

LEARNING HOW TO CONTAIN OUR ANGER AND RESISTANT EMOTIONS

BEING WITH RESISTANT EMOTIONS

We suffer a great deal when we don't find healthy ways to address our own anger or to absorb aggression from others. We see this universal condition as it manifests in politics, nationalism, religion, terrorism, business, relationships of all kinds, and the list goes on. Our lack of contemplation in dealing with aggression in an effective way has provoked a lifetime of questioning as we explore our best chances of re-channeling this potentially destructive force, into something that can serve us.

The average person has been taught that it's okay to dump their anger on someone else or to avoid it altogether. But few people understand the high stakes involved for us personally and collectively as a culture when we do not deal with our aggression in a positive fashion. We are suggesting healthy ways to concretely deal with anger, so we can use it as a constructive force rather than a destructive one. The central purpose here is to offer tools to increase the possibility of not suppressing or dumping our aggression. Instead, we'll explore strategies and practices that can help us tolerate feeling our aggression through contemplation, as we also discover our real needs and strengths.

It is important to cultivate a beginning practice to deal with anger. This may sound simple, but in the face of anger, itself, it is difficult to do. It helps immensely to give yourself a suggestion to take at least a few breaths before expressing your anger. After lots of practice, you won't have to remind yourself any more. An inner voice or instinct may automatically guide you to pause and take a breath. You might say something like; "I don't want to react from anger right now, so I'm going in the other room to calm myself down."

We will be exploring how to discover the thwarted need that caused us to be angry. The premise is that we are angry only when we want or need something we are not getting. In response to that, Humanistic Spirituality has developed several practices to bring out the essence of what we are looking for when we're angry. As you engage in the following practices,

please continue to remind yourself that anger is a result of our desires, needs and longings being obstructed or thwarted. I want to be clear that the primary practices below, require that the two people have already mutually agreed to use them.

PRACTICE: LOOSE TIME

The “loose time” practice usually works when both people want to express their anger in a safe structure, in a less inhibited way. At the same time, they want to discover why they are angry, and learn how to reach the underlying need that will relieve the anger. There must be a clear agreement that neither partner will express anger in order to target the other’s core wounds in a mean-spirited way. This is also described as “not hitting below the belt.”

Loose Time is often the more desirable of the two practices when both people feel safe receiving the other’s anger with minimal restrictions. This practice has five parts.

1. In the moment, you agree to be the one to express the anger. Your partner agrees to just listen without responding, and do his best to avoid internal defensiveness, while listening from the heart as much as possible. His function is to look for your true needs that are contained in your anger, even if you can’t express them clearly. If he believes that 95 percent of what you’re saying is false, he commits to do his best to focus on the 5 percent that is true. Remember, it is incredibly difficult not to be defensive when hearing direct anger.

2. Your partner retains the right and responsibility to let you know if he is reacting defensively or has stopped listening. You also can let him know if you think he has shut down. In either case, you both agree to stop the process and assess whether you need to try this at another time or work through the ways in which he got triggered right then. There is to be no arguing about this because there is no reliable way to resolve whether or not he was listening, unless he is aware of this, himself. You agree to not hit below the belt and unnecessarily attack areas where your partner has known severe wounds.

3. Once you expressed what you were angry about, you’re then trying to see what you want from your partner as you express specific needs and wants. If you don’t know yet, both of you agree to listen for what you *likely* need or want. Refer to the lists of needs

to help you identify the need(s). When your partner expresses what he heard, he focuses only on your needs and wants. If he couldn't hear your needs, he tells you so. If he mentions a specific need he thought he heard, you get a chance to clarify if he heard you accurately. You make your best effort to speak as calmly and kindly as possible. If you're still too angry, don't say anything.

4. If you express something that you think your partner didn't hear, he verifies what it is that you need, even if it seems repetitive. If he has any empathic positive responses, he can voice them. If he has anything negative or qualified to say, he agrees to remain silent.

5. You express appreciation for the freedom to be angry and the focus being kept on your needs, and hopefully express respect for your partner's strength in being able to listen without getting lost in defending himself.

The following case study is a good example of a client using "loose time" to deal with her feelings.

LAURIE

When Laurie arrived at my office, she said she'd been angry with me since our last session with her husband, Keith. The issue was that Laurie shut down when her husband was anything that wasn't tender and soft. Although she wasn't yet able to listen from her heart in the way Keith was asking for, I'd been touched by her efforts at containing her anger and admitting to her exhaustion. I'd complimented her for being accountable for her anger and admitting not being able to love Keith in the way that he needed, meaning she couldn't listen sincerely when her husband was frightened, uptight or empty.

He was able to do that well with her, but her inability to listen openly to her husband was creating a significant imbalance in the relationship. I'd told her that I saw her on the precipice of being able to listen to Keith from her heart, but that had angered her.

"I'd like to be loose with my anger right now," she said. "I want to just tell you how I feel. Is that alright?"

"Of course," I said, prepared to look beneath her anger for what she really needed.

“I feel like you’re taking Keith’s side and demanding too much of me,” she began. “I’ve worked really hard and you seem oblivious to my situation.” Her fury was escalating as she said, “Here I am, working a part-time job and trying to take care of my six-year old, Jeremy, and my husband. And you tell me I have to do more.”

She was furious as she continued, “Can’t you see how unrealistic that is? I don’t want to do any more. I deserve to be loved as I am.”

When she paused, I said, “You’re feeling enormous pressure. Is that right?”

“Yes,” she snapped.

“May I give you my perspective?” I asked her.

“Okay,” she said, leading with her anger and disdain.

“You already acknowledged that you haven’t been able to open your heart to your husband when he needs that from you. You told me that you want to do this and I never would violate you. If you told me you truly didn’t feel you could do this and your anger was coming from more than an emotional reaction, I would respect that. But I’m here to serve your relationship, and to bring out what you’ve told me is the best in you.”

Laurie was calming down a bit. I went on, “Keith says he can’t be happy in the relationship unless you can hear him when he’s hurting. My intention is to always respect your truest truth and reflect back a perspective of wholeness, as objectively as I can. If your guiding wisdom wants me to respect your limitations, I will. I just don’t want you to be in denial about how it’s affecting your marriage.”

Laurie was listening to me now with her full attention. “If the pressure to change is making you reject yourself and feel inadequate,” I said, “you have to stand up for yourself.”

“I just think you like Keith better than me,” she said.

I knew that I treasured both of them equally. I told her, “If I don’t help you stand up for your own truth, I should be fired. My goal as a counselor is to share my full reality when I believe it is healing, and then to surrender to your guidance concerning the overall situation.”

Laurie began to cry when she heard the ferocity in my commitment to stand beside her. “I just don’t know if I can do it,” she sobbed. “It’s really hard to stay open with my son and my husband. Most of the time, it’s impossible. Both my parents abandoned me and it’s a miracle that I can love at all. I want to love them both but I can only manage to show my love for my husband when we’re alone. It’s the same with my son. I don’t have enough energy to be there for both of them at the same time without ending up exhausted.”

I was touched by her ability to see herself clearly, without defenses. “How would you express that as a need, and maybe consider Keith needs, too?”

“I don’t know.”

“Could you tell him exactly what you just told me?” I suggested. “Tell him with the same softness you just used with me, that you don’t know if you can express love for both him and Jeremy at the same time.”

“It’s scary to be so defenseless,” she said, “but I want to.”

“What do you feel underneath your anger toward me?” I asked her.

She laughed, realizing that she was not angry with me anymore. She said, “I feel hopeless, despairing and inadequate.”

“Could you let Keith know that too?”

She nodded.

“Do you have tender feelings for your despair?” I asked her.

“No,” she said, “but I do right now.”

“How can you respond to it?” I asked.

She answered without hesitation, “I’m really sorry that this is so difficult. It’s hard to care for both of you and myself all at the same time.” Her tone had softened considerably and I could feel her heart.

“How about making this a self-love practice,” I suggested, “that would include the ones closest to you?”

She agreed to do this. After many months of practicing, she was learning to support her needs to be kinder toward herself, and toward her family, as much as possible. I asked if she wanted to make this her constant self-love practice, which would result in her loving the members of her family.

She said yes. In the long term, Laurie recognized how much she wanted empathy for her dilemma with Keith. She was determined to support her own needs to be kinder toward herself and as harmless toward her family as she could muster.

CONTAINED ANGER CONTEMPLATION PRACTICE

It is critical that we learn to contain anger because we can become dangerous when it is present. Most of us are convinced that the source of our anger is largely on the outside. In my

view, this is, at best, half true. We are also angry because we are afraid, self-rejecting, we lack an adequate sense of self, and we are dependent.

Mostly, anger is a re-action, (acting again) and dumping our anger is inevitably going to fuel the fire, even if the fire seemingly was started by someone else. This requires a radical shift in how we view the causes of our anger and the best ways to handle it.

A second practice, a more controlled one, I call “containing anger.” This can help people who best benefit when the intensity of the anger is limited, and there is a continuous effort to be as focused, direct clear regarding the source of the anger. With containment and focus on your thwarted need(s), there’s a better chance the listener will be able to hear, rather than getting caught up in his or her defenses. Remember, you are likely to create emotional stress and damage when you’re just dumping anger, even if you think it’s a small anger.

Before you begin the following contemplation practice, visualize and remember as best you can, the last time you felt aggression due to an intense interaction with someone close to you. Choose an example in which the impact is still affecting you. Imagine you’re with this person and in your aggression now. Pause. See if you can feel your feelings. If not, read through the contemplation practice after the case study, so you understand the principles of harmless aggression. It cannot be said too often, that there is a huge difference between intellectual understanding and integrating a practice. The central intention here is to help you create effective practices for your daily life.

BETTY

This case study demonstrates the importance of containing anger in an effort to learn to be with our aggression. Betty and her husband Harold came to see me, when she was seething with anger toward him. “It isn’t fair,” she said, “that I’ve always had to do more than my share to maintain our lives. I’m furious at Harold.”

I told her, “ You’re aware that you’re angry, which is really important, but you haven’t learned to stay with it long enough to find the real source of it. It isn’t easy to just stay with it, as it is.”

She agreed with me.

“If you can stay with it until it simmers down,” I suggested, “you may be able to see the real source. Are you willing to try?”

She was willing and I suggested she take some time alone. “Why don’t you leave Harold, and go into the other room for a while. Tell yourself, ‘I’m going to let myself act out and feel the anger, but I know full well that’s what I am doing while I’m letting myself act out. I’m really angry that I’ve been an accommodator all these years. I’m going to temporarily allow myself to just be pissed, to feel it in my body, and growl and say, I’m pissed, I’m pissed, I’m pissed, I’m angry, I’m angry, I’m angry.’”

“Now sit quietly with your anger. Free associate to all the places in your life where you’re angry. Give yourself from five minutes to half an hour. If you don’t reach a point where you’re calming down and finding a way to what you really need, tell yourself, ‘I’m still dangerous.’”

“If you do calm down, ask yourself, ‘What’s underneath this?’ The answer will likely be, ‘I need help.’ You may need help from many different people, but right now, you need it from your husband. You can tell yourself, ‘I need to be open enough to ask for help. Under the anger, I’m afraid. I’m thinking about next September when I won’t be working. I feel anxious about the future, because I really feel like I’m no one.’”

MEDITATION: CONTAINING ANGER

For a direct taste of containing anger, try the contemplation below which is designed for moments when you are triggered or feel aggressive. Whether you are feeling aggressive right now or preparing for the future, this practice is an act of peace.

Take a few slow easy breaths to anchor your attention in your body. Feel the quality of the aggression there. Let this be an encouragement and a perpetual reminder to take a few breaths before you consider any expression. If possible, encourage yourself to delay talking, as the anger will likely leak into the conversation; no matter how hard you try to stop it.

Notice how much you are contracted and angry. If it’s severe, pay even more attention and recognize that you are more likely to be destructive. Ask yourself, “Do I have an agreement with this person that it’s okay to express my anger directly?” This is never something to be presumed. If the answer is, “I don’t know,” ask them when you are calmer if it’s okay.

Once you have a clear agreement, start by acknowledging that you're angry and that you'll do your best not to hit below the belt. Recognize your intention to do some damage control, and to have a more harmless communication. Pause and see if you can realize what you wanted that you didn't receive, that you believe made you feel aggressive.

Now, let them know what you wanted, or if you don't know, let them know you are frustrated but can't articulate the reason. Give them time to respond. If their response is not leading in a direction of receptivity, suggest that you wait until a later time to try again. If that isn't possible, see if you can agree to disagree. See if you can maintain eye contact while you are talking, which will help you remember that you are both vulnerable human beings - - something easy to forget when you're angry.

If a person says they don't want to hear you while you're angry, there are virtually no situations in which it is healthy to override their view. Think of a time that worked out well when you were pressing your anger against another person's will. Don't be surprised if you can't find any, because even the "good" situations resulted in them getting back at you later.

See if this reminder will help you delay your expression, and increase your desire to integrate more advanced practices. Stay alert to the consequences that can help guide you the next time you're in a similar situation. Each time, be careful to note afterwards whether you could have waited, and how clear, simple and harmless you were or were not. Appreciate your effort to do your best and to learn from what you did. Plant seeds to continue practicing. Recognize that being less destructive and more peaceful is needed for healing, for reaching your heart and accessing your pure intentions.

Many people vacillate between these two practices, according to how safe and angry they feel in the moment. In reality, there's a gradation of how much anger they can tolerate, that partners will settle on each time they do the practice. The clearer they can be with each other about their needs, the better, which only comes through trial and error. For some, there are

necessary limits to the level of intensity they can tolerate. They may need boundaries around certain areas that are considered untouchable, unless someone can be extremely gentle. If there's a debate between the two practices, it's best to start with the more contained one, so both people feel safe.

It is clear from the start that the partner expressing the anger is not suggesting that he or she is absolutely right. They're simply saying they need the freedom to feel where they are, and to try to discover the real source of their anger. Spontaneous anger doesn't usually work constructively because without a prior agreement, the receiver feels he should have the right to respond emotionally and rationally. Even with a prior agreement this is extremely difficult. When we're angry, we need to be felt and heard, and the situation inevitably will deteriorate if someone does not or cannot listen. The very idea of being able to listen when someone is angry is a radical one because so few of can pull it off.

ASKING FRIENDS FOR REAL HELP

We all need help to avoid blaming others when we are out of control with anger. If you feel it would be helpful to call a friend to help you feel your anger, make sure beforehand that you choose someone who will not collude with you by encouraging you to dump your anger on your partner. This is a common way friends think they help each other so make it clear what you are asking for. Let them know that you want to feel the raw aggression, just as it is, in an attempt to understand what you need. Also make it clear that you want to find a way to express it that has a chance of being heard. If such subtlety isn't realistic, due to their current stage of development, it's best not to call these friends while you're attempting to find a way to be with your anger and not act out or suppress. In other words, you want to feel the anger and explore what is making you so mad, not just be told you are justified. You are looking for a way to tell the person you are angry at, what you want or need. You might need to have them stop yelling at you, or to speak in a different tone of voice. Perhaps you want them to show more affection or interest in how you're doing. These are the kinds of issues and needs you want to be able to communicate that might be underneath your anger.

You've realized that simply to express this anger callously causes it to come back at you. To avoid this boomerang effect, you can develop ways to unload your feelings in a safe environment and to reach the source of what is upsetting you. This realization of the source of your needs is empowering and transformational. You might initially feel embarrassed or

ashamed when you see how out of control you are normally. But this is a healthy sign, and you can feel encouraged. It takes integrity and heart to see where you have lost yourself.

TOM

A close friend for many years, Tom asked if I were open to listening, since he was angry with me. I said it was okay and we set aside a few hours. Tom came from a distressed socioeconomic background, and he had a lot of anger towards “overly entitled” people with money. I was pretty sure this was what was bothering him. We were accustomed to listening to each other, it was our priority, and with the taboo of hitting below the belt, there were no other limits.

“I’m really pissed off,” Tom began, “because you feel like you deserve to have more money than I do.” He sounded exasperated when he added, “Do you feel entitled to have a bigger bank account than me because you were raised in more fortunate circumstances than I was?”

“I just feel fortunate,” I said honestly.

He became even more furious and said, “You sound like all the other people with money. You have a right to it and you don’t give a shit about how impossible life is for so many of us who suffer.”

I tried to look beneath his rage and hear his needs as I thought to myself, “He needs me to feel empathy for how hard it was to be raised in powerless circumstances. He needs me to admit that I’m not entitled at all and he needs me to feel his pain. Maybe he even needs me to give him some money.”

This spontaneous series of possibilities flashed through my mind as I asked him, “What do you want?”

His tone was filled with annoyance as he screamed, “Isn’t it obvious?”

“No,” I said quite simply.

“I hate your fucking entitlement,” he roared,” and I hate that you don’t even feel guilty. I hate your lack of caring about how hard it is to raise a family on thirty thousand a year.”

I was struck by the absurdity of a world in which extreme wealth was often determined by environments, people you knew, the brain you were born with and the skills you had been taught.

“What do you think?” said Tom, with a “Goddamn it” attitude.

“I think you’re right,” I said quietly. I felt humbled when I realized that if I had been born into other circumstances than my own, I might have struggled my entire life like Tom had. “I’m not entitled to have more than you. I’m just more fortunate than you are. I’m really sorry for my indifference and for avoiding my guilt. I feel badly about your predicament, but I don’t feel like you deserve my money. I’m not so sure I deserve it either.”

I felt warm and tender toward the truth beneath Tom’s anger. He needed empathy and for me to acknowledge my “dumb luck.” At least I could agree that it was an unknown mystery why I had money and he didn’t. Tom wanted me to open my heart to his powerlessness and feel it with him. “Thank you for waking me up,” I said. “It isn’t easy to imagine how it must feel to struggle for a lifetime. It’s uncomfortable for me to not feel entitled and still not want to give away what I have.”

Tom shifted into a state of gratitude right there on the spot. “That was exactly what I wanted to hear,” he said. “I wanted to know that you don’t feel entitled, that you do want to keep your money and that you feel for me, too. No one with more money and success than me has ever admitted what you just said. They’re so full of themselves.”

I smiled. Tom had never felt the pressure and guilt of having “more than” someone else, and being conflicted about giving until you had nothing left. I refrained from mentioning that, though, and felt the warmth and open-heartedness that had blossomed in such a short period of time.

In the example above, you can see how raw anger can lead to recognizing our core needs. It is also a demonstration of unswerving trust between friends who love each other. As difficult as it can be to contain, anger is a precious energy when dealt with directly. The intent is to get what you need.

When Tom spoke to me about his feelings, I benefited from it as much as he did. I had a new understanding of entitlement and I could feel the dilemma of those who had challenging financial conditioning. When my heart opened and stayed that way while Tom expressed his truest feelings, he felt supported to open his own heart.

HANDS ON HEART ANGER MEDITATION

This meditation might feel strange and artificial at the beginning because it is so unfamiliar. The gist of the meditation is holding a hand on your heart when you’re angry in an

attempt to feel the anger and contain it. We're used to losing contact with our heart when we feel anger, as if we have become the anger. But we still have a heart.

It's as if we have two stations inside ourselves: One where we feel our anger; the other where we can just be in our hearts with gentleness and tenderness. To feel all of it, we need to take some time alone in a comfortable place. This meditation differs from the others as it asks us to infuse ourselves with tenderness by making physical contact between our hand and our heart. This contrast of tenderness mixed with anger grounds and comforts many of us who don't want to leave our hearts completely when we get angry.

Start by appreciating that you're taking this time to neutralize the destructive impact of your own aggression which includes anger-related feelings such as: irritation, impatience, annoyance, sarcasm, rage, fury. Gently place your hand on your heart as a reminder that you want to reach this part of your purity as soon as it naturally can occur. It doesn't matter that at this moment you feel aggressive. Doing this integrative practice is one of the purest intentions and prayers that a person can have.

Breathe and feel the aggression, as it is, in your body right now. Do not attempt to change it in any way. It will move on its own when it's ready. Simply suggest to yourself to feel your muscles, as they are, starting with a scan of your stomach, chest, legs, and jaw. Pause. Notice where the resistance is most apparent in your body. Keep reminding yourself that you're in a safe place, and now is the time to let your anger be as it is. This is a place where you are not going to hurt anyone, including yourself. If you need to flash to scenes of what made you angry, go ahead. If you want to express a few words of direct anger, support it.

Keep breathing and telling yourself that it's okay to be exactly as aggressive as you are. Let yourself continue to be as aggressive as possible. The more okay you make it, the freer you can become. From time to time, return your awareness to the hand on your heart to help you recall your intention to allow anger to support the ultimate return to the purity of the heart.

For a period of time, let yourself feel the anger, and try to drop any content or thought in your mind. It is helpful to recognize your anger without a story. Encourage yourself to stay with it, to breathe and feel the subtlety of the contractions in your body. You will likely notice at a spontaneous moment, without effort, that you feel more relaxed, peaceful or strong. Don't make it a goal; simply notice how containing this vital alive energy naturally transforms itself. If the aggression doesn't change in any noticeable way, recognize that you have heightened your own awareness of these sensations, and at the very least you're practicing the art of tolerance. When you feel ready, end the meditation by feeling the hand on your heart. Feel the sincerity of your intention and recognize you have just participated in an act of peace.

LIVING OUR PASSION

In our current hi-tech world, we have all battled the frustration of seemingly unreasonable hassles with computers, cable and insurance companies, hospitals, contractors and many more. This highlights one of our greatest challenges as human beings, which is to dedicate ourselves to feeling anger consciously, not dumping or repressing it.

The following personal anecdote highlights the transformation of anger and the possibility of discovering and living our passion in every day life situations. Since receiving a kidney transplant, I had been ordering anti-rejection medications from the one company that was authorized by my insurance company. It is critically important to take my medications in a timely way, to maintain the life of my new kidney. After numerous problems with the authorized sellers who were sending me erratic mixes of liquid compounds, essentially endangering my life, I had complained and asked for a different company, but my requests were rejected in writing.

The next month, they forgot to call me and to send the medications. I called early in the day on a Thursday to arrange overnight delivery, and was assured arrival the very next morning. But then I received a call later that same afternoon asking if I wanted to reorder my medications, with no reference to the prior call, or record of my prior conversation. A 45-minute wait on each call was typical, and I was getting pretty frustrated.

When my meds did not arrive on Friday, I called many times throughout the day and could never get through by phone. That night, they called to say that the order had not been sent because the meds were on back order. They hadn't bothered to tell me. I was

incredulous and exasperated and a great anger rose up inside of me. I breathed as deeply as possible and reminded myself that getting the medications was all that mattered.

Instead of acting out my anger, I told the salesperson that I was frustrated but I knew it wasn't her fault. I also made it clear to her that the company had a lot of problems. Appreciative that I didn't blame her, she was cooperative and although I was still angry, I was also pleased with the way I was handling the situation.

The fact remained that I would run out of my medications on Monday so I called at 6 AM that morning to discover they were no longer making the products. I was horrified and angry and had a surge of wanting to strike out, but I handled it like I had before, reminding myself of the need, and the futility of expressing my anger and instead breathed deeply and asked for help.

Five more contradictory phone calls throughout the day only increased my anger and my passion to get help, as the two vacillated back and forth inside of me. The results were positive. After successfully navigating myself through the minefield of anger and rage, I finally got my medications delivered the next day. I had succeeded not only in getting what I so desperately needed, but I also had found the strength and passion, instead of striking out at someone who didn't create the problem in the first place.

I looked at how many times in the past I'd been less successful at containing my anger, which was often in direct proportion to how much less cooperative the other person had been. In the current situation, I had dealt with many people who had no real power but because of my attitude, they did what they could to help. I was left feeling strong rather than contracted and since I had zeroed in on my need, I had suffered the least amount possible.

ADVANCED GUIDED PRACTICE: BEING WITH ANGER

Do this practice only when you want the experience of your own naked aggression, without acting it out. When you are ready to own your anger, you are ready for this practice. Determine if this is a safe time to dwell in your aggression.

As you start, ask for the wisdom to recognize the benefits of feeling your aggression, and to find the courage to feel it and not act it out. Make sure you're in a safe place where you don't have to worry about others disturbing you. Remember the triggering events, words, actions and attitudes, whatever it is that

caused your reaction. Use your breath, movement, fantasy, voice and muscular contraction - - whatever allows the aggression to deepen. Now feel your aggression as fully as possible, however it unfolds. Take as much time as you need.

After simply being in the aggression, recognize that in addition to the trigger that caused the episode, your aggression is a lifelong condition that is part of being human. Drop the immediate content of why you believe you are angry as much as possible. Recognize that is only half true at most. Our lifelong anger is like an ocean, you are only dealing with a river. We have a place inside that adds our past angers to current ones.

Continue to feel the aggression as fully as possible with an empty mind. When the mind wants to tell a story, see it is an escape and return to the naked experience in your body, allowing a grunt or scream or contraction. Keep dropping thoughts and the mind as much as you can tolerate. Feel the vitality in the anger, and recognize it as your reaction, not caused by another.

If that makes you angry to hear, continue to feel it. Recognize that down deep inside is a state of being you can find when you're ready. It's your thwarted strength, which may or may not be accessible now or even in the near future. Feel this energy and find a place where your need exists for what was thwarted, rather than against something or someone outside. Feel how much you want to be strong and give yourself what is needed. Feel your longing and convert your anger into passion for your life as much as possible.

Continue to access the longing to find your passion. If you're still angry, feel the need to be passionate for what was thwarted. End the meditation when you recognize you've taken it as far as you can. Let yourself be as you are. Remind yourself to do this as often as possible, especially when you're triggered. Appreciate the courage you have for seeding this source of peace and strength.

The importance of this practice and similar ones are rarely understood or practiced. But they are worth focusing on because the inability to re-channel anger leads to the worst suffering in our history. Such anger has caused endless wars, violence, prejudice and alienation. It is rare that we have the dedication and maturity to get so far as to face this additional cause of suffering inside ourselves. But pausing to take a breath before we launch our anger outward can help us find our interest in our inner states. Notice, how interested you are in the practices here? If you are not, take a closer look at whether you are more interested in just acting your anger out. While no one I know has mastered the above advance practice completely, we can all keep trying.

It is worth drawing attention here to a few circumstances when expressing anger in a raw way that are appropriate. For a passive kind of person who is unable to access their anger due to conditioning or lack of development, they need permission and encouragement to express anger in the moment. It can be very healthy for people who rarely get angry to let it out, especially when they can find what they need shortly thereafter.

It is also healthy to express anger, when the guidelines have been agreed upon by two or more people. It is not healthy without an agreement or an understanding. Even then, it is frequently challenging. This has sometimes been misinterpreted by those that believe it is healthy to just “get the anger out” any way you can. This is a prime example of “a little bit of knowledge” being a dangerous thing. In the Buddhist Teachings, there is significant emphasis on being with anger, but this knowledge is seldom understood in the psychological community. Meditation teachers rarely give useful personal examples of witnessing anger to help model the process. Unfortunately, this often leads to an idealization of “getting over the anger,” rather than dealing with it.

A good example of integrating anger is the Dalai Lama, who successfully practiced containment of his anger toward China when it was taken over so violently in 1959. After his exile, he has publicly maintained an attitude of honesty about encountering his anger and converting it into strength and courage, rather than succumbing to blame and bitterness.

The second example is Nelson Mandela who was incarcerated at the hand of his own government for his political beliefs of non-aggression. After spending twenty-seven years in a prison cell, he joined the world with an open heart as he transmuted his anger into Peace and Compassion.

Such rare depths of maturity make these two extraordinary men noteworthy. And yet, it is unfortunate that in our contemporary culture, they stand out as unusual examples of heroism.

While they are looked upon as gods or supermen, the truth is that each of us has the same capacity for compassion in a very real way.

RUTH AND KENNY

Ruth was a good person. She had spent her childhood avoiding conflict by acting friendly with her family and her friends at school, even when they were being difficult. Living with an authoritarian father and a volatile mother, Ruth learned at a very young age, that she did best in her family when she showed her “good” side to avoid suffering.

Now, as an adult in a relationship with a man named Kenny, her previous habit of avoidance had run into a dead end. When she came to see me, Ruth was considering leaving the relationship because after being with Kenny for four years, she didn’t feel connected to him any more.

Their story was that after the first year, their honeymoon period, the sexual intimacy had gone from “the best and most intimate ever” to being almost perfunctory. “Kenny was gentle and passionate in a way I’d never seen before,” she said. “We used to do meditations together, but now we do them on our own. When I ask him how his day went, he used to describe it in detail. Now, he just gives me the same vague answer. He says it was tiring but he doesn’t want to talk about it. And he doesn’t bother asking me about my day.”

In our second session, I asked Ruth, “How have you responded to these changes? What have you said to him?”

“I’ve been loving and friendly because I want this relationship to work.” she said.

“Have you addressed the issues that are bothering you,” I asked.

“Yes,” she said quickly. “Well, sort of. I let him know I wished he’d talk to me about what’s underneath his exhaustion. And I told him I wish he’d ask more about me.”

“Does he have any idea how unhappy you really are?” I asked.

“Probably not to the extent that I feel it. I haven’t talked about the sexual change I’ve noticed. I’m afraid that would really hurt him.”

“So would you say that the amount of unhappiness you’re feeling is grossly understated?” I asked. I saw that her consistently acting like a “good” person was not getting her what she wanted.

“Yes, it is,” she admitted. “But realistically, what else can I do? He knows what I want and he’s obviously not interested.”

Ruth was demonstrating the reverse pattern of the majority of people. Most of us have a tendency to be irritable, annoyed, or aggressive when we don’t get what we want. “In your case,” I explained, “you go on automatic ‘good girl’ pilot and no one takes you seriously. You would make virtually anyone take you for granted, because you appear to be so ‘nice’ all the time.”

I suggested she let Kenny know she was unhappy in a direct and honest way. “Chances are,” I said, “if you were that direct, you might find out how angry and frustrated you really are feeling. You might be more afraid of facing your own anger and alienation than you are of hurting him.”

Ruth looked surprised and interested as I continued. “You told me Kenny is a good man who loves you. So I suspect he’ll respond positively when you tell him how disturbed you are. Maybe no one ever taught him how to communicate when you feel frustrated.”

“I know that telling him I’m unhappy will hurt his feelings,” Ruth argued. “Anyway, I think I already told him.” Ruth was having a difficult time giving up her good girl image to see what was underneath the façade.

When she went home, she sat down with Kenny for a long talk. Stunned at what transpired over the next couple of weeks, she came in to give me a summary. “I told Kenny I was unhappy and I felt alone. I said I’d told you how hopeless I felt about his lack of communication, beyond his tiredness and his lack of interest in me. “What did he do?” I asked.

“He was shocked, and said he had no idea that I was unhappy. He told me, ‘I’m really sorry. I’ve been feeling a little distant, but I didn’t know how to talk to you about it, either. It seems like you’ve been withdrawing from me sexually, and you aren’t anywhere near as loving or interested as you used to be. I didn’t want to hurt your feelings, but I guess now is the best time to let you know.”

She was as surprised as he was. But that night, they made love more intimately than ever before, even during their honeymoon. As we continued our sessions over the next couple of weeks, Ruth saw that she *had* been withholding, that she had been frustrated and angry about being ignored. But instead of discussing it, she had withdrawn sexually.

“Underneath my good girl image,” she said, “I can now see I was angry and lonely. I really need to love, be loved, and to communicate.” She had discovered a goldmine of aggressive feelings

and needs by breaking her image, seeing her own anger, and opening to share her true feelings with her lover. This anger was transformed into finding her strength and love, a true shock and transforming experience.