



Anger.

Some of us experience a lot of it inside ourselves. All of us witness it in others and on media. Considered a primary emotion, anger is among the most prevalent of feelings.

Psychologists have linked anger with various conditions. In men, it is often an indicator of depression. Rather than wallowing in melancholy, depressed males usually grow irritable, short tempered and sometimes aggressive. If you know a particularly ticked off man, underneath that gruff exterior you'll likely discover a sad, alienated and dispirited fellow.

In many people, anger is a mask for fear. When we feel in danger or out of control, anger is nature's way of helping us meet a threat, whether actual or merely a figment of one's imagination. Earlier in our history, those threats were largely physical, as in teeth, claws and such. Today, they are primarily social, meaning coming from people.

Research shows anger often arises from anxiety, which is a unique form of fear. In particular, a condition called "Generalized Anxiety Disorder," or GAD, aligns closely with unrecognized, underlying anger. GAD can be a debilitating condition where an individual is excessively worried and fearful about everyday events (i.e., threats), often catastrophizing about what could go wrong. We don't yet know exactly how this back-and-forth between GAD and anger operates, but we know it's there.

Now, clearly, there is a place for being angry. When expressed non-violently and with a modicum of respect and decorum, it can be an affirming experience, one that draws out one's personal power and applies it judiciously.

Also, when in clear and present physical danger, anger can literally save one's life. Many a soul has survived by getting angry at those forces, including fate, that seemed bent on their destruction.

Of course, and sadly, anger can fuel violence, both emotional and physical. It is the engine of the weapons we turn on each other. In such a guise, it is a

fearsome force, and many are the lives lost to or gravely damaged by its awful power.

When angry, the heart races, testosterone ramps up, respiration quickens, and the dominant hemisphere of the brain (left if you're right-handed) lights up on full alert. Consciousness constricts, focusing on the perceived threat, while all else fades away. Self-awareness diminishes, leaving the mind riveted on one's adversary, real or imagined.

Anger occupies a disappointingly large portion of the human psyche, and sages and therapists alike have long labored to tame it, with limited success. There are a few strategies that have proven effective for many, although not all. In the realm of the psychological, there are no panaceas.

Among these is something called "self-distancing." When someone ticks you off, take a deep breath, imagine you are viewing the scene from a distance, like an observer rather than participant. In other words, dissociate or zone out. Then, instruct yourself with a quick mantra, like "Be the better person" or "It just doesn't matter" or "Who angers you controls you."

Exercise, deep breathing and nature interaction are all proven to reduce anger and, when it does emerge, lessen its intensity and shorten its duration. Anger management programs have an iffy report card, but a consistent meditation practice is showing great promise in taming this emotional beast.

If being angry is too much a part of your life, consider the words of Katharine Graham of Washington Post renown, who said:

"The longer I live, the more I observe that anger is most debilitating to the person who bears it."

Don't be one of them.