

# Control Anger before It Controls You

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Mr. Harvinder Singh, a transporter from west Delhi, upset over corruption and the prevailing price rise curtly slapped the chief guest, Mr. Sharad Pawar, Hon. Union Agriculture minister, in a function on Thursday 24 November 2011. This assault triggered instant reaction from politicians with a view to benefit their parties. Ministers expressed anger against Mr. Singh and concern for Mr. Pawar. NCP workers owing allegiance to Mr. Pawar expressed their anger violently by destroying public and private property. Social activist Mr. Anna Hazare reacted uncharitably but flayed the attack. Some felt the act to be a shameful insult to the 'Marathi Manos', angrily declaring that Maharashtrians will not tolerate it while some others hinted at a larger political conspiracy. Most felt that the attack was for cheap publicity. The Sikh community to preempt any angry communal fallout of the incident distanced itself by condemning the act and the attacker, calling it unlawful and fascist. Most citizens believed the incident only happened because of people's anger against politicians, rising prices, corruption scandals, dubbing it as a slap on the government's functioning. However, Mr. Pawar smartly outwitting all others did not blame either politicians or the political parties, but angrily found fault on people's groups, claiming them as attempting to malign and discredit parliament and other institutional setups in our functional democracy. In either way, all parties involved in the incident directly or indirectly, were angry against one or other according to their perspective.

So what is anger?

## Anger, its forms, and philosophy

Anger is what we have all felt either as a fleeting annoyance or as full-fledged rage. Anger is a normal, usually healthy, human emotion. Anger is a manifestation of Shakti or Devi. A Sanskrit Shloka in praise of the goddess, says,

या देवी सर्वभुतेषु क्रोधरूपेण संस्थिता ॥  
नमस्तस्यै नमस्तस्यै नमस्तस्यै नमो नमः ॥

*"I bow again, again, and again to that Devi, who is seated in all beings in the form of anger".*

The instinctive, natural way to express anger is to respond aggressively. Anger is a natural, adaptive response to threats. It inspires powerful, often aggressive, feelings and behaviors, allowing us to fight and defend ourselves from attack. Thus, a certain amount of anger is necessary for our survival. Only when anger gets out of control and turns destructive, it leads to problems, at work, in personal relationships, in the overall quality of our life, making us feel as though we are at the mercy of an unpredictable powerful emotion. Everyone, without exception is a victim of this horrible malady and its control is necessary to bring supreme peace and immeasurable joy in our life.

Anger is a negative *Vritti* or vortex born out of ignorance. It is a strong emotion, excited by a real or fancied injury, involving a desire for retaliation. It begins in folly and ends in repentance. Anger is a stronger term than resentment, but not as strong as "indignation"

awakened by flagitious in character or conduct, or as wrath, fury, rage, in which anger is wrought up to a still higher point in the order of these words. Anger is a sudden sentiment of displeasure and drives a person beyond the bounds of prudence or discretion.

The anger of fire we kindle for our enemy burns us too. According to a Buddhist saying, anger is like a piece of burning coal that we use to hit out against someone else. The hurled piece of live coal may hit the person, injuring him as we intend at that moment. However, the most injured and seared, is the one who hurls the coal, the one who held it in the first place.

In the Bhagavad Gita, Arjuna asks Sri Krishna, “But what impels man to commit sin, O Krishna, in spite of himself, and driven as it were, by force?” The blessed Lord says:

काम एष क्रोध एष रजोगुणसमुद्भवः ।  
महाशनो महापाप्मा विद्ध्येनमिह वैरिणाम् ॥

*“It is desire, it is wrath, which, springs from passion. Know that it is our enemy here, a monster of greed and sin”.*

Sri Krishna further adds,

त्रिविधं नरकस्योदं द्वारं नाशनमात्मनः ।  
काम क्रोधस्तथा लोभस्तस्मादेतत्त्रयं त्यजेत् ॥

*“Three are the gateways of this hell leading to the ruin of the soul, and they are, lust, wrath, and greed. Therefore let man renounce these three.”*

When we think of objects of senses, attachment to these objects develops. From attachment desire is born. From desire, anger comes forth. Just as heat melts lead, just as heat and borax melt gold, so also Kama (lust) and Krodha (Anger), the heating factors of the mind, melts the mind. All evil qualities and actions proceed from anger. Anger begets eight kinds of vices namely, injustice,

rashness, persecution, jealousy, taking possession of others’ property, killing, harsh words and cruelty. If we can eradicate anger, all bad qualities will die by themselves.

When one’s desire is not gratified and someone stands in the way of its fulfillment, one becomes angry. This desire becomes anger making them lose their memory, with their understanding becoming clouded and intellect perverted.

क्रोधाद्भवति संमोहः संमोहात् स्मृतिविभ्रमः ।  
स्मृतिभ्रंशाद् बुद्धिनाशो बुद्धिनाशात् प्रणश्यति ॥

*“From anger comes delusion, from delusion, loss of memory; from loss of memory, destruction of reason; from destruction of reason he perishes.”*

An angry man will do anything he likes, without understanding what he is exactly doing as he becomes emotional and impulsive. Anger destroys reason and under its influence a person, abuses, insults, fights and will commit all sorts of sinful deeds, even murdering his mother, father, brother, sister, guru, wife, breaking intimate friendships. Anger makes everybody its slave and victim.

Anger influenced even Hanuman the mightiest brahmachari (celibate) to burn Lanka. Losing his understanding, he later repented “Alas! I have burnt the whole of Lanka under the influence of anger. This fire might have burnt mother Sita also. What shall I do now? I have become a victim to anger. How powerful is anger? I believed that I am a powerful brahmachari having destroyed passion to its very root and branch and yet I have not controlled anger. Is anger more powerful than passion?”

Anyone becoming prey to anger, as if under intoxication, temporarily loses his or her normal consciousness. Irritation, frowning,

resentment, indignation, rage, fury, wrath, are all varieties of anger, according to the degree of intensity. Resentment is continued bitterness. Wrath is a heightened sentiment of anger. Wrath is deep and vengeful displeasure, simply expresses the culmination of righteous indignation without malice in a pure being. Fury is stronger, sweeping one into uncontrollable violence. If one wants to correct another and manifests slight anger unselfishly, as a force to check and improve, we can call it as “righteous indignation” or “spiritual anger”. Supposing a man molests a woman and tries to outrage her modesty and a bystander becomes angry with the criminal. We call it as “righteous indignation” or “noble rage” and this is not bad. Only when anger is the outcome of greed and selfishness it is bad.

A teacher has to manifest a little anger outwardly to correct students. The teacher should be cool within, although hot, and impetuous outside. Never allow anger to take a deep root in our mind for a long time. It should subside off the next moment like waves in the sea. To become angry for trifling things is childish, and mean. An angry person becomes angry with oneself on coming to one’s senses.

Anger is personal, usually selfish, aroused by real or supposed wrong to oneself. Indignation is impersonal, unselfish displeasure, at unworthy acts. Regret or the need to repent does not follow pure indignation that is more self-controlled than anger. Anger is a common sin. Indignation is often a duty.

### **Consequences of Anger**

Like all other emotions, when we get angry, physiological and biological changes take place; our heart rate and blood pressure go up leading to high levels of stress and tension, as do the levels of our energy hormones,

adrenaline, and non adrenalin hurting our physical health. Chronic anger makes one more susceptible to heart disease, diabetes, high cholesterol levels, a weakened immune system, insomnia, and high blood pressure.

Chronic anger consumes huge amounts of mental energy, clouds thinking, making it harder to concentrate, see the bigger picture, and enjoy life. Stress leads to depression and other mental health problems. If a person very often becomes irritable for trifling things, it is a definite sign of mental weakness. When someone abuses and if we do not lose our cool, it is a positive sign of inner strength. Self-restraint or self-control is a sign of great mental strength, wise, glorious, and divine.

Anger gains strength by repetition and if we check it immediately, we will gain immense strength of will. Easily irritable persons are always unjust, swayed by impulses and emotions. Constructive criticism, creative differences, and heated debate can be healthy. However, we cannot physically lash out at every person or object that irritate or annoy us. Laws, social norms, and common sense places limits on how far we can take our anger. It can alienate our associates eroding their respect. Bad reputation can follow wherever we go, making it harder and harder to get ahead. Anger causes lasting scars in the people we love most and gets in the way of our friendships and work relationships. Chronic, intense anger makes it hard for others to trust, speak honestly, or feel comfortable with us, as they will never know what is going to set us off or what we will do.

### **Controlling anger**

Control anger through patience, enquiry, self-restrained love, and meditation. Use a variety of both conscious and unconscious processes to deal with angry feelings.

The three main approaches are expressing, suppressing, and calming.

Expressing our angry feelings in an assertive, non-aggressive manner is the healthiest way to express anger. We can only do this by making ourselves clear on our needs, and getting them met without hurting others. Being assertive does not mean being pushy or demanding; it only means being respectful of yourself and others. Maintaining and strengthening the relationship, rather than “winning” the argument, should always be our first priority. We have to be always respectful of the other person and his or her viewpoint.

We can suppress anger and focus it on something positive, converting it into a more constructive behavior. Unexpressed anger at times can turn inward on our self, causing hypertension, high blood pressure, or depression. It can lead to pathological expressions of anger, such as passive-aggressive behavior (getting back at people indirectly, without telling them why, rather than confronting them head-on) or to a personality that seems perpetually cynical and hostile. If one constantly keeps criticizing, making cynical comments, it clearly shows ignorance that they have-not learnt how express anger constructively to maintain successful relationships.

Finally, we can calm down from inside. This means not just controlling our outward behavior, but also controlling our internal responses, taking steps to lower our heart rate, calming ourselves down, letting our feelings subside. "When none of these three techniques work, that is when someone or something is going to get hurt."

### **Managing anger**

Managing anger means to reduce one's emotional feeling, and physiological arousal

that anger causes. We cannot avoid, the things or the people that enrage us, nor can we change them, but we can learn to control our reactions. Some get angry more easily and more intensely than the average person does. Some do not show their anger in loud spectacular ways but are chronically irritable and grumpy. Some do not always curse and throw things; they just withdraw socially, sulk, or get physically ill. People who are easily angered generally have what some psychologists call a low tolerance for frustration. They will not take things in stride, and are particularly infuriated if the situation seems somehow unjust, say, pointing out a minor mistake. It may be genetic or physiological. There is evidence that some children are born irritable, touchy, and easily angered, and these signs manifest at a very early age. It could also be socio-cultural. Anger management is learning to handle anger or channel it constructively.

Research has found that family background plays an important role. Typically, people who get angry easily, come from disruptive, chaotic, families, not skilled at emotional communications. Researchers say, "Letting it rip" with anger, only escalates anger and aggression and does nothing to help us (or the person we are angry with) resolve the situation. Better find out what triggers our anger, and then develop strategies to keep those triggers from tipping us. A minor problem could become major if we handle it with anger spoiling the situation deteriorating our relationships. In short, handling anything with anger will not make things better.

True power does not come from bullying others. People may be afraid, but they will never respect us, if we cannot control ourselves or handle opposing viewpoints. Others will be more willing to listen and accommodate our needs if we communicate in a respectful way. Controlling anger essentially makes us handle our problems

with tranquillity. We can then exercise our wisdom and judgment to the problem at hand to achieve the best possible solution. Always fight fair, focus on the present rather than looking into the past grievances and assigning blame. Focus on what you can do in the present to solve the problem. Conflicts can be draining, so it is important to consider whether the issue is really worthy of our time and energy.

As Confucius, said', when anger arises, think of the consequences'. It will soon subside.

### **Simple tips to deal with anger**

**Relaxation:** Simple relaxation tools, such as deep breathing, relaxing imagery, can help calm down angry feelings. Practice these techniques daily. Learn to use them automatically when you are in a tense situation.

**Cognitive restructuring:** We have to change the way we think. When we are angry, we tend to curse, swear, or speak in highly colorful terms reflecting our inner thoughts. Our thinking gets overtly exaggerated and dramatic. Try replacing these thoughts with more rational ones. For example instead of cursing ourselves, "it's terrible and everything's ruined," tell ourselves, "it's frustrating but it's not the end of the world'. Remember that getting angry is not going to fix any problems it only alienates and humiliates people who might otherwise be willing to work for a solution.

Logic always defeats anger, because justified anger, can become irrational in front of logic. Use hard logic whenever angry to get a more balanced perspective. Angry people tend to demand things, fairness, appreciation, agreement, to do things their way. All of us want to do things our way and are hurt and disappointed when we are unable to do so. This is normal. Angry people demand them,

and their disappointment becomes anger. As part of cognitive restructuring, angry people have to become aware of their demanding nature and translate their expectations into desires, viz., their request should change from, "I must" to "I would". Some angry people use anger as a way to avoid feeling hurt, but hurt does not go away.

**Solving problems:** Many times, real and inescapable problems in our lives cause anger and frustration. Not all anger is misplaced. Often it is a healthy, natural response to our difficulties. Culturally we believe that every problem has a solution, and when we are unable to find one to our problem, it adds to our frustration. The best approach in such situations is not to focus on finding a solution, but rather on how you handle and face the problem. Make a plan, checking its progress along the way. Focus on positive ways to solve the problem. Resolve to give it the best without punishing oneself, if an answer does not come quickly. If we approach it with our best intentions and efforts and make a serious attempt to face it head-on, we will be less likely to lose patience, even if we are unable to solve the problem right away.

**Better communication:** Angry people tend to jump to and act on conclusions that may be very inaccurate. In a heated discussion, slow down and think through the responses. Never say the first thing that comes into our mind, but slow down and think carefully about what we want to say. Listen carefully to what the other person is saying and take time before answering. When criticized it is natural to get defensive, but do not fight back. Do not speak when angry rather learn to listen. Pay attention and try to understand the point the other person is making. Listen to what is underlying the words, the message they want to convey. It may take a lot of patient questioning on our part, but we should not let our anger spin out of control. Keeping our

cool can keep the situation from becoming a disastrous one. Do not have unrealistic expectations toward others. Let expectations be realistic. Do not expect others to behave just like us. We all can make mistakes. Realizing this will make it easier for us to understand when someone else makes mistakes. See from the other person's perspective. In any situation, constructively look at the positive side.

**Use humor:** Humor, helps defuse anger and get a more balanced perspective. Humor can always help unlock a tense situation. We should however not try to "laugh off" our problems. We should rather use humor to help ourselves face them more constructively. Remember harsh sarcastic humor; is just another form of unhealthy anger expression.

**Changing environment:** Our immediate surroundings can cause us irritation and fury. Problems and responsibilities can make us feel angry. Take a break, making sure to have some "personal time" scheduled for self-contemplation. Learn to forgive and we will no longer have reasons to be angry with someone.

**Timing:** We fight when we are tired, or distracted, so try changing the times when talking important matters so that talks do not turn into arguments.

**Avoidance:** Avoid topics and places that leads to anger. The point here is to keep ourselves calm. Resolving a conflict is impossible if we are unwilling or unable to forgive. If we cannot come to an agreement, agree to disagree. It takes two people to keep an argument going. If a conflict is going nowhere, choose to disengage and move on.

**Finding alternatives:** If our daily commute, through traffic leaves us, in a state of rage and frustration, we should map out a different

less congested route, or find another alternative, such as a bus or train.

**Counseling:** When anger gets out of control, impacting relationships and life styles, consider, counseling to learn, on how to handle it better. A psychologist or other licensed mental health professional can work with, in developing a range of techniques for changing thinking and behavior.

Press reports suggest that Mr. Harvinder Singh's parents and friends are doing this to resolve his problems.

Science now points out how anger has outlived its evolutionary use. Today it is a double-edged knife, hurting the source more than the victim does. An angry exchange can affect us for hours or even days as we endlessly go over the event in our mind, churning up the anger feelings and adding to them. When we allow someone else to make us angry, we are the victims as they are likely to go off and forget all about it, while, we fume and fret and relive the event for days or months afterwards even while relaxing or enjoying life with family and friends, or while trying to sleep at night. Anger, like fever, is a symptom, which shows that something has gone wrong in the inner mechanism without timely lubrication. The most effective of all lubricants is introspection or reflection. Even the angriest person will realize his or her folly after the anger fizzles out, when he or she begins to reflect upon the incident. If this reflection had come to them before getting angry, they would not have become angry at all. Make reflection or introspection over issues a habit before taking decisions, and you will not become unnecessarily angry.

*If you are patient, in one moment of anger, you will escape a hundred days of sorrow - Chinese Proverb*