

Hypnosis and Anger Management

Hypnosis and Anger – Sinan Koray

My name is Sinan and I am a person who gets angry. I'm not violent nor do I rage inappropriately, but I often experience anger. Sometimes I'm not even aware that I am angry: my friends and family can detect it, even when I can't.

I'm not too comfortable admitting this. I'm concerned that from now on this confession may mark me in some way. I imagine being introduced, "This is Sinan, he is that angry person." Or people will just point at me and say: "There he is, Sinan, the angry man we read about. Let's cross the street so we don't have to talk to him."

When I was little, I wasn't allowed to have temper tantrums. These days, as I watch children throw temper tantrums, I get a pretty good idea what I had to suppress when I was their age. To say children's anger isn't encouraged or validated is a gross understatement. Parents, and most adults, treat little kids' anger as something to be fixed, changed, stifled, discouraged and if all else fails punished. Angry children are sent to their room, threatened with or actually given physical punishment. Adults who are not related to the child who is throwing a temper tantrum will stare, tsk tsk, or hurry away out of earshot from the outburst.

Do you remember the last time you were in a public place where a little one was screaming, crying and carrying on? Did you look away? Did you have judgements about how the parent was handling it? Did the whole event bother you? (Don't be ashamed to admit it, we've all been trained to see anger and its expressions as distasteful, inappropriate and impolite).

The consistent message about anger we give to our children is that expressions of anger are shameful. If anger must be expressed (and many adults do not accept that it must be expressed) then this expression must be done in private, certainly quietly, and preferably when the child is alone. Perhaps you are wondering what I was so angry about. I spent most of my primary school days learning how to avoid being bullied by the "angry" kids. Then there were the angry teachers as well. I learned to suppress any loudness that could attract their attention. I learned to be quiet no matter what I was feeling. A careless outburst of joy was just as punishable as an angry scream. I grew up with an alcoholic father. Along with many happy memories with both my parents I have memories of being made wrong and shamed by my dad. My father's infidelities were often a source of violent arguments between my parents. I had fantasies of standing up to him. I never did. My mom would often share her pain with me and wanting me to side with her.

As an adolescent, my sense of powerlessness grew. Dad was drinking more and on occasion he would hit my mom. It didn't matter if others were around. I was only beaten up twice and each one was a devastation. In high school, I was a boarder and learned to survive the bullying by being cautious. I often was the younger or the weaker one being beaten up, an easy target. I am not complaining. My parents were not monsters; they were a couple of confused and stressed adults doing their best. My circumstances were no worse than most of my friends. I do not believe that circumstances are the root cause of anger. As someone who makes a living helping people, both in private sessions and workshops, I get to see that anger is a natural, normal, healthy emotion. We all have anger. It's built into us like joy, love and fear.

Anger is a messenger, a signal that tells us we are off-course. Anger may be telling us that we are being hurt, that our rights and boundaries are being violated, that our needs or wants are not being met or that something is wrong. Unfortunately, with all that conditioning to suppress or hide our anger, we often shoot the messenger! We try to stuff our anger down inside ourselves, completely turning it on ourselves, creating depression and feeding our sense of self-esteem. Or we stuff it as much as we can, until we can't anymore and then explode inappropriately, usually creating hurt and guilt and more anger later. Or we walk around "leaking" anger all the time, splashing a little on everyone we come in contact with.

At the core of our experience of anger is our sense of powerlessness. We get angry when we come face to face with unexpected impotence. Anger is awakened when we think our power has been taken away by someone or something else (parents, boss, organisation, banks, salesman, government, terrorists) We experience anger when we feel too small to make a difference, too insignificant. In other words our anger could be a call to action. Our anger asks us the questions: "How am I powerless right now? How have I given away my power? What can I do right now to increase my sense of potency?" Sadly, most of us confuse power with force. The only true power is one that empowers others. "Creating a win-win" isn't just a slogan, it is a recipe for potency. Anger that finds its outlet in shows of force: violence to each other or to property; hurling abusive language at ourselves or others; trampling the rights of others; is the kind of response that leaves us feeling less potent, less empowered. Once there are winners and losers, then my position as a winner is always tenuous, at any time I may become a loser if the fighting erupts again.

When we welcome our anger, and the anger of others, when we listen to the messenger, a world of possibilities opens. When we allow our anger to motivate change in ourselves and our surroundings we unleash this powerful tool for good. Let me remind you that Gandhi was angry, angry about being a second class citizen in his own homeland. And his anger fuelled the birth of his nation, India, as well as the modern practice of non-violent civil disobedience. Martin Luther King was angry, and his anger awakened his nation to the insanity of "separate but equal" doctrine.

We can, and must, change our attitude towards anger. As we find appropriate expressions of anger, we learn how to make a difference to ourselves, our families, our community. I invite you to look at your life and find the source of your powerlessness. What might enhance your potency in this situation? Having a conversation? Writing a letter? Seeking mediation? Circulating a petition? Making peace with your choices? Letting yourself or someone else off the hook? What action will you take? And notice, as you validate and honour your anger, how much more of you is available, notice what other feelings are hiding in there.

Perhaps you too will be willing to stand up and be counted as person who occasionally gets angry.

Source: Adapted by Sinan Koray from an article by Chip August. Sinan is a Clinical Member of the AHA and is in private practice in Sydney, Australia.