

# **Making Friends with Your Anger**

## **By JP Sears, Holistic Health Coach**

When we experience anger we can feel as though we're a small little boat being tossed around in a very turbulent and dark sea. The stressful movement of dropping from the crest of an enormous wave down into the trough below can make us feel very helpless. However this e-motional internal storm that we may feel powerless over is actually created by us. Therefore, with the light of our conscious awareness piercing through the stormy clouds, we can realize that we do in fact have the supremacy to determine our internal weather patterns.

Becoming friends with this experience of anger facilitates the experiential transition from riding out a stormy, rough ocean to gently drifting about in a peaceful, glassy sea. Many would jump into this peaceful concept believing that eliminating their anger is the way to transition to the calmer waters. I ask you to consider the possibility that harmonizing the storm of our anger into peace and calm isn't about denying ourselves the experience of being angry, but rather it is about giving ourselves permission to be angry while acknowledging that our anger is always a symptom of something deeper within.

How can giving one's self permission to be angry possibly bring about higher levels of inner peace? My experience is that what intensifies anger the most is repressing it. Many people believe that it is not okay to be angry and that anger is a sign of weakness. In turn, they feel that not expressing anger is not having anger. But just because it is not expressed, does that mean it's not there? Ask yourself which has more internal pressure, the soda bottle that is shaken and then has the cap slowly twisted off or the soda bottle that is shaken and the top is continued to be sealed tightly? To a third party it may look as if the tightly sealed soda bottle is more peaceful, after all the other one is hissing. But is the amount of internal pressure and stress built up a different story from a first person perspective?

### **Which Polarity is Your Anger?**

My experience working with clients as well as observing myself and others lends me to have the belief that there are two types of people, those who have anger and those who have anger but don't believe they have anger. Like anything in life, anger has polarity. The nature of anger's polarity is such that it can be experienced either actively or passively. Those who experience their anger in the passive pole are typically those who may be seduced into denying that they have anger at all. I certainly have plenty of first hand experience of being passive with anger and denying that I have it!

For many years I simply thought to myself, "Gosh, I pretty much have life mastered. I never get angry, I never yell, I never fight with anyone. I am a pretty enlightened guy!" It was actually pretty fun to be swimming in this pool of denial. As I learned to be more

sensitive with myself I began to notice that when I get emotionally triggered I become very quiet. I can watch myself withdraw emotionally from a situation and go into a cocoon, which is a very passive way for me to experience my anger. In contrast, my childhood experiences of my father nominate him as an excellent example of anger experienced actively. When triggered he'll put on the whole active anger show of yelling, screaming, arms flailing, etc. Neither my dad or I are any more or less functional than the other, it is simply the case that we have different modes of experiencing anger.

If an important foundational step in making friends with our anger is first recognizing how we express our anger, I'll invite you to introspectively consider which of anger's polarities you take up more residence in, the active or passive.

### **The Purpose of Anger**

I know that for me it took a long time to appreciate the function of anger rather than seeing it as an ugly, negative enemy. I would also believe that there are some self-growth practitioners and life coaches who would choose to disagree with my belief that when we come to understand the nature of what our anger means we find out that anger is very healthy and purposeful.

For the skeptics, let me respond with a question. Could it be that anger is always a symptom and never the genesis of the issue? If this is true then we may come to find out that we use anger to blame others for how we feel about ourselves so that we don't have to experience the sensitivity of how part of us is truly feeling. In other words, could it be that anger allows us to deflect from feelings that cause us to feel unsafe and unvalued, such as fear and shame? We can then come to realize that the part of us that has a sense of fear or shame doesn't want to feel these very threatening emotions. Instead, it distracts itself from these internal feelings through the mechanism of focusing its attention externally toward another, often in the shape of anger. To this part of us, it simply seems too threatening to sit with the responsibility of feeling our core emotions and this gives rise to the symptom of anger.

As an illustration, imagine a scene at a bar. Guy #1 tries to dance with guy #2's girlfriend. Does guy #2 go up to guy #1 and say, "I have to tell you that a part of me has some fear that my girlfriend might leave me for another guy, and that I'd feel very lonely if that happened. So because I have this fear, would you mind refraining from dancing with her?" Have you ever witnessed this taking place? Probably not unless you frequent bars that are heavily occupied by Zen masters! But what is familiar in this scenario is the expression of symptomatic anger to deflect from the core of fear. Guy #2 will likely have a few angry words for guy #1 and the physical expression of anger is likely to follow, all because guy #2 doesn't feel safe enough to feel his core emotion of fear.

Many people say they have been angry for years or even decades at another person. They are simply saying that they have not yet had the awareness to look beyond the symptom

of their anger for the core feelings they have about themselves. How would you respond if you asked yourself, “Could it be even *halfway* true that everyone who I’ve ever been angry at, including myself, has simply been a target for my projected, hidden core feelings about myself?”

### **Repressed Anger**

If it is true, as I mentioned earlier, that there are those of us who have anger and there are those of us who are in denial about our anger, then it is safe to say there is a lot of repressed anger. It is important to understand that there are consequences of repressing our anger.

Anger isn’t tangible. We cannot smell, taste or see it. Because of this we can easily fool ourselves into thinking that it isn’t there when we repress it. It is a similar scenario for people who are constipated from suppressing their bowel urges for too long. Many of them don’t even know they are constipated. Yet their backed up fecal matter continues to decay, while sending toxins into the body. Our eyes do not pick this up, yet this internal self-poisoning and destruction goes on. Anger affects our internal environments, both physically and emotionally, in much the same way. Emotionally speaking, the more we suppress anger the less sensitive to life we become, almost like being anesthetized. Physically speaking, suppressed anger can have systemic effects in many areas of our physiology. In Chinese Medicine it is believed to most directly impact the liver. So if you find a person with detoxification troubles, blood sugar imbalances, trouble digesting fats, high or low cholesterol, poor assimilation of nutrients, or hormonal imbalances you are likely going to be looking into the eyes of a person with a troubled liver as a result of repressed anger.

When we sweep anger under the rug it is important to acknowledge that *we* are the rugs and what we are hiding rots what it is under! Acknowledging our anger allows us to experience it and for it to flow through and naturally dissipate out of our bodies and minds rather than becoming stagnated and stuck.

### **Transitioning from Enemy to Friend of Anger – A Self Discovery Exercise**

John McMullin, founder of *Journeys of Wisdom*, advocates that experiencing anger without shaming ourselves for it is one of the greatest freedoms we can know (1). Below we’ll explore five steps that facilitate the movement from a place of conflict with our enemy called anger to a place of expansion and freedom with our friend called anger.

- Step #1. *Notice how you express anger*, as talked about above. Do you tend to be more passive or active? Allow yourself to recall a time when you expressed anger passively and a time when you expressed anger actively. It is quite challenging to change the relationship we have with anger until we realize what our relationship with anger looks like.

- Step #2. *Give yourself permission to be angry.* By denying ourselves the right to be angry, the angrier we become. We become the anger. Conversely, by giving ourselves permission to feel anger we allow the anger to become part of us which allows the anger to be expressed through us and it can naturally dissolve.
- Step #3. *Express your anger responsibly.* Responsibly expressing our anger means that we take ownership of *our* anger. If feeling the need to raise our voice or argue with another, we acknowledge with our words, “Yes I am angry, and though it is coming your way, it is *my* anger to deal with, not yours.” This prevents us from attempting to deceive others into feeling the burden and responsibility of our anger. Responsible expressions of anger also mean that we feel and act out our anger in a way that does not compromise the wellbeing of another person.
- Step #4. *Take two points of view* about any situation, issue, person, or event that you feel angry about. You can begin with the line, “A part of me feels pretty angry about this. And another part of me feels...” Your whole being will not be angry, even though it may seem like it. So you get to finish the above line with how another part of you feels about the same situation. As an example I might say, “A part of me is very angry at her. And another part of me feels scared about her behavior.” With two points of view we’re less likely to stay rigidly stuck in a stream of anger.
- Step #5. *Introspect about your anger.* Asking yourself the question, “How am I feeling about myself in this situation?” permits you to shift your focus from the other party back to yourself. Of course “yourself” contains the original source of the anger. By introspecting on how we feel about ourselves, our anger becomes more transparent leaving open the door for discovering our core emotions. I will also invite you to consider that with Step #5, some of us when emotionally triggered with anger, actually lose the capacity for conscious consideration. When this is the case we can still garner tremendous growth from this step by reflecting on this question a few hours or days later when we are in a less paralyzing intensity of anger.

## **Conclusion**

Perhaps making friends with anger is really about accepting the parts of ourselves that feel angry rather than making them an enemy and rejecting them. By acknowledging the purpose of our anger and allowing ourselves to experience it we can stay conscious of anger rather than being unconscious to its existence within. Not only can anger be a very healthy human expression, but we can also turn it into a very powerful catalyst of self-growth and healing with the self-discovery practice mentioned above. With anger as our friend, perhaps you and I can experience the peace and calm of the emotion rather than its storms.

## **References**

1. John McMullin, Holistic Coach. [www.Journeysofwisdom.com](http://www.Journeysofwisdom.com).

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