EMOTIONAL REGULATION

A Study of Anger

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Scheherazade was the beautiful daughter of a powerful sultan's trusted counselor. When the sultan decided to wed her, she knew this honor was actually a death sentence. Every year the sultan chose a bride, then executed her after their wedding night. But Scheherazade's father confided to his daughter an important secret: When the sultan was a younger man, he married a woman who betrayed him with her lover. The sultan executed his wife and her lover, but this did nothing to quench his hurt and anger. Believing every woman hereafter would betray him, the sultan set himself on the path to marry the most beautiful women in the land, then put each of his wives to death before they could hurt him.

As the next woman in line to suffer this fate, Scheherazade thought hard about what she could do. Scheherazade was not just beautiful; she was also clever. Armed with her insight into the sultan, she wed him with a plan in mind. At nightfall, she asked the sultan's permission to tell her little sister a bedtime story, as she was accustomed to do every evening in her father's house. The sultan granted the favor and stayed to hear the story. Scheherazade told a riveting tale of love, loss and adventure, but stopped at the most exciting part and sent her sister home. The sultan spent the night with his new bride, and the next day allowed her to finish the story for her sister's sake.

Each night afterwards, Scheherazade continued her storytelling, always ending at an exciting part—what we would call a "cliffhanger" today. The sultan so enjoyed these stories that he spared his bride for days, then weeks, until Scheherazade's goodness melted his frozen heart. At the same time, the sultan learned much from the spiritual truths contained in the stories. As he opened his heart and mind, he grew in his compassion and humanity.

Scheherazade's stories are now known collectively as *The Arabian Nights Tales* (or *One Thousand and One Nights*). They include "Aladdin and the Magic Lamp," "Sinbad the Sailor" and many more. These stories are about 1,000 years old. Yet they are still relevant today with their themes of injustice, betrayal, love and healing. The sultan was stuck in anger, and his anger compelled him to repeat the horrifying pattern of his original trauma. But as he listened to stories of other people's suffering, his perspective expanded. As he learned to love and trust another human being, his regained his capacity for growth.

While our power to inflict extreme revenge is not on the scale of the sultan's, we are all capable of doing damage to ourselves and others by misunderstanding and misdirecting our anger. Anger kills. Yet anger can also be a catalyst for new insight, courageous action, and personal growth. How can we deal with this natural human emotion in constructive ways? First, we must understand anger accurately and thoroughly. Then we can apply what we know to wield the "double-edged sword" of anger for good, not for harm and destruction. Here are a few simple facts about anger to begin our study:

Random Facts About Anger

1. Anger comes from the Greek word "angst," meaning "tightness" or "constriction." It is the same root word that makes up the words "anxiety" (nervousness, tension, worry) and "anguish" (distress, grief, suffering). When we are angry, anxious or anguished, our blood vessels literally constrict, increasing our blood pressure. We are also shut down or "constricted" emotionally, mentally and spiritually. In short, anger cuts us off from the Life Force. It interferes with our ability to feel, think and experience the presence of Spirit. Ultimately, anger even limits our emotional connection with others, leading to feelings of isolation and loneliness. Isolation and loneliness intensify the anger, anxiety and anguish, and the destructive cycle feeds upon itself.

2. Anger is the brain's normal response to feelings of threat. It is a part of our survival mechanism. As such, anger is not bad or evil in itself. Someone who has never been angry is a person who has lived a privileged life, protected from harm through his socio- economic status or the good fortune of being overwhelmingly loved and catered to. Alternately, this "never-angry" person may be simply one who lacks insight and assumes that his lack of outward-directed anger is the same as "not being angry." Never allowing oneself to feel anger can be harmful, just like a person who cannot feel physical pain may suffer greater damage because he does not perceive when he is injured.

3. Anger is not the same as violence, nor does anger necessarily lead to violence. Anger signals the presence of danger. It is merely an alarm system. Violence results when a threat so

overwhelms us that we feel our survival is at stake, whether it is our physical survival or our emotional wellbeing. Violence is as much provoked by fear as by anger—as when a frightened person chooses to fight back instead of run away. In prison, individuals cannot flee from danger, because showing fear only leads to more and worse victimization. In any case, both fight and flight stem from fear for one's survival, so building confidence and self-esteem are helpful in both cases.

4. Anger that is not expressed, channeled or directed does not simply go away. The bottled-up angry energy is harmful to the one who is angry. Violence that is felt but not expressed can be misdirected into self-harm—for example, cutting, suicide or substance abuse. These are some of the more extreme ways a person will try to dampen or stop the pain of bottled up anger. More commonly, bottled-up anger can lead to a laundry list of health problems such as headaches, muscle pain, skin eruptions, and auto-immune diseases. The foundation of all these issues is "angst" (anger, anxiety, anguish).

5. Anger is considered more permissible for males than females. The old-school idea that anger is not "ladylike" and that an angry woman is a "bitch" demonizes anger for women. Holding women to a different standard of humanity is not only unnatural and impractical; it is also a sneaky way of undermining women's self-worth and agency. The message is that women must accept mistreatment and be passive even in the face of threat. The need to suppress anger has many negative impacts on women. They may be confused about their own worth; they may believe they "deserve" mistreatment from others; they may attract abusive relationships by repeating the pattern of not being able

to stand up for themselves; they may become chronically ill and die.

6. The idea that anger is more masculine has another toxic effect. It encourages men to hide or suppress a range of normal human emotions like sadness, hurt, loneliness, disappointment, shame or regret, and channel all these difficult feelings into anger. Since anger is assumed to be "strong" and other emotions seen as "weak," some may not even allow themselves to register other feelings authentically and honestly. As a result, they may not even know what is truly bothering them. This "constricts" a person's emotional growth and puts a limit to his maturation. Toxic anger is often a sign that more painful emotions are being suppressed. Maturity cannot be achieved by either men or women without the ability to feel and contend with a range of human emotions.

The Incredible Complicated Brain

It is well known that the brain is composed of different regions, each of which is specialized to help with specific human tasks. As humanity evolved itself beyond the simple instinct to survive, more complex brain functions were added. These functions do not function separately, but rather as an integrated and coordinated whole. Working together, the different parts of our brain help us survive and act in the physical world; make emotional connections and attachments; as well as to learn, remember, reason, plan and create. Our brains enable us to have and maintain family and social relationships, live in complex groups such as villages, towns and cities, solve problems, invent tools, create art and explore the world. They give us the ability to distinguish right from wrong, make and keep

promises, devote ourselves to a cause, appreciate beauty, learn from our mistakes, change our behavior and much more.

The Immature Brain

When we are born, our brains are not well developed. In fact, scientists believe that our brains do not fully mature until we are in our early to mid-twenties. This is why—unlike other animals—human children need responsible parenting and nurturing environments for such a long time. Without these protections, normal age-related immaturity becomes a big risk factor injury, death, crime, substance abuse, pregnancy and more. In a general way, an individual's journey to brain maturity retraces humanity's journey: from simple survival to emotional and social connection and finally to all the complex activities that we call "thinking." The basic brain activity in babies and young children is survival-oriented. That means safety from harm, adequate food and nutrition, health and wellness, shelter and clothing. But, because human children take so long to mature, their survival also requires emotional connection with caretakers. Parental love and attention are basic survival needs and their lack is as life-threatening as starvation.

Male brains take longer to mature than female brains. This may be because testosterone reaches levels as much as 10 times higher in male teenagers than in boys. This sudden surge of testosterone in adolescence interferes with the reasoning part of the male brain and encourages greater impulsiveness and susceptibility to peer influence. Adolescent males, compared to girls, are far more likely to engage in risky behavior and be influenced by peer pressure. Moreover, males tend to make use of fewer parts of their brain than females, making them perceive people and experiences in more "black and white" ways. Attention seeking, bravado behavior and gaining status in the eyes of

other males are male adolescent priorities. Even immature male sexual drive tends to be oriented more toward conquest and status than toward relationship.

When a boy's maturation process is hampered in any way—by parental neglect or abuse, the deprivations of poverty, street violence, substance abuse, the injustice of racism, or negative experiences with authoritarian institutions (school, law enforcement, church) to give some examples—the male brain may stay in an emotionally arrested state. That is, his thinking and behavior may continue to be largely adolescent. This makes sense because the individual—both male or female—needs to feel safe and loved in order for the brain to grow and mature naturally. The lack of emotional connection and physical security register as danger and threat. The brain that is constantly forced to focus on survival needs is handicapped from developing higher thinking skills. Bottom line, the individual who must live with physical fear and emotional insecurity during his or her formative years is held back from fulfilling his or her potential for self-development, achievement and success. Behaviors such as impulsiveness, recklessness, outbursts of extreme emotions, conforming to peers, acting without regard for future consequences, and rebelling "without a cause" are hallmarks of immaturity that can last far into adulthood for some people. Violence due to anger is also an indication of immaturity.

Fight, Flight, Freeze

Since survival is so important, the brain must operate so that we seek it instinctually. That is, we must act quickly and automatically to protect ourselves from potential injury. After all, if we are in harm's way, we usually lack the luxury of planning our next move. If we hesitate, we could be injured or killed by a wild animal or a human

rival. In the presence of immediate danger, humans' natural response is fear. Fear is not cowardice. It is the brain's way of telling us that we are in danger and must act quickly to preserve our lives. Fear forces us to take an action, but what action should we take? Scientific research—especially studies on trauma—have consistently shown that the human response to fear falls along three predictable lines: flight, fight, freeze. The human brain instinctively calculates the best option for confronting the specific danger and does one of these three things.

Fleeing is our response if the brain decides avoiding the confrontation will preserve our lives. Fleeing in response to fear is not necessarily cowardly because it still involves taking an action and may be smarter than fighting in the moment. But fighting and fleeing are not choices everyone who faces danger can make. For example, babies, young children, and individuals who are the victims of beating, torture, molestation, rape, sex trafficking and institutional abuse cannot fight or flee. Indeed, anyone who is confronted by an overwhelming threat and is helpless to fight or flee will "freeze." In fact, it's the only possible response to real helplessness. The brain calculates the options and correctly says, "I can do nothing." Freezing is the last resort when we feel powerless. Trauma victims describe withdrawing deep inside themselves, going somewhere else in their minds, or splitting off from themselves. They describe feelings of numbness, distance and unreality, submission and passive acceptance.

Anger: The Fight Response

If our instinct tells us to fight, it's because the survival part of the brain has calculated that we can and must take an aggressive action. The feeling we get before we take that action is generally anger. Anger releases certain brain chemicals (neurotransmitters and hormones) that raise our blood pressure, quicken our breathing,

stimulate blood flow to our extremities (arms and legs), increase muscle tension and narrow our focus to the source of the threat. This happens quickly so we have little time to reflect on and consider our options before acting. The helpfulness of this quick response is offset by the risk that we might be misjudging the situation or simply overreacting to it. Moreover, as we repeat this pattern, the "fight" response can become automatic and harder to resist.

Although dealing with anger is challenging, it's not realistic or helpful to demonize it. Just as fear is not cowardice, anger is not evil. Nature wouldn't make such a basic mistake. Anger is all around us. So is the unchecked result of anger—violence. Only by accepting anger as a natural response to a natural desire—to protect ourselves—can we begin to deal with it constructively. Hopefully, by understanding anger, we can get better at restraining or channeling anger, avoiding violence and getting to peace. Ideally, we want to move quickly from feeling anger to identifying its cause, and finally to responding in the best way possible to the provocation. To do that, we have to stop the automatic anger/violence response if it has become a habit. This gives us the space to choose something different. For the most part, dangers today are not as extreme as a saber tooth tiger attack. Therefore, reacting with violence is not usually the best option in contemporary life. Even in extreme environments like prisons, physical violence is the last resort because it generally leads to more violence and punishment.

Individual physical violence is just one form of aggression. Other types of aggression impact us as well, though less well-studied. Some of these include economic aggressions—for example, withholding opportunity from marginalized people; social aggressions such as racism and misogyny (bias against women); and institutional

aggression such as found in war and the criminal justice system. Society turns a blind eye to the latter forms of aggression because these tends to benefit privileged individuals, groups and institutions. That is, aggressions that are sanctioned by society and that benefit the privileged are protected. Unsanctioned physical aggression (violence outside of sports and war) is common in male culture, but especially among those most victimized by the above forms of aggression: marginalized males. The prison population (including the female prison population) is therefore a group that has suffered uniquely from multiple sources of aggression over a long period of time. Predictably, those who have suffered most and longest from aggression often become aggressive in response. Those who insist that violence is an individual "choice" are not being fair or realistic because access to peace and security are not distributed equally.

That physical violence is natural in prison makes sense. First of all, individuals who wind up as prisoners have generally suffered the most from the socially sanctioned aggressions such as racism and poverty. They feel they are the victims of an injustice, even if they cannot articulate it. They often suffer from untreated trauma caused by parental neglect, abuse, street violence, substance abuse and police violence. Moreover, prisons are overcrowded and packed with males most of whom have suffered from the same traumas. Adding to these problems, prisons are by nature authoritarian institutions that permit prisoners little or no agency, offer limited opportunities for self-improvement, isolate prisoners from the social connections they need for growing their humanity, and treat prisoners as not worthy of care and respect. Prisons are environments that bristle with multiple sources of threat, the potential use of deadly force, and the lose-lose choice between being a victim or a perpetrator. Few officially acknowledge that such conditions in themselves are strong

provocations to the very violence prisoners are being urged to overcome.

Emotions and Violence

Anger is more complex than people give it credit for. The truth is, more anger is provoked by difficult emotions than by physical attacks. Emotional triggers for anger, and thus also violence, include hurt, humiliation, shame, betrayal, jealousy, envy, resentment, frustration, disappointment, sadness and grief. Remember that anger is always a sign that one feels threatened, and few things can feel more threatening than assaults to our self-esteem and identity. Self-esteem and identity are just as critical to an individual's survival as food and shelter. Consistently nurturing parenting contributes directly to an individual's growth of self-esteem and identity. In fact, early experiences of a caregiver's consistent nurturing form the foundation of mature self-esteem and identity. This is called "secure attachment" by psychologists. An individual who is fortunate enough to have secure attachment to one or more loving adults grows up feeling good about himself and optimistic about life. He or she is likely to choose friends, mates, activities and work that contribute to his success and happiness. He is simply repeating the pattern of taking good care of himself the same way his caregivers took good care of him. Conversely, an individual who was abandoned, neglected, abused, or deprived by his caregivers as a child will gravitate toward risk, harm and loss in his adult years. He is also repeating a pattern—one that reveals the injury to his self-worth and identity.

Parental neglect, abuse and abandonment are survival threats that create an underlying condition of primal fear that lasts into adulthood for many, if not all, people. This can be felt as anxiety, sadness, depression, boredom/disinterest in everything and, of course, also

anger. The differences in responses depend on whether the primal fear triggers a fight response, a flight response, or a freeze response. A freeze emotional response includes sadness, depression, and boredom/disinterest. This fits the pattern of withdrawing, becoming numb and splitting off from oneself and others. A flight emotional response always has, at its core, anxiety. Anxiety is a condition of chronic stress that impacts on the body and mind because the feeling of danger and threat is never resolved. The individual wants to flee but cannot or does not for any number of reasons. The conflict between the instinct to flee and the choice or necessity to live with the fear creates internal conflict and suffering. The fight response is of course anger and possibly violence—either verbal, physical or any number of hurtful acts. Violence involving others will result in hurt feelings, damaged relationships, injury, death or criminal prosecution. But violent emotions can also lead to self-harm. The fight response generates a flood of brain chemicals, blood flow, muscle tension and extreme mental focus that is fine for a brief time, but dangerous for an extended period. Chronic anger and the urge to violence—even when it is not acted upon—does physiological damage to the body and psychological damage to the mind. In fact, it is possible that suicide is the ultimate act of anger turned inward. When one cannot "get back" at the one who has hurt them, the only way to act on that anger is to kill oneself.

Anger is "Socially Conditioned"

Gender differences exist with regard to anger and violence. Men generally express anger more often and more easily than women. Is it because men are more angry? Probably not. Like many behaviors, expressing anger is "socially conditioned." In other words, people are taught by parents, teachers, ministers, the media and other influential

people when, how and to whom they can or should express anger. A strong current of bias runs in those social "rules" about anger and violence. For example, we are taught not to express anger toward people in authority. African Americans (and other dark-skinned people) are taught that expressing anger at White people is risky. Poor (inferior) people are not allowed to express anger at wealthy (superior) people, but the reverse is perfectly fine. Children can't express anger at adults, who are automatically privileged over them due to age and the presumption that adults are "right"—or in any case, should never be confronted if they are "wrong." Finally, women should not express anger at men, sometimes because it is physically dangerous, sometimes because men are the ones in authority, and sometimes because angry women will be disrespected and dismissed as "bitches."

These social "rules" seem to favor men, but in reality they hinder men greatly. Many males are conditioned from an early age to be sensitized to "disrespect" and to interpret a range of behaviors from other males (and females) as insults or challenges. Natural competitiveness and the need to feel dominant or at least respected fuels this sensitivity. When males have no other way of being dominant or gaining respect but through physical aggression, violence is the result. Moreover, boys are conditioned to dread most of all being thought of as "weak." Anger is "strong," so anger is allowed. Even out-of-control violence is "strong." On the other hand, sadness, loneliness, shame, grief, regret, confusion, worry, anxiety and insecurity are "weak" and not manly.

Any human being who grows up so restricted in his emotions is bound to be handicapped in self-awareness, communication, relationship, leadership and even in work and career. It would be difficult, if not

impossible, for an emotional restricted person to experience spiritually elevated feelings such as joy, reverence, tenderness, humility and awe. In short, emotional restriction results in a holistic restriction in human potential. We are moving away from this primitive ideal of "manhood," but society tends to turn back to this evolutionary dead-end during times of chaos and fear. We have only to look back at Nazi Germany to find an example of this. After Germany's humiliating defeat in World War I, the country turned their shame and confusion into a collective delusion of racial superiority and world conquest. Naturally, their chosen leader was a man so emotionally restricted that brutality and genocide were considered normal and acceptable. The fight/flight/freeze brain dominated over the thinking brain and the world was again consumed in "manly" shows of aggression and violence.

Just as men are hindered by restrictive "social rules" for acceptable emotions, women are equally restricted. Women are socially conditioned to be agreeable, docile, friendly, polite, humble, helpful, subservient and obedient to people in authority—especially male authority. Smiling and cheerfulness is expected. What is not expected is assertiveness, independence, resistance, confrontation, will, ambition, courage and perseverance. Women get angry just like men do. The difference is, many females are socialized from an early age not to feel anger, nor to express it openly. Women are demonized for being angry, as we can see in the common image of "witches." Witches are indeed powerful, but they get their power at a high cost: that is, witches are traditionally portrayed as ugly, evil, feared and hated. They certainly have nothing most women want such as families, friends, good times, security and beauty.

In a similar way, many modern females still fear that having agency (power over oneself), as well as identity, will lead to a loss of those things. Certainly, countless women today have agency, identity and love, too. But the fear exists for a reason. On a personal level, insecure men feel threatened by strong women because their primitive brains get triggered by women's strengths. After all, we still hear men calling other men "pussy," "cunt," "broad" or "little girl." It is never a compliment. Men who are ruled by their primitive brains tend to look at strong, smart, talented or powerful women the same way they look at men: as competition, threats and rivals. So even while civil rights and social custom protect women as a group more than ever before, individual women face the age-old challenge of dealing with the emotional restrictions of men, as well as men's instinctive competitiveness and insecurity.

The greatest curse of not being allowed to feel or express anger is the blow to self-worth. Keep in mind that anger warns of a threat to one's safety or wellbeing. Threats are not just physical dangers like being beaten, raped or dying in childbirth. Threats also include insults, backstabbing, deception, cheating, being robbed or stolen from, loss of reputation, emotional betrayal, professional embarrassment, and so on. Women face as many dangers as men, if not more, because men assume women will not defend themselves or not defend themselves effectively. Men regard women as more vulnerable and many take advantage of that. When women suppress anger, they short-circuit their own instinct for self-preservation. Out of self-doubt and confusion, they may ignore the warning signs, fail to protect themselves, and get hurt. They are particularly vulnerable if they both doubt themselves and, at the same time, hold an inflated idea of men's value. That is, they put too little stock in their own judgment and too much stock in a man's, who might be less competent, but far

more confident. Women's tendency, even when she is victimized, is to blame herself. Indeed, others tend to blame her as well—for example, "You asked for being raped by jogging alone in the park!" or "You must have done something to make him violent." Just as men over-rely on anger as a motivating emotion, women do not allow themselves to be angry enough. Women have a right to protect their own interests, and it is risky for women to expect men to the job for them.

Prison is a Sad Place but Doesn't Have to Be

Prison is a dangerous place and a sad one. But especially for men, anger is preferable to sadness because anger feels more "manly" and "strong" than sadness, which is associated with weakness and helplessness. In an environment full of predators, not one wants to be prey. Admitting we feel vulnerable or showing our vulnerability in prison is too risky because it might invite more victimization. This presents a big barrier to rehabilitation and healing. Growth requires a reliable degree of safety so that one doesn't constantly have to be on the defensive. Fear activates the primitive fight/flight/freeze brain and will keep us from developing our thinking and feeling brains. To become a full, whole human being and fulfill our God given potential, every person must develop the ability (and skill) to feel a wide range of emotions and deal with them appropriately and constructively. Even difficult, uncomfortable emotions like shame, regret or resentment have value for what they can teach us, how they can help us improve ourselves, and also to relate honestly with other human beings. After all, humans feel the same emotions. Regret feels the same to one man as to another. One woman's grief is a universally felt grief.

It might sound strange to say that uncovering and confronting difficult emotions can lead to great things, but it's true. The first point to

consider is that not facing difficult emotions doesn't mean they aren't there. We can assume that anyone in prison has suffered extreme conditions that have tested his or her humanity. Therefore, we can also assume that every prisoner has felt all the difficult emotions one could possibly name. The greatest barrier to transforming this burden into a blessing is . . . you guessed it: anger. Or, put more accurately, the barrier is the overreaction of the primitive fight/flight/freeze brain when it is triggered by the perception of danger. Yes, it's true that prison is a dangerous place. But so is the world. Fear is justified. Anger is also justified at times. But demonizing anger, being shamed or shaming others for anger, or focusing on "managing anger" are not the answers. Would you advise someone to "manage" his racism? The best way to deal with racism is to dispel the ignorance, misunderstanding and privilege that allows racism to exist and change the laws, practices and institutions that promote it. Similarly, the best way to deal with anger is to understand it thoroughly and deeply—both on a personal and social level—and then change the way we think, feel and behave as a human being and as a community. Anger, like racism, poisons us first and then afflicts others. Both are contagious. Everyone suffers; no one is immune.

As previously stated, anger is easily triggered in prison and other environments of extreme deprivation and danger. Feelings of vulnerability are just under the surface because the threat is constant and real. Moreover, for most people the dangers of prison are simply continuations of life in the streets. The pattern of fear and anger-based violence is self-perpetuating and predictable. But even more than in the streets, prison's forced isolation and lack of social engagement bring to the surface memories that prisoners prefer to forget. Feelings like, "Nobody wants me," "I am a fuck-up," and "There's no hope for me" can trigger sadness so overwhelming that a

person shifts into anger to defend against the sadness. Anger triggers more violence and the voice in one's head pipes up like this: "See? What did I tell you? You're a complete loser. No wonder everybody abandoned you!" The good news is that this pattern is predictable and gets easier to see over time. After we see it, we won't be able to "unsee" it. Like the first glimmer of light in the morning sky, it tells us that life can be better.

The Variations of Anger

Irritation

Annoyance

Frustration

Impatience

Resentment

Hostility

Envy

Jealousy

Vengeance

Hatred

Rage

Irritation, Annoyance, Frustration, Impatience

Anger is not a block of stone. It has degrees and variations. It's good to be able to identify these degrees and variations so you can deal with the emotion appropriately. Milder forms of anger like irritation,

annoyance, frustration and impatience are the first stirrings of fight/flight/freeze. What is causing this sense of threat? Yes, someone might be triggering you, but that trigger is in you, not in them. Some of the possibilities include: You can't explain something; You are having a hard time getting something right; You are worried about your own competence; The other person reminds you of a quality or fault in yourself that you aren't happy about; You feel forced against your will and feel powerless. In every case, the bad feeling is in yourself and says something about you, not the other person.

The learning curve here is to catch yourself feeling the emotion, realize where the emotion comes from, and stop yourself from projecting anger onto the person who is triggering your feeling. The substitute behavior here is patience—first, patience with yourself, then patience with the other person. It's important to put ourselves first because the problem is with us, not with the other. Also, it's vital to understand that patience is *doing something*, not *doing nothing*. Instead of thinking we are blocking our anger, we should think that we are practicing our patience. Patience is a complex skill which includes slowing down, self-soothing, letting in spiritual energy, and gathering focus in a relaxed way. Remember that anger is a constriction. Mild forms of anger are thus a sign that we've tightened up and closed off the Flow of Good. Like a garden hose that is crimped in one spot, we will either stop the flow or spew out energy in disorganized and useless ways. How effective can anyone be when annoyed or frustrated? If you are honest, you'll admit that you are less effective and more prone to mistakes when even mildly angry.

Another issue in this case the issue of justice and fairness. Do we want to be unfair and unjust to an innocent bystander who had the misfortune to trigger us? If we have a sufficiently developed

conscience, we will feel bad later for having been unpleasant, rude, insulting, aggressive or accusatory. In any case, conscience or no conscience, unleashing bad energy onto the other person will sting and have repercussions. So, if only for self-preservation, we shouldn't indulge ourselves in petty angry feelings like irritation, annoyance and the like. "Indulgence" is an important word here. Indulgence means going too easy on ourselves and embracing a negative behavior. For example, we indulge in petty gossip, indulge in alcohol, indulge in overeating. In other words, indulgence is a weakness; if we indulge ourselves in petty anger too easily, it can become a pattern that gains a grip over us. It's like ignoring a small hole in our shirt until it becomes a big hole that makes the shirt unwearable.

Envy, Jealousy

Envy and jealousy aren't usually associated with anger, but they should be. They are both variations of anger when we compare ourselves unfavorably with someone else. In addition to making us feel "less than," envy and jealousy imply the other person's good fortune is unfair. Also, at the core of envy and jealousy is the idea that someone's else's good takes away from ours. In other words, there is only so much good in the world and someone's "more" means "less" for us. Examined thoughtfully, this idea is unreasonable. Another common mistake is assuming the other person believes he is "better than us" because of who he is or what he has achieved. Most people don't do what they do to be better than others; they do what they do for deeply personal reasons. Or, they are just blessed by good fortune. If these lucky ones are aware and appreciative of their blessings, it's likely they are humbled and grateful rather than proud and smug. Instead of making us envious or jealous, another person's success or blessing could inspire us to reach for the same. The best

way to deal with envy and jealousy is to confront it. We can get up the courage and humility to tell the person we want to emulate, "Hey, I really admire what you did" or "I hope that one day I can have what you have." This will surprise and touch that person in a good way. This positive acknowledgement will flow back to us as goodwill and good wishes for our own success.

Envy and jealousy, like all forms of anger, are destructive. We might try to destroy that person we envy to obliterate the reminder of what we lack. But even if we succeed in our goal, we'll be destroying the good in us as well. We cannot do evil deeds without becoming the deeds we do. Ironically, by destroying another's good fortune because of jealousy or envy, we don't succeed in gaining anything for ourselves. We just waste our time, energy and attention on creating bad karma, instead of focusing on fulfilling our own potential for success and happiness. Envy and jealousy are actually signs that we don't think we are worthy or capable of the success someone else has achieved. This should give us pause. We are all worthy and we are all capable. We might have to work harder for it, but with humility and perseverance, we can do it. On the other hand, if, upon reflecting on this idea, we decide we aren't willing to put in the work, we should be more honest. We should admit that we don't have the desire or will to achieve on that level, and shift from envy and jealousy to giving the other person his due credit. For example, we might envy someone's perfect body, but realize that we don't care enough to spend hours exercising and dieting to achieve the same. If we don't care enough, why should we feel envy and jealousy towards someone who does?

Resentment

Resentment is anger that has persisted for a long time. At the root of resentment is a feeling of injustice and unfairness. For example, the

person you lashed out at in frustration may still be angry at you. He may feel your attitude was unfair and unjustified. He feels wronged and this sense of wrong makes his anger simmer. That simmering anger is resentment. Like a pot of coffee left to turn bitter on the hotplate, resentment is a slow burn. Resentment is common in families because injustice and unfairness have a long time to be repeated and build the anger. For example, a son resents the fact that his brother was favored over himself. A wife resents the time her husband spends recreating with his "bros," instead of with her. An employee resents someone less qualified and less hard-working being promoted ahead of him. At the root of resentment is not just unfairness, but also the feeling of powerlessness. A lack of agency intensifies the anger. Why? Remember that anger comes from the sense that one is being threatened. That threat is more often emotional, social or economic so getting physically aggressive doesn't address the threat. As a result, the anger has no obvious path of action. Anger that isn't directed externally else goes into our bodies. Anger always claims its victim.

Naturally, total powerlessness is seldom an accurate description. The angry person just thinks he can do nothing. The opportunity to redress a grievance may be few, and possibly comes with its own dangers. But taking some constructive action, no matter how small and potentially unsuccessful, is better than simmering with resentment. For instance, the employee could ask to speak to the boss and tell her how he feels about being overlooked for promotion. The neglected wife could go on holiday with her girlfriends on a regular basis, spending time and money on her own enjoyment. The "black sheep" brother could initiate a conversation with his parents about his perception of being less loved. When action requires us to express our feelings to another person, things can get uncomfortable. But when

things get uncomfortable, it's time to act like grown-ups and do the best we can. Half of dealing with the resentment is fixing the unfairness that has occurred; the other half is learning how to stick up for ourselves when something bothers us. Fixing the unfairness is less important than sticking up for ourselves. After all, "life is unfair," right? How often have we heard that? It's true, so being passive and powerless may become a full-time job unless we learn to channel the anger into empowering action.

Hostility, Hatred

Hostility is resentment that has turned habitual and grown in intensity. Like those charred bits of burned coffee at the bottom of the overheated pot, hostility is a kind of bitter taste that persists in the mouth and fouls the air. Hostility can grow from resentment, or it can emerge full blown from a real or imagined offense. It can be directed toward one person or group, or it can be a generalized state of anger without any particular target. Unlike resentment, which is self-contained and can be hidden, hostility is by nature projected outward and hard to hide. Hostility can break out into violent action when it is provoked or when the opportunity to act presents itself. Hostility may be justified or not, but it is just one step short of aggression and violence. It is the word most used in place of the word "war." For example, "Hostilities have broken out between the French and German forces." Or "The company was destroyed in a hostile take-over." Even without a specific object for one's hostility, hostility can become a habitual state of mind. The proverbial "angry person" or bitter, sarcastic or mean person is probably suffering from generalized hostility.

Hostility doesn't happen for no reason. Hostility usually has a long history, even if it is a forgotten history. Hostility can even be passed

on, as some families pass on racist hostility, misogynist hostility (hostility toward women) or religious hostility—like the Catholics and Protestants in Ireland. In these cases, hostility has become like a cultural tradition. New conflicts can rise and restimulate the old hostility, which intensifies quickly because of the underlying history of conflict. When people have suffered at the hands of another and never had their injuries redressed, they can naturally feel hostile. It is well understood why victims of an injustice would feel hostile toward the perpetrators of their suffering. But it is less well understood why the perpetrators and descendants of perpetrators would feel equally, if not more, hostile toward their victims. For example, many White racists whose biological or cultural ancestors were perpetrators of violence against Black people express intense hostility toward the descendants of their historical victims. Why? Shouldn't they feel shame, guilt, regret and remorse?

Shame, guilt, regret and remorse are sophisticated, complex emotions. They don't come from the primitive fight/flight/freeze brain. They arise from the more evolved parts of the brain associated with relationship, self-awareness and rational thinking. The relational part of the brain makes you feel connected to other people and leads to compassion. The self-awareness part of the brain leads to honesty and the desire to do the right thing. The rational thinking part of the brain defends against the strong instinctual urges of the primitive brain. It gives the individual the ability to take in information, reflect based on that information, and come to reasoned, balanced conclusions as the basis for his actions. But for the individual who operates only or mostly from his primitive brain, what passes for "thinking" goes like this: feelings of intense vulnerability, fear of the unknown, instinctive and irrational biases, suspicion of strangers, distrust of knowledge, "the end justifies the means," "might makes

right," easy acceptance of contradictory ideas, black-and-white thinking, preference for harsh punishment, and an authoritarian bent.

Perpetrators of other people's suffering don't have good use of their relational and rational brains, despite the fact that some may be educated and do professional work. This is not a difficult fact to understand. Most of us have two hands, but few of us are sculptors. We can have two legs yet not be dancers. Similarly, we can have the same mental equipment and even similar levels of education yet have very different abilities to relate and reason.

Hatred is an entirely different animal from hostility, which can be subject to some control. Hatred is far more intense. It has a life of its own. Hatred is seeing another as unworthy of respect, understanding, compassion, mercy, dignity and even life. Hatred reduces the hated into an object, something subhuman. Hatred can lead to one thinking that any action against the hated object is justified, therefore morally acceptable. One example is when a victim of a crime advocates for the maximum punishment for the perpetrator so that he might suffer. Other examples of hatred include the extermination of Jews, and the destruction of Native Americans and their culture. In every case, the haters demonize the people they hate, exaggerating or outright lying about them in order to justify treating them as subhuman. No matter whether justified or not, hatred is costly for the one who hates. Even more than anger, hatred constricts us spiritually and thus limits emotional growth. It keeps us from experiencing the finer emotions such as joy, peace, gratitude and forgiveness. In fact, hating someone or some group keeps our minds obsessed with the ones we hate. We cannot be free of them.

People who have injured, harmed or betrayed other people should be the ones who suffer, not their victims. But how can victims promote

their healing from hatred? What is the best and most wholesome attitude we can take toward the perpetrators? Must we "turn the other cheek?" Do we have to forgive them? This is a critical issue for everyone because the people who betray and injure us are frequently family members, mates, friends and trusted authority figures. This is partly because they have the most access to us and influence over our welfare. Also, we let our guard down around them. That is, we turn off our warning alarms when it comes to these trusted people. This is why (as the song goes) "You always hurt the ones you love" and "Hell hath no fury like a woman scorned." In other words, trust makes us vulnerable to betrayal, and betrayal by someone we trust is particularly hurtful. This sense of betrayal can spark hatred or some version of it. So what is the best strategy for dealing with hatred, when the animosity is justified?

First, it is important to know that energy travels in a circle, always returning to the originator of that energy, just like a boomerang. The circle may take a while to complete itself, but every day the individual denies the wrong, refuses to take responsibility or continues in his pattern of behavior, the boomerang gathers force. But just as negative energy travels in a circle for the perpetrator, so does it travel in a circle for us. We cannot do a wrong in response to a wrong, because these are independent wrongs, each with its own life. A second evil does not cancel out the first. At the same time, we do not owe forgiveness to the one who has injured us. Forgiveness is a gift of grace that flows from God; forgiveness is spiritually healing. But one can ask only God for forgiveness, not his victim. Moreover, the perpetrator must earn forgiveness through his actions. He can sincerely apologize and potentially give his victim some relief. But this apology may not be enough to quell the feeling of victimization and hatred. In this case, the victim must ask for God's forgiveness for the

offense of hating her offender. Grace can dissolve hate and heal injury. We only need to be open to it.

Rage: Tantrums for Adults

Rage is anger that is expressed violently and forcefully, usually directed at others. We have probably all experienced or observed rage because we have all been children. When humans become overwhelmed with stress, frustration, fear, sadness or any number of uncomfortable emotions, they may explode physically or verbally. Some children do this on a regular basis. They lash out, yell, cry, throw things and stomp their feet. Adults call these outbursts "tantrums." When adults have tantrums, it is called "rage." Rage is more frightening in adults than in children because it is louder, more physical, and potentially more dangerous. But in the end, rage is still a tantrum wearing grown-up pants. It indicates that a person has reached his limit of coping with stress, frustration, fear, sadness etc. and the internal pressure has built up to the explosive stage. During a rage, individuals report being in an almost trance-like or out-of-the-body state. It's not dissimilar to the drug- or alcohol-induced "black-out" that some addicts describe.

The raging person may not even hear or see what is going on outside himself as his rage consumes him. Later he may also not remember what he did or said during his "black out." It's not that he has "forgotten." Instead, he never took in this information in the first place. As a ramped-up version of the "fight" instinct, rage mobilizes blood flow, oxygen, mental focus and various hormones to the point of producing a neurochemical "high." But what rage really tells us about the raging person is that he is overwhelmed and vulnerable. He may be feeling sad, anxious, humiliated or shamed—all painfully toxic emotions. A person in the act of raging may look strong, but he is

actually at a low point. Rage is his cry of despair. For the person in a rage, the explosion can release emotional pressure and offer temporary relief from stress. But the operative word here is "temporary." Rage is exhausting and debilitating. It leaves us weaker. It also has other serious consequences. It is a form of violence that—like all forms of violence—leaves wreckage that may be hard to repair.

When Prisoners Get Angry

It is not uncommon for individuals in prison to have issues with rage and violence. They carry scars from emotional damage sustained in their families and communities. More often than not, the injury was ongoing over many developmental periods from infancy to young adulthood. As a result, most prisoners suffer from some degree of Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder. By the time they come to prison, many prisoners have a combination of serious liabilities: they may illiterate, undereducated, lacking in marketable skills or suffer from substance abuse problems, serious health issues like diabetes and heart disease, psychiatric diagnoses, physical injuries from street violence, and a lack of social support. Often, they have spent time in abusive foster homes and violent juvenile facilities, been suspended or expelled from school, and have a long history of negative experiences with authority figures, including teachers and law enforcement.

Prisoners have little reason to trust the institution of prison, its staff and its programs, to help them. With their overwhelmingly threatening physical appearance, punitive policies, restrictive conditions, arbitrary decisions, and limited opportunities for education, recreation and spiritual growth, prisons are continuations of the deprivations and oppressions prisoners experienced in the home and the streets. Added to this mix are extreme overcrowding, lack of privacy and space, chronic violence and threat of violence, social

isolation from caring human contact, and inmate mental health breakdowns and suicides. In short, multiple reasons exist for inmates to be stressed, angry and violent in prison. But because prisons, as flawed as they are, fulfill law enforcement's basic goal to remove and isolate offenders from society, little motivation exists to substantially change them.

Prisoners are not shown much if any understanding and compassion for their extreme suffering, both prior to prison and in prison. Because of their "subhuman" status, prisoners are seen as unworthy of such consideration. Prisoners are encouraged to focus on their faults and errors; feel guilt and shame; and accept any mistreatment or injustice as deserved. This attitude generates more hurt, hostility, resentment and hate. As we know, even when anger is justified, it is still a stumbling block to progress. How can prisoners rise above their justified anger and work toward their good? First, prisoners can refuse to accept incarceration as an absolute limitation on personal growth and healing. Growth and healing are vastly more difficult to attain in prison, but it's possible. To make it possible, first we must compare ourselves to people who have faced similar obstacles, or worse ones, rather than those more blessed or privileged. If we do the first, we will be inspired and humbled. If we do the second, we will be discouraged and resentful. Second, we must create our own community of like-minded people, focused on self-help and rehabilitation. This can begin with just one other individual. If possible, find a mentor outside of prison to provide materials and communication. Third, work on creating a long-range dream, plan and strategy to fulfill that dream. Anger is easy to avoid when we have something positive to think about and do. Don't "manage" anger. Replace it with something better.

Things to Think About or Do

The following activities are adaptable. You can take an activity meant to be done alone and turn it into a group sharing and discussion. You can take a group activity and do it on your own. You can break down one activity into smaller ones. You can create projects, write poems and essays, draw and act things out, based on your experiences. You can create new activities on your own. If you do, please let us know so that we can add it to our material with your permission.

1. Recall the first time you got angry. Remember all the details: the place, the people, the sounds and smells, etc. What happened just before you got angry? What provoked your anger? How did you express your anger? How did people respond to you? How did you feel afterwards? How does your current understanding of this incident differ from what you thought in the past?

2. Things tend to patten in patterns. What makes you angry today is likely similar to what made you angry in the past? What is the common thread in your history of anger?

3. Trauma is a very real psychological condition. It is caused by having to confront an overwhelming fear, a serious threat either to your body or emotions. You know if it's trauma when it "feels the same" as other incidents or situations that upset you greatly in the past. The trauma gets its power from this history of feeling endangered, the repetition of the hurt and fear. Think of the last time you got very afraid, angry or hurt. What other times have you have felt this way? What did the most recent incident remind you of?

4. Because of the power of repetition, we can be easily triggered even by small things that fit or seem to fit the pattern. Looking over your trauma history, what are some of your "trauma triggers?" For example, someone looking at you in a way that feels like disrespect; a woman who becomes emotionally cold and rejecting; a child who continues to whine. What other incidents fit your trigger pattern? Were you always right when you interpreted the trigger as a warning sign that you are in danger?

5. Armed with your new insights into your trauma patterns, how do you think you can deal with your fight/flight/freeze provocations in the future? What are some aspects of your improved strategy?

6. Talk to people you trust to be honest and open with you. Ask them about their own experiences of fight/flight/freeze. Ask them what makes them angry and how they deal with anger.

7. Write an essay about how you've dealt with anger in the past. Make sure you tell personal stories, not just repeat what you've read or write about ideas.

8. What is the most interesting idea you've learned in this material on anger? Why is it significant to you?

9. What insights have you had about other peoples' anger patterns? Your mom, your dad, your wife, husband, etc. What do you think makes them feel threatened?

10. At first some behaviors are hard to fit into the fight/flight/freeze survival instinct. But they always fit. Reflect on a previously confusing behavior and try to make sense out of

it from the survival brain perspective. For example, a parent might rage at a whining or crying child because the child's pain triggers his own experiences of neglect or abandonment. A husband or wife who withdraws emotionally from a spouse might be acting out the "freeze" survival response. A spouse who leaves during an argument is acting out the "flight" response. Use this understanding help find better ways to cope with conflict and pain.

11. Do you feel that you have a right to be angry? Do you feel you have the right to advocate for your welfare and protect yourself when your good is threatened? Refine your strategy and techniques for expressing anger, advocating for yourself, and protecting yourself. What do you most want to avoid doing and saying? What can you do and say instead? Do you know anyone who is a good example of such skills?

12. Reflect on your own maturity. In what ways are you "grown up?" In what ways are you still thinking and/or behaving like an adolescent? How can you mature in the ways in which you less adult? When it comes to anger, how much have you matured since your adolescence? How has this changed (or not changed) your life experiences?

13. What other emotions do you think your anger is covering up for? Write yourself a letter explaining this to yourself. Behind most anger is hurt and fear. Allow yourself to grieve for what you have lost or never had. Be honest, but also kind.

14. Once you have realized the true causes behind your anger, reflect with this insight on other people's anger: for example, your spouse, parents, children. What do you think they really

might have been feeling? Reflect on this with compassion and sympathy.

15. Only we can create the feeling of safety other people need to express their true feelings to us. It may be uncomfortable to listen to people who are angry at you, but it's the only way to confront problems and maintain healthy relationships. Some people may need encouragement to open up. Some may need help to explore what they are feeling. Some people may need to learn the skill of talking honestly about how they feel instead of indulging in blame and verbal violence. Most of us need to improve in all three ways. Instead of being afraid of emotional confrontations, or becoming angry and defensive, do your best to be honest and compassionate. Practice deep listening skills. It's a learning curve for everyone.