

ANGER...?

When we feel we are not **heard** and experience the **control** we have slipping away we naturally seek to remedy that position, if however our attempts to be heard and retain some control are fruitless then dissatisfaction, fear and panic are usually conceived. These emotions then act as the touch paper that light the fire of anger and it is at this point that we are either informed and inspired by our anger or blinded and consumed by it. Anger is the force that invites us to assert ourselves and change a given situation but because we have ignored or overlooked all its earlier "nudges" it becomes a volatile and often harmful force. When the natural urge to assert ourselves and maintain our boundaries is ignored by ourselves or indeed others, that energy is what is described as anger and if that anger is not given permission to express itself openly and honestly it manifests in some other form within the human organism, for example: stress and anxiety, headaches, ulcers, period pains, depression, violence, abuse, and mood swings.

Anger does dissolve when we learn to act appropriately, like speaking up calmly and clearly about how we feel. If we do not assert ourselves in the way we need to we lose our power by becoming victims of anger. Anger becomes our ally when we act on its initial prompts and early impulses, it only becomes our enemy when we ignore those signals. It is because we have acquired the habit of ignoring the initial signals that we lose control and are unable to manage our feelings and emotions in a healthy and constructive way, we are then either driven aimlessly towards rage and violence, or if our anger is an internalised feature of our lives we are thrust into the pit of depression and the agonies of neurosis.

Anger is often conceived out of "people pleasing", our need and desire to be accepted, valued and loved is so great we suppress what we really feel, need or want in order that we can meet the demands and expectations of others. However, there is a price to pay for not addressing our essential needs, because the more we divorce ourselves from our real nature the more we generate the raw materials that perpetuate a culture of anger within. The short term gain of being a people pleaser is acceptance by others but in the long term we lose our self confidence, our direction, purpose and sense of self. This loss of self and of one's value simply perpetuates more anger in one form or another because as we compromise ourselves in order to be liked we end up not liking what we have become and grow tired of pleasing others whilst neglecting ourselves which probably leads to the greatest anger of all.

Anger can be a very manipulative emotion that seeks to control or influence others to behave differently towards us, when it emerges itself in this way it is because we lack the assertion, honesty and social skills to communicate our own truth effectively. **If we learn to live our lives honestly and assertively anger as a violent and negative force evaporates and becomes a force of change and improvement.**

When anger first knocks on the door of consciousness we need to be still and listen to what it is really saying because our anger comes to inform, sometimes protect and at times inspire us and if we act on its initial impulses in the best way we can, we do not become overwhelmed by its amazing force, to the contrary it helps us map out a better route for ourselves.

Once we understand anger we need to develop the skill of saying how we really feel and be clear and genuine as we share those feelings with others. If we want to be heard by others it is important not to become entangled in blame or self justification, all that is needed is to express the truth as we see it whilst respecting the other party and then our message will be heard. **The presentation of our feelings and emotions is as important as what we want to say and more than anything else will determine whether or not we are heard.**

HOW TO USE YOUR ANGER

Most people think of anger as being synonymous with aggression and violence. Their image of anger is of a person hitting, throwing something or being physically threatening. This is not anger; these are the actions of a person who is out of control, violent and abusive. It is vital that we differentiate between anger and violence because it is violence in all its various forms that destroys relationships and ultimately ourselves **not anger**.

Anger is not inherently bad, in fact it has a very important role and is essential for our well-being and survival. Anger is a signal that alerts us to the need for re-organisation and change in ourselves and our lives, it works in the same way as pain. Just as pain tells us when something is not good for our system and needs our attention, in the same way when we feel an irritation or anger rising within us it too is telling us whatever is happening at that time is not good for us and we need to respond to that message. It is by ignoring these signals that we become enslaved and trapped by our anger, instead of seeing it as an informant, a messenger that comes to instruct and enlighten, we see it as a disruptive and unpleasant force which negatively affects our lives. We often feel unable to manage its potency and its need for some form of expression so we socialise it and conform to common expectations. It is then that anger later leads to loss of control, abuse or violence.

If we are to use anger in accordance with its nature we need to listen to our anger and respond to its important role in our lives and stop fighting against it which only enslaves us further in a spiral of anger, frustration and loss of control. We need to get to know our anger by forming a relationship with it. We need to find out how does our anger manifest itself? Under what circumstances? What are the main triggers for us and why are we affected in that way? These and many more questions can and will be answered if we form an alliance with our anger and stop seeing it as our enemy. Forming this kind of relationship with our anger provides us with important information about ourselves and helps us develop and define our own personal boundaries, sense of morality and code of ethics. Anger also helps us to connect with our core-self and offers us the wisdom and insight that comes from having a real connection with our inner world.

Honesty and negotiation are critical in the process of using anger more effectively. When we feel that sense of anger rising it is then that the need for honesty is so important, firstly to be honest with ourselves about what is being felt and then to be honest with those we need to express our feelings too. It is helpful to realise that our anger is nearly always about the way we have been affected or are indeed still being affected by a relationship in our life, whether that be connected to the work environment, a social situation, or a more intimate relationship, eg: partner, friend, member of the family etc ... The effect that the relationship has may be as a result of recent events or be due to something from the past that still haunts us in the present, which is quite common because we have so much from our past that we have not truly dealt with. Once we can be honest about our feelings we then need to communicate them in an appropriate and constructive manner, so they do not further feed the cycle of anger and conflict, this calls for skills of diplomacy and negotiation. Negotiation means taking responsibility for the contribution we have made to the way we are feeling whilst airing our dissatisfaction about the situation to those who are involved. It is not about holding anyone else responsible for the way we are feeling or engaging in a blame game, it is simply about airing our feelings so that the potential for a dialogue that may lead to adjustment and change can take place. It is important to recognise that the changes which may need to take place are changes **we** may need to make as well as the other parties involved in the situation. It is when anger is managed in this way that it enriches our lives.

ANGER IN RELATIONSHIPS

Relationships are where the worst examples of anger can be found, what begins as anger goes unheard and becomes abuse, rage and violence. The reason anger escalates out of control in this way is because the relationship does not give permission for anger to emerge in an honest and healthy form, and so the anger has to find some other way of expressing itself. Sadly families, cultures and societies the world over have helped corrupt our view and expression of anger by offering us gender-models of anger which means women have in the main been taught denial and suppression of their anger because it is considered unacceptable, bad and anti-social for women to get angry. For men anger is considered part of their make-up, an expression of masculinity and strength and therefore their expression tends to be more overt, threatening and explosive, hence the reason men's anger is more likely to take on a violent form such as: shouting, beating, hitting etc. Whereas for women who have been taught to suppress, conceal and deny their anger it is more likely that their anger will emerge in a more manipulative, nagging and critical way, which are some of the channels through which women have traditionally been allowed to express their anger. Both these gender-based manifestations of anger are damaging, ineffective and prevent healthy, equal and profitable relationships, because men's anger in this form is more likely to lead to conflict and violence, denial, pretence and lack of emotional integration, whilst women's anger as it currently exists leads more to internalised oppression, subservience, depression and loss of self.

When we can appreciate how our families, communities and cultures have shaped our understanding and the development of anger in our lives we are better placed to make sense of the anger that exists within ourselves and our relationships. However due to the complexities and uniqueness of families and cultures the way we may fit into the gender-based model is likely not to be as neat and as simple as the model suggests, nevertheless the blue print laid down is a very good starting point for understanding the psycho-social context of anger. **If we look to our own families and upbringing we can create a personal profile of our own anger's evolution and establish a more accurate model for ourselves.**

The way forward for relationships whatever their status and intensity is for all of us to own our own feelings of anger and express them in an honest, healthy and constructive manner, rather than reverting to old, stereotypical and socially predictable patterns of behaviour. We can learn to respond to anger impulses by creating a new dialogue, first with ourselves and then with each other. By establishing a new dialogue with ourselves and then where necessary communicating our feelings to those we need to, prevents our anger from transforming into a range of harmful expressions. If we look closely at our own anger we will see that often it is harmful and is a form of violence either towards others eg: shouting, hitting, saying hurtful things etc, or it is violence towards ourselves eg: beating up on ourselves, moodiness and irritability, or bouts of depression. When anger does spill into our relationships it is nearly always an accumulative force, which contains a lot of what has not been resolved on previous occasions. This makes anger in relationships complicated because one or both parties is often drawing on several unresolved events and attempting to deal with them in the context of the present situation; this leads to a defensive and protectionist dynamic as the other party feels quite rightly attacked because the anger they are in receipt of is disproportionate to the "here and now" situation. So even though the person expressing their anger may have valid reason to be angry because their anger is made up of so many other dissatisfactions from the past their point is lost in the battle that ensues, which is no longer a dialogue about the truth because self preservation becomes the name of the game. **Relationships are the mirror in which we can most see ourselves clearly so by listening to and hearing our anger signals and acting on their instructions early on we can learn an immense amount about ourselves and establish relationships of substance and meaning.**