

4. ANGER: CHALLENGE TO ADULTHOOD II

Relate to a life situation in the deepest sense: not from the standpoint of the ego that bemoans its fate and rebels against it, but from . . . the greater inner law that has left behind its small birth, the narrow realm of personal outlook, for the sake of renewal and rebirth.

—Max Zeller

Definition

Anger is a natural human feeling that everyone experiences often and that needs to be expressed to maintain psychological health. Anger is the feeling that says No to opposition, injury, or injustice. It is a signal that something I value is in jeopardy.

The physical energy of anger comes from the "fight" side of the flight/fight response of adrenalin.

The psychological energy of anger comes from the real or imagined sense of threat. Anger is thus legitimately expressed even when its foundation is irrational. We express a feeling because it is real for us, not because it has objective justification.

Anger is expressed actively when we show it directly. Usually this involves the raising of one's voice, changes in facial expression and gestures, and a show of excitement and displeasure.

Anger can also be expressed passively, i.e. passive aggressively. One punishes the other without admitting one's anger, e.g. tardiness, gossip, silence, refusal to cooperate, absence, rejection, malice to cause pain, etc. Passive anger is inappropriate and not an adult way of behaving. Strongly expressed anger is called rage. Strongly held anger is called hate. Unexpressed anger is resentment. Anger

can be unconsciously repressed and internalized. It then becomes depression, i.e. anger turned inward.

When anger is consciously suppressed, we choose not to know or show it. The motivation is usually fear but we seldom acknowledge the fear. Instead we rationalize the suppression as politeness or social amenity, configuring the expression of anger as unnecessary.

Fear of Anger

Why do we feel so unsafe about expressing anger openly? We may have found early in life that showing anger was dangerous. There are two main ways to have learned this:

1) Showing anger in our childhood may have meant no longer being loved or approved and now we are acting as if that were still true. Processing such archaic equations may lead to the liberating realization that anger and love coexist in authentic intimacy. Anger, like any true feeling, cannot affect, mar, or cancel real love.

Anger is inevitable in any relationship in which people are free and in which they allow one another to get close. "To let ourselves be touched also involves letting ourselves be scraped," writes John Welwood. Love without the safety to allow anger is not love but fear. When adults love they reveal their own anger and welcome it from others. This is a way in which the truth sets us free!

2) Receiving anger may seem dangerous because previously in life anger has led to violence, either physically or emotionally. But this was not real anger, only a dramatic mime of it. Anger does not lead to danger, distance, or violence. Drama does. In this context, drama means ego-centered, manipulative theatrics with an explanatory storyline attached. Many of us have never seen real anger, only drama.

Drama and Anger

We distinguish anger (a true feeling) from drama (an avoidance of true feeling). It takes heroic work to drop drama and show

responsible anger. The neurotic ego clings to negative excitement. The adult functional ego loves the positive excitement of expressing true feeling and then being released from it.

DRAMA	TRUE ANGER
Scares the hearer	Informs the hearer and creates attention in the hearer
Is meant to silence the other	Is meant to communicate with the other
Masks the dashed expectation or fear of not being in control with a false sense of control	Contains sadness or disappointment and these are acknowledged
Blames the other for what one feels	Takes responsibility for this feeling as one's own
Is a strategy that masks a demand that the other change	Asks for change but allows the other to change or not
Is violent, aggressive, out of control, derisive, punitive	Is nonviolent, always in control and within safe limits
Represses the true feeling	Expresses an assertive response
Occludes other feelings	Coexists with other feelings
Creates stress because one's bruised, scared ego is impotently enraged	Releases the aliveness in one's true self
Is held on to and endures as resentment	Is brief and then let go of with a sense of closure
Insists the other see how justified one is	Needs no response

Applying this distinction to the experience of rejection, notice the difference in reactions:

Drama is a belligerent reaction to rejection that punishes by further distancing	Anger is an intimate response to rejection that bridges the distance or allows it without long-held resentment
Drama is based on indignation that one was not treated with the love and loyalty one unconsciously believes one is entitled to	Anger is based on displeasure at what happened but with consciousness that this feeling is based on a subjective interpretation

It is often said that anger is a "secondary feeling," one that masks another feeling, such as sadness or fear. Notice that anger, like all feelings, coexists with other feelings. It never masks them. Drama does that. Where else would masks fit so well?

"Holding onto anger" is also impossible since anger is the shortest feeling. It cannot be held onto. Once it is expressed fully, relief and letting go follow automatically. What is held onto is not anger but a set of storylines that keep the drama ignited.

Anger and Belief

Anger, like all feelings, is not caused by an event but by our belief about or interpretation of an event.

Here is a paradigm, based on the work of Albert Ellis, that elucidates this process:

An Action occurs (open to any interpretation)

My Belief interprets the action in a specific way

A Consequence occurs: the feeling based on the belief that was triggered by the action

So A: What happened

B: What I believe

C: What I feel

It may seem that A led to C. But B, the disappeared middle, requires attention. A can only get to C through B!

In this psychological chain, one stimulus does not cause another. A does not cause B or C. B does not cause C. A triggers B and B triggers C.

This explains why we are responsible for our own feelings. Others triggered us by their actions but the interpretation was our own. The consequent feeling was not caused by others' behavior, only occasioned by it. They are accountable for setting a process in motion but not for the final feeling. That is our responsibility alone.

Working on Anger

Using the paradigm above, identify an instance in which you were angry. Then acknowledge (A) the stimulating event and (C) your anger. Now admit: my feeling (C) about his behavior (A) would not have arisen unless I believed (B).

Here is an example:

A: You did not keep your promise.

C: I became angry.

B: I believe I am entitled to be treated fairly.

I expected you to be honest.

I believe I was insulted by this betrayal.

You have now identified at least four beliefs behind your interpretation of the broken promise: entitlement, expectation, betrayal, and insult. Now match these beliefs against your own history, especially in childhood. Were you betrayed before? Were the betrayals, abandonments, and abuses of early life ever mourned and processed? If they were not, they remain raw and distressed now. The beliefs and anger are signals of unfinished emotional business. This event has reopened old wounds. Now you begin to

see how much of your reaction to this present stimulus is your own business. *The anger has pointed to where it still hurts.*

Finally, entitlement, expectation, and insult are neurotic ego issues. Adults who are building more functional ego responses see through the power of such dramatic cues. They let go of entitlement by asking for what they want while acknowledging that sometimes people come through and sometimes they do not. They drop expectations (one-sided) and ask for agreements (two-sided). They ask for amends when they are insulted and shun those who consistently refuse to treat them respectfully.

Parsing an anger experience has led to more understanding of myself, more clarity about where my work is, and more responsibility for my own reactions. Now I am not thinking of myself as a victim. I have grown in assertiveness and self-esteem while still validating my anger as legitimate. Anger is still real even when its origins are in childish or atavistic beliefs.

Affirming Anger

1. I accept anger as healthy and I examine the belief behind it and the personal history it evokes.
2. I take responsibility for the feeling as legitimate and as totally mine.
3. I express my anger but I choose not to act out aggressively by retaliation, vindictiveness, or malice.
4. I embrace more adult beliefs about myself and the world so that my anger now arises from an informed sense of justice without the "insulted, arrogant ego" dimension.

Lively Energy

Anger is fresh lively energy that is valuable to our individual evolution. We use our anger to break the stranglehold of ego and fear. We follow our anger to the sources of our own hitherto unfranchised psychic territory. The anger stimulates our power. It is

not something we need to drop or deny. It is something that lifts us and transforms us once we allow ourselves to feel it and show it.

In the intensity of the emotional turbulence itself lies the value, the energy . . . to remedy the problem.

—Jung

5. GUILT: CHALLENGE TO ADULTHOOD III

All self-knowledge is purchased at the cost of guilt.
—Paul Tillich

Appropriate Guilt and My Truth

Appropriate guilt precedes or follows unethical behavior. It flows from an internal organismic resonance (conscience) that evaluates action in accord with personal conviction. "We are born with an inherent bodily wisdom which helps us distinguish experiences that actualize or do not actualize our potential," says Carl Rogers. This is our functional ego telling us when we have stepped out of our own truth. This guilt indicates a rending of our integrity or an upsetting of a natural balance between ourselves and others. The balance is restored by admission and restitution.

Neurotic Guilt and Their Truth

Neurotic guilt is a learned (non-organismic) response to an external injunction or demand that we have internalized. We have stepped out of others' truth. This guilt is not let go of by amends and restitution but hangs on. Its origin is in the neurotic ego and it leads to an inner conflict, not to balance.

Guilt is not a feeling but a belief or judgment. Appropriate guilt is a judgment that is self-confronting and leads to resolution. Neurotic guilt is a judgment that is self-defeating and leads to unproductive pain. Appropriate guilt is resolved in reconciliation and restitution. Neurotic guilt seeks to be resolved by punishment. In appropriate guilt there is accountability. In neurotic guilt there is