

Anger's Usefulness

By Patricia Morgan © 2006

- *Speak when you are angry and you will make the best speech you will ever regret.*
Ambrose Bierce
- *The world needs anger. The world often continues to allow evil because it isn't angry enough.* Bede Jarrett
- *He who angers you conquers you.* Elizabeth Kenny

With contradictory quotes like the above it is challenging to make sense of the complicated emotion of anger.

Here are some basic Feeling Angry Concepts:

1. Anger is the most energy charged and hot feeling. It is often experienced in the body by increased heart rate, rapid breathing, adrenalin rush and hyper alertness. When in a high feeling state “cool thinking” is distorted by a heated brain. It is smart to familiarize ourselves with this emotion and monitor it so we don't end up “steaming off.” We can learn to number our anger from 1 to 10 intensity and learn to say “I feel angry” when we are at a 2 or 3 and not wait for the explosion at 9 or 10.
2. Anger is a secondary emotion. First we feel hurt, sad or afraid before anger is triggered. Observe a baby. When she feels sad, through hunger for example, she gently cries. But if no one delivers the beverage we will be treated to a full blown screaming message to “GET MY DINNER HERE!!!”
3. If sad is the body's message that “I don't have what I want,” hurt is the message that “What I want was taken away” and fear is the message that “What I want is at risk of being taken away.” Anger is the body's message that “I have the energy to get what I want.” That energy needs to be contained and managed wisely.
4. Anger's energy can be so intense that it can shut off our thinking abilities. As mentioned above it can *fry* our brain. When we build up a lot of angry energy we are wise to dissipate some of it before we take action. We can clean the garage or house, run around the block, breath deeply or the old favourite, count to ten.
5. Distorted thinking can fuel useless anger. Blaming others or ourselves, exaggerating problems, assuming the worse and thinking in terms of *always* and *never* can escalate our anger.
6. Sleep deprivation, illness, fatigue, stress, poor self esteem, stress and conflict can exaggerate our poor thought patterns and add to out-of-control anger.

What about Anger's Usefulness?

If we didn't have the feeling of anger we would not have the extra energy to take on the world's injustices, to fight for what is right. Think of poverty, violence, racism and sexism. Suffragette means a woman who fights for the right to vote. In the 1910s women in England, America, Canada and elsewhere became angry that they could not vote. Previously they had expressed sadness and disappointment for not being included in the political system. Feminists in the 1970s became angry that they were not paid equally for equal work nor welcomed into many professions nor had a voice in many issues that affected them. Women for centuries were considered not lady like if they expressed anger. This barrier disarmed them from taking action. MADD, Mothers Against Drunk Driving took action to prevent drinking and driving. They could have stayed in a puddle of despair--stayed feeling *sad* at their loss, *hurt* that others chose to drink, drive and then kill their loved ones or *afraid* that others would perish. They chose to feel angry and ignite a difference called *designated driver*.

Letters to the editor are often fuelled by feelings of indignation, frustration and anger. People who felt angry about the harm done to children created protection services. Properly channelled anger can right wrongs. Misused angry is when people wield power over others such as in domestic violence. Anger becomes an excuse for hurting others rather than protecting. Let's use our anger to right injustice and rally for peace.

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