

Managing Negative Emotions: Anger, Bitterness, Hatred

– Ranjini Isaac

Anger, a lifestyle: In a rapidly changing, fast paced world everyone wants to be ahead and stay connected. Gadgets and gizmos, electronic devices have changed the way people live and interact. Cellphones, Internet, emails and all forms of information transfer, has made life faster and therefore there is a sense of urgency in everything. Although this has been helpful in many ways, there is a downside to it. The need or the obligation to stay connected has replaced the need for solitude and meditation. We live in a stress filled society where everyone is overworked, overscheduled, overspent and therefore overwhelmed and over reacting leading to anger and hostility.

- Adapted from Tim Lahaye's audio book "Anger is a choice"

Anger is a natural emotional response experienced by all. Like all other emotions, anger is also a 'signal emotion' designed to protect us from any form of threat or danger to our wellbeing. It is part of our instinct to protect and preserve ourselves. However, anger ceases to be a form of protecting life and becomes a means of destroying life and relationships when the threat or danger is imagined and isn't real. Anger in itself is not classified as an emotional disorder. It becomes problematic only when it is experienced frequently and intensely and interferes with one's life goals, ability to connect with one another, or is harmful to health. Anger is everybody's problem.

Anger is an emotional state which varies in intensity from mild irritation to intense fury and rage. Anger if used constructively can be positive and empowering.

The emotion of anger can be experienced and expressed in the mildest to the most destructive form both internally and externally. Chronic, suppressed anger can cause bitterness or rage.

Society and culture are factors that often determine the expression of anger. Men express anger more aggressively as the emotion is often considered to be a 'macho' trait. Men also choose aggression to put fear in the spouse and the children. Women, on the other hand tend to suppress anger, thereby become

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depressed and self-injure. Studies show that men are more often referred for anger management therapy and women for depression.

Bitterness, malice, wrath, envy, resentment, criticism, revenge, hatred, jealousy, etc., are all symptoms of anger.

Bitterness: Bitterness is a feeling of deep anger and resentment. Bitterness encompasses both anger and hate. However bitterness is often a result of some past event which has hurt, scarred and jaded the person.

Anger, like any other emotional state is influenced by our thoughts (our core belief system) our behaviour and our physiology (body). Anger itself is a completely rational emotion as it is designed to protect us from any form of real threat or danger. However it is the core belief system in our mind which is often not rational. It is the way we perceive the thoughts and events in our mind which is often distorted, that causes the anger response.

On the surface anger seems irrational, but you need to look below the surface to understand the real cause of anger which one needs to overcome.

The behavioral expression of anger often distracts us from the real issue inside. Anger takes many forms. Most people do not regard themselves as angry individuals because anger disguises itself in many ways. Some of the following emotions are actually variation of anger.

Hatred: Hatred is an extreme form of dislike or anger towards a person. Hate is when you are unwilling to let go of your anger.

People with anger control problems frequently experience associated difficulties with:

- interpersonal relationships,
- low self-esteem,
- Mental and physical health.

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Causes of Anger: Anger is everybody's problem. The major causes of anger problems for any individual are the interaction of both internal and external factors. Internal causes are rooted in childhood formative experiences. Growing up in families that are disrupted and dysfunctional, hardly communicative, with a history of violence or aggression, physical, emotional abuse or neglect all contribute to producing angry individuals- Angry fathers produce angry children.

External factors play an important role in determining anger and aggression like-

- Frustration, provocation, peer influence, addictions, poor living conditions, poverty, etc.
- When a person doesn't get what he wants- when someone or something blocks one's goal.
- When he/she is corrected for wrong doing/mistakes.
- When a person feels unjustly treated or hurt.
- Poor/chronic physical illness
- Emotional pain caused by betrayal and loss of trust.

Anger in Marriage. The major cause for disrupted marriages is because of anger and hostility between couples, often begins with simple irritations and ends in bitterness and divorce.

Anger in homes, between parents and children is often disguised as a strict disciplinarian parent venting his aggression on children in the form of verbal, emotional, physical abuse.

Work place anger is on the increase between employer/employee/coworkers, due to work pressure, competition and increased expectation on both sides. In a fast paced world, everyone is expected to multitask-housewives, mothers,

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adults, teenagers and even children, leaving behind a trail of irritable people, when they are unable to accomplish as much as they are expected to.

Anger on the road is often a spillover of this lifestyle. Eating, talking on the cell-phone, coupled with a sense of urgency while driving makes the road a place to vent anger. Impatience leading to road rage is a serious problem all over the world.

Steps to Managing Anger, Bitterness, Hatred:

- Increasing self-esteem,
- Improving one's ability to cope,
- Enhance communication skills
- Examining the person's goals and values.
- Learning to control with anger itself

Recognize Anger: Becoming aware of the nature of the emotion itself and acknowledging the need to overcome anger is the key to managing emotion.

Remember anger if used constructively can be positive and empowering. Anger can be constructive when it causes a person to respond to injustice or any act of violation of individual and human rights. This kind of anger leads to positive peoples' initiatives.

Anger in the active form can be expressed in aggressive behavior towards whatever triggered the anger, in the form of physical abuse or attack against others.

In its passive form, it can come out as verbal abuse, in the form of sarcasm, criticism, or mockery.

Change your core beliefs: To manage anger effectively, we need to change our thoughts and perceptions – our core beliefs and the way our mind perceives and interprets them. Change your negative thought patterns to

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positive. This means challenging your beliefs and perceptions. If you know what's driving your behavior then you may have to actually accept the fact that you are responsible for your actions. The fastest way to take control of your anger is to take full responsibility. And the fastest way to begin figuring out others is to figure out 'you' first.

Identify potential consequences of anger to others and to yourself:

Anger is the emotion, it is ok to be angry, while aggression is acting out your anger and it is not ok. Learn ways to control your aggression and express your anger in appropriate ways. You cannot express anger whenever and however you wish. You cannot repress anger and not feel it yourself. Repressed anger leads to stress, guilt and misery.

Studies have shown that the digestive process in the stomach comes to a halt, whenever someone is feeling anger or bitterness, because it not what you eat that matters, but what's eating you! The stomach is made for good will and not ill will. Good will sets it up and ill will upsets it!

Similarly the soul is not designed to harbor bitterness and resentments. Forgive yourself and forgive others regularly. Forgiveness is a key to overcoming anger, bitterness and hatred. Flush all the bitterness out of your soul as you would flush a toxic substance out of your body. So the most helpful exercise is to get rid of every trace of rancor.

Know your trigger buttons:

List things that make you angry. Like rude remarks, being left out, someone taking away what rightfully belongs to you, being treated unfairly, being teased, etc.

Examine your thought signals: It's not fair, I feel cheated, I hate myself, I can't stand that guy, I feel like telling someone off, nothing seems right, etc.

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Learn to control your emotional reactions: Tell yourself that you can change from being a reactor of the emotion to being a processor.

Taking a deep breath, counting upto ten, are simple ways of taking control of oneself.

- Be aware of body signals:
Muscles tighten, face grows hotter, heart races, fists clench, and stomach feels uncomfortable. If you experience these symptoms frequently and intensely it means that your anger has gone out of control and can become the cause of health problems like hypertension, stomach ulcers, heart attacks and strokes.
- Develop communication and respect in your relationships: Choose appropriate time to settle/discuss issues.
- Be willing to talk and clear the air and discuss the problem in a respectful way.
- Don't argue to have the last word.
- Listen to what the other person has to say.
- Talk about how you feel without blaming the other person, using 'I'-messages. For e.g. "I feel very upset about the way things are going."
- Think of alternative ways to solve the problem.
- Find positive ways of releasing your anger.
- Exercise, workout, play games/go for a swim.
- Journal your thoughts and feelings.
- Quiet the negative thoughts in your mind, do not rehearse them.
- Indulge in positive self-talk. You need to change your internal conversation and meditate on positive thoughts.
- Create love and happiness in your life.
- Add humor and laughter
- Eat right, sleep well.

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- Don't let the sun go down with your anger. Don't let your anger build up.
- Learn to forgive and forget
- Choose friends who will help you feel good
- Do relaxation exercises.
- Work on your emotions with the help of a counselor/ therapist.

Remember, you have the power to be or not to be! Anger, bitterness and hatred is a choice.

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