

What's behind My Anger?

Anger is one of our most destructive emotions. For many of us, it is a near-constant plague. And anger is the cause of so many of our other problems. But what's behind the anger itself?

In my process, I have learned that anger is a secondary emotion; follows either fear or pain, perhaps both. "Fear" & "pain" are defined very broadly. I may fear that my life is in danger, or that I may look weak in others' eyes. I may experience physical pain, as from a punch to the nose, or the pain of hurt pride. Since I get scared or hurt before I get angry, then fear & pain are the "primary" emotions, & anger is the "secondary" emotion.

Armed with this awareness, I can take a brief inventory whenever I am angry. I ask myself, "What am I afraid of? How does this person (or situation) scare me?" "How have I been hurt?" By asking these questions, I can discover the pain or fear that I is there.

Sometimes I discover that my pain & fear are rational; it is perfectly reasonable to feel hurt or afraid, given the objective facts. In this case, my anger is rational & justified (though I still must behave appropriately). More often, though, I find that my pain & fear are irrational; it doesn't make sense to feel hurt or afraid, given the facts. In this case, my anger is irrational & unjustified.

My brief "anger inventories" often reveal that either, 1) my ego is involved somehow, or 2) I have unrealistic expectations which have not been met. This enables me to laugh at myself & my own ridiculousness. I then remind myself of my own inventory & what it reveals about my self-image, pride, & intolerance. I remind myself of my commitment to patience, detachment, humility, & peace of mind. I think it's amazing that my Higher Power has turned one of my biggest character defects into one of my best assets.

Please, for the world's sake, act as if your children are going to mimic your behavior.

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