon me, some karmic debt or implication for me to explore and become better aware of so as not to perpetrate further unwanted consequences.

See also [Ask the Expert: How Can I Get Over Anger?](http://www.yogajournal.com/article/practice-section/a-lesson-in-karma/)

(<http://www.yogajournal.com/article/practice-section/a-lesson-in-karma/>)

4. Relinquish

Give up habitual conditioned reactivity and let go of impulsive urges in favor of dispassionately chosen responses. Accept the fact that such instinctual and discomfiting feelings and urges naturally arise; neither suppress nor indulge them. Let them be without acting on them; reflect upon them and watch them pass by and dissolve. It's not external things that entangle us; over-attachment and fixation are what trip us up.

See also [Forgive Your Flaws](#)

5. Recondition

This is a way of redirecting reactivity through mindfulness. Mentally replay the entire situation while relinquishing its power; reflect on how little it will matter in a few days, months, and years. Actively let go of unwholesome reaction patterns. Remember to remember what's most important and hold firmly yet flexibly to your principles and practice commitments.

See also [Learn How to Forgive Yourself](#)

6. Respond

Opt for intelligent, consciously chosen thoughts, words, and behaviors; be proactive rather than reactive. In some cases, this may translate into doing nothing, or in other cases it might mean responding with equanimity. Ultimately, this practice helps you make more skillful and creative decisions based on

conscious awareness and experience. At other times, action is clearly called for; physical self-defense may even be called for.

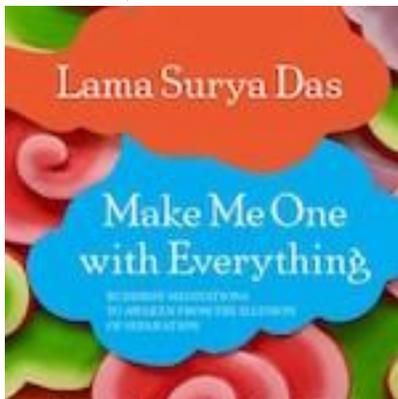
As we grow, we learn to heal the divisiveness, the conflict between Self and other. Accordingly, we can change the entire dynamic from struggle—with its ups and downs—to self-sustaining, naturally motivated maintenance and natural flow. If we practice the Six Rs of Mindful Anger Management and Intentional Responsiveness in the situations that make us most angry, we can stop, breathe, and let the anger—and the fear that usually feeds it—dissolve to reveal a place of calm and joy. This potent practice can be extraordinarily healing and transformative. It will help you hang in there and go beyond anger, rather than suppress or deny it. Then you can see, hear, feel, and understand much better than when under the influence of anger and hatred, or any intense emotional energy.

See also [10-Step Practice to Move from Anger to Forgiveness](#)

About the Author



Lama Surya Das is one of the most learned and highly trained American-born lamas in the Tibetan Dzogchen tradition. Surya is the founder of the Dzogchen Center in Cambridge, MA and Austin, TX, and the author of many books, including the international bestseller, [Awakening the Buddha Within](#) (Broadway Books, 1997), [Awakening to the Sacred](#) (Harmony, 1999), and his most recent book, [Make Me One with Everything](#) (Sounds True, May 2015). He lives in Concord, Massachusetts. For more information, visit surya.org.



Adapted from *Make Me One with Everything: Buddhist Meditations to Awaken from the Illusion of Separation* by Lama Surya Das. Copyright © 2015 by Lama Surya Das. Published by Sounds True.