

Anger; What Lies Beneath it All?

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Received: November 11, 2019; **Published:** November 22, 2019

Anger. Tension. We often confuse our anger with other emotions. With regret, frustration, jealousy, guilt, humiliation. We are not familiar with the process of observing ourselves and always being capable of recognizing our emotions. Sometimes, it is easier to feel angry than to admit that we feel hurt. Feeling hurt conveys a sense of failure or weakness that is impossible to endure or handle. It is more socially acceptable to feel angry than to feel hurt, especially for men.

Stereotypically, anger is considered to be a “masculine” emotion and sadness a “feminine”. In our minds, anger is linked to more dynamic personality traits, while sadness or distress are thought to be indications of tenderness, vulnerability, and weakness. Consequently, anger is often used as a protective shield for an individual, creating an image of someone who may be intimidating to others, which is why frequently anger works as a mask to conceal our fear. It is better to make others be afraid of us, than to allow them to get close enough and see our fear.

Conversely, sadness or distress, are emotions that we have attached to a more sensitive aspect of our personality and thus, they make us vulnerable to others, creating a sense of perceived threat. A person who shows his anger is expected to react to a behavior or a comment, while a person who shows his sadness more easily is not. Therefore, the individual who shows his sadness becomes more easily a target than the one who demonstrates his anger. But where does the anger come from?

Often, we feel angry or we are used to put the label “angry” on ourselves or the others. In fact, our anger works like an umbrella, beneath which we hide a variety of emotions that we do not even recognize for ourselves or we do not want to see or show to others. When things do not go as planned, when we experience rejection or betrayal, when we fail, when we have no control over things or our needs are not fulfilled, when we feel that others do not understand us, when we feel inadequate, unappreciated, unacceptable... we get angry.

When was the first time you felt angry? You probably cannot even remember. Anger is one of the basic human emotions we experience early in life. A stimulus, something you see or hear, triggers that feeling, which is also expressed physically in various symptoms. Your heart starts to pulse faster, your blood pressure rises, your breathing becomes faster and sharper, your blood is directed to the large muscles of your body that will prepare you to “fight” or “flee” from the condition that caused this tension. Your body, with no conscious control, automatically enters a process of self-protection and survival. Due to the increased blood flow to the body, you may start sweating, feel dizzy and notice that your limbs start to tremble. Because there is so much tension in the muscles of the body and the adrenaline is high, when the tension starts to wear off, you feel tired and exhausted.

Anger often is about communication. We have not learned to express ourselves, to say what we think or feel, what we need, what we do not like, what bothers or hurts us. We expect others to guess what we have in our minds, and we get angry when they don't or they reach wrong conclusions. We tend to keep things and at some point, because we've accumulated a lot of stuff inside us and the system is overloaded, we make the bam and lash out. We fail to manage our emotions and the intensity with which we experience them. Explosion.

When you get angry, you feel that something that is valuable to you is not understood, respected or accepted. Anger touches a side of yourself that is hurt and vulnerable. It may be related to a negative perception that you have for yourself, which may reflect reality or not, which you may be repulsed by, refuse and avoid to see, and you try to bury it, because it affects you deeply, and you are hurt by the possibility of it reflecting the truth. So, when an external factor triggers that perception, “activates” it, you get angry, you react, because you try to protect yourself and avoid coming into contact with the reality. Basically, anger is used to protect you from a threat or situation that you perceive as threatening, because you may feel that your reputation, your dignity, your values, your capabilities or whatever you consider important for who you are is being offended, misinterpreted or doubted.

We often say “hold your wrath, do not express it”, “don’t say or do things in the moment that you will regret later”. But not expressing yourself at all can be just as damaging. If you can understand what is inside you that is being threatened and it affects you so intensely that you cannot withstand a situation, then it will be easier for you to learn to manage your anger. Control it and not be controlled by it.

Volume 8 Issue 12 December 2019

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