

“Don’t get mad, get righteous.”

Haven’t we all heard a variation on that? “Don’t get mad, get even.” These phrases represent two sources of anger. The latter has its roots in ego and the former at a perceived wrong outside of feelings about ourselves.

“What is the real origin of my own anger? Is it the ego defending its territory, or is it something that has its source in the desire for the well-being of all?”

— Jean-Yves Leloup, *Compassion and Meditation: The Spiritual Dynamic between Buddhism and Christianity*

Of course we all get mad. It’s as natural a human emotion as joy, grief, fear, love, and anxiety. But what is at the root of personally driven anger? Calm reflection about what causes self centered anger may reveal that it is actually a response to less manageable feelings of hurt, frustration, shame, anxiety, guilt or helplessness.

“Anger is just anger. It isn't good. It isn't bad. It just is. What you do with it is what matters. It's like anything else. You can use it to build or to destroy. You just have to make the choice.”

— Jim Butcher, *White Night*. Make anger your servant, not your master.

But let’s face it, anger can be easy and seductive. Easier than examining what the catalyst is for bringing the seed of anger to bloom but also more destructive. When have you ever made a good decision in a state of rage?

AJ Heschel says “In a controversy, the instant we feel anger, we have already ceased striving for the truth and have begun striving for ourselves.” How true this can be when we start to talk politics or religion with someone who has views that are very different from our own.

This is not to say that the anger we feel when personally affronted should be ignored or repressed. The hurt we feel when boundaries have been crossed or expectations not met makes us mad and/or depressed. The issue is how do we take care of our own needs without flying off the handle and causing hurt in return? Calm and clear limit setting and expression of

expectations in a relationship requires skill and emotional work that is more taxing and complex than simply being pissed off.

“Anybody can become angry — that is easy, but to be angry with the right person and to the right degree and at the right time and for the right purpose, and in the right way — that is not within everybody's power and is not easy.”

— Aristotle

Some things should make us angry: injustice, poverty, cruelty, greed. Righteous anger can be fruitful if it produces a constructive response to an unrighteous situation. Anger is healthy to the degree it causes us to take action in response to morally unacceptable behaviors, situations or conditions. Unlike egocentric anger, acting on anger stemming from something outside of our selves is not followed by regret and pain but is redemptive. Acting on these angry feelings, can almost be considered a moral duty.

“I wish for you all, each of you, to have your own motive for indignation. This is precious. When something outrages you as I was outraged by Nazism, then people become militant, strong, and involved.”

-Stephane Hessel

Some questions for consideration:

What is anger? What is the catalyst?

How do you deal with rage that has no object, such as what you might feel over the untimely death of a loved one?

What is the difference between righteousness and being right?

Why do we hang onto anger and how does it end?

What effect does anger have on you?

How can you make anger your servant rather than your master?

Can you be righteous without being angry?

Have you ever had an e-mail exchange that has gone off the tracks? What would have happened if you'd had the conversation face to face?

What is the opposite of anger?

