

The fire down below - dealing with our anger

"Anger is that powerful internal force that blows out the light of reason." - Ralph Waldo Emerson

Anger is a powerful energy. Being afraid of this energy, we often attempt to deny or hide it. When we cannot contain the energy of anger, we act it out on other people or things.

We live in an angry time - folks angry with their neighbors, politicians, educators, health care providers, bankers, sports heroes, bosses, colleagues, co-workers, drivers, passengers, those who are "different" from ourselves - just angry with one another. What many of us rarely get is that our anger, our biggest fight, is really within. While most folks' anger is directed outside themselves, the truth is that the origin of our anger is within - anger *is* an "inside job." While the "stimulus" of our anger may be outside, the "source" is always within - always.

Inner anger

Like other emotions, anger is normal. However, when we suppress our anger and allow it to build up, it saps our strength, causes undue stress and dis-ease, destroys relationships and, most of all, prevents us from experiencing happiness.

Anger is an energy. It's not a thought, an idea, or a belief. It's not mental; it's not intellectual. It's an energy we experience, physiologically, in the cells of our body. When you experience anger, notice what happens in your body. Anger affects your body - e.g., blood flow, tendons, muscles, ligaments, nerves, temperature, etc.

Inner anger is energy that is "misdirected" - energy that builds up and is discharged in ways that are self-destructive, self-sabotaging, hurtful and harmful to ourselves and others.

Fire energy

For hundreds and thousands of years, Eastern traditions have referred to this energy as "fire energy." We are familiar with Western references to this fire energy as, for example, "heat" (heated argument), or "hot" (hot under the collar), etc. The "fire energy" in and of itself is not "anger." The issue is that most folks have never learned how to "be" with, or contain, their fire energy.

Why we feel angry

Inner anger is a sign that we are upset at something or someone outside ourselves *and* that we are upset at ourselves.

There are five fundamental reasons for feeling angry - feeling: (1) disempowered, (2) deprived, (3) overwhelmed, (4) inadequate and (5) we don't understand the deeper dynamic of emotional maturation.

Disempowerment is feeling a lack control over our lives. We feel we have little to no power to direct our lives, feel a lack of confidence in doing so, or we just don't trust ourselves to do it effectively. Disempowerment can lead to using "fire energy" to act out, become pushy, and shoring ourself up with a false sense of bravado that often ends in a "crisis" of some type.

Deprivation is a feeling of fear, the flip side of anger. We feel we can't achieve, get what we want or think we deserve. Those who feel deprived often engage in acts of greed and ruthlessness and become overbearing and controlling. On the inside, the deprived generally experience low self-esteem, lack of self-management skills, and a lack of will, self-discipline or steadfastness.

The overburdened ("woe is me!") folks feel like victims. They feel they are imposed upon by others and the world at large. The flip side for the overburdened is their need to take care of everyone else, be accommodating and meet everyone else's demands and requests. They need to please.

The overwhelmed feel they have an insurmountable mountain to climb, too many responsibilities and are unable to complete what is required of them. Frustrated, they feel their life is not their own.

The inadequate feel they are never right - agitated by a sense of feeling deficient. They feel guilt, shame and never good enough. Their need to be an "eleven" on a scale of one to ten fuels their anxiety, anger and self-loathing. They have a need to be right and feel they are "nobody" when they are wrong or different. They feel threatened whenever their identity is challenged.

In addition to these five "common" causes there is one more, not so common. Probably the greatest, and most misunderstood, stimulus for one's anger is lack of awareness about why one is on the planet. Most folks want to live on the "happy" end of the "happiness-unhappiness" continuum spoiled, and feeling entitled to have whatever they want. They feel angry because life is tough and challenging "down here." They get mad at the Universe, Spirit, Source or God (generic) because they have to experience the "human" aspects of being a human being.

The antidote to anger

Eastern traditions, and Chinese medicine, refer to the element of "fire energy." Fire energy is a primal energy i.e., it's a natural and animated energy contained in the body. Fire energy is the energy of "light" wisdom and intuition.

Our fire energy is generated in the abdomen or belly center of our body. (Think about some Western expressions that refer to the location of the fire energy, such as "gut-check," "no guts," "intestinal fortitude," "have the stomach for," "lily-livered," "have the balls," "fire in the belly," "yellow-belly," and "gut feeling." Fire energy is manifested as strength, courage, steadfastness, drive, creativity, self-confidence, commitment, and self-love. When we are lacking fire energy, we find it hard to persevere, take action, and forward the action of our lives. Fire energy supports us to be fearless, to be outgoing, to heal and to love ourselves. Fire energy gives us "spirit."

On the metaphysical or spiritual plane, our soul wants to be embodied - i.e., live in this body, this human form and to experience joy while moving through our "human" experience. Anger is the result of choosing not to engage our spirit at the same time we engage our body.

As a result, rather than use our fire energy as a life-affirming force, we mis-use our fire energy to ignite our anger. And when we misuse our fire energy, we are caught up in fear and anger; we "burn out" - not simply in the sense of experiencing fatigue and exhaustion but also in the sense that we are consistently searching for ways to feel happy, satisfied, and emotionally, mentally and psychologically secure. Mis-using our fire energy burns up our liveliness, our juiciness.

When we consciously and self-responsibly connect to our Essential Self, our True Self, we are able to ignite the fire of our soul, and in so doing, we can contain and appropriately use our fire energy to experience greater well be-ing.

The following tips can help you engage your fire energy in a positive way:

Consistent breathing exercises (*NOT* "ab" work"!) that focus on the belly center can activate the fire energy, and energy work such as Yoga, Tai Chi and martial arts can help to circulate the fire energy throughout the body.

As one experiences the (re)generation of the fire energy over time (days, weeks, months), we slowly become "energized" with our life force and learn to experience self-love and self-trust. Over time, we begin to feel the energy of empowerment and find we need less and less external stimulation to feel happy and satisfied. Letting go of external needs and attachments to experience happiness becomes easier.

Fire energy generates the strength, courage and confidence we need to feel empowered, free, open to exploring the "unknowns" of life and facing life's challenges and pressures with a sense of equanimity.

In the face of anger, rather than "act out", reactively blame, feel the victim and become abusive, we can breathe deeply and sense the heat in our body. Sensing the heat, we make the connection between the heat and our soul nature, our primal and natural tendency to welcome the energy as a healing force - a natural energy of happiness that is our birthright.

The reason we become reactive (angry) is that our "human" (ego) part of our self is unable to contain the fire energy and it leaks out in a way that brings us to "fight against" others and our environment. It's like trying to contain spilled water with your two hands. When our fire energy is dissipating we feel out of control, that others are giving us a hard time, pushing on us, threatening us in some way, shape or form, and, unable to contain our fire energy, become reactive. The more we contain our fire energy, the better we can feel centered and disconnect from the pull of others and the less we become "angry."

Centering leads to self-validation which leads to a greater sense of self-worth and from this place we create a greater capacity to believe in and trust ourselves!

Finally, happiness depends on a conscious understanding of why we're on the planet. It's not about life being unfair. It's not about bad luck and bad karma.

The evolution of humanity, and that means each of us - you and me - depends on a conscious understanding that life "down here" is about growth. Growth does not take place passively, or only on the happiness end of the spectrum.

Growth demands challenge, and struggle. It is only through such growth that we build our inherent and natural capacity to feel and be strong, courageous, and confident with a real sense of our True and Real Self.

Happiness and satisfaction arise when we douse the heat of anger by consciously containing our fire energy so we can move through life cool, calm and collected.

So, some questions for self-reflection are:

- How do you normally react in life? Do you tend to be passive-aggressive? Do you manipulate, bully, intimidate - physically or verbally?
- What physiological symptoms do you experience when you're angry? (e.g., head, neck, back, or jaw pain; nervousness; irregular heartbeat; sweating; a pounding heart; panic attacks; upset stomach; exhaustion; sleeplessness or other disturbances)?
- Does your anger ever lead to hostility, abuse, anxiety or depression?
- Has anger led you to any addictions (e.g., food, alcohol, drugs, shopping, or sex, etc.)?
- How is anger evident in your home or work environment?
- Do TV shows (news, talk shows, etc.), toxic friends, relatives or co-workers push your buttons? How about unmet expectations, feeling you're being treated unfairly, threats to your or your family's security, threats to your beliefs or to your self-image and identity, or fearing that the worst will happen?
- What emotional beliefs lead you to react with anger?

- Think about a person, place, or issue that really pushes your anger button. What is it about that person or situation makes you angry? What is your belief or story that you use to rationalize or justify your anger?
- What was your experience around anger like when you were growing up?

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Peter G. Vajda, Ph.D, C.P.C. is the founder of True North Partnering an Atlanta-based company that supports conscious living through coaching and facilitating. With a practice based on the dynamic intersection of mind, body, emotion and spirit, Peter's approach focuses on personal, business, relational and spiritual coaching. He is a professional speaker and published author. For more information, www.truenorthpartnering.com, or [pvajda\(at\)truenorthpartnering.com](mailto:pvajda@truenorthpartnering.com), or phone 770.804.9125. You can also follow Peter on Twitter: @petergvajda