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## Controlling Anger

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Aspiritual aspirant should have absolute control over anger. Controlling and expressing anger in a right way is a divine quality. Though extremely difficult it is possible to control anger.

Some people consider our generation as a 'generation of anger', and this age as an 'age of rage'. There is road-rage, plane-rage, domestic-rage; and there is even an internet-rage! Hardly do we come across a person who has not felt anger at some time or other in life, not excepting saints. Then we find some people who are less prone to be angry than others. There are some who do not express any anger outside but go on simmering inside all the time. If a person does not appear to be angry but is grouchy all the time we can be pretty sure he is angry.

Anger is a normal emotion. It helps us to defend ourselves in dangerous situations and has its uses in life when controlled properly. But when it goes out of control it can lead to problems to oneself and others. If it is not dealt with properly it can lead to depression, high blood pressure, stroke, or to heart attack. Extreme anger can even cause death.

Is there a thing called righteous anger? Most of us think there is and use it to justify some of our actions. But from the spiritual point of view there is no such thing. Here is what Swami Vivekananda has to say: *"Our religion teaches that anger is a great sin, even if it is 'righteous'. I could not for my soul distinguish ever the distinction between 'religious anger' and 'commonplace anger', 'religious killing' and 'commonplace killing,' 'religious slandering and irreligious', and so forth."*

What is anger? It is a negative emotion, a concentrated outburst of energy in the form of annoyance, rage, dislike, coldness etc. According to some psychologists anger is 'a temporary state of madness, an emotional state that varies in intensity from mild irritation to intense fury, rage etc.' Swami Turiyananda regarded anger as concentrated desire. Anger is called a demon by Sri Ramakrishna, for like a demon it keeps us bound to this world.

Without doubt anger is one of the deadliest enemies in spiritual life. According to Vedanta it is one of the six inner passions that block progress in every field of life. If it is not controlled one courts ruin even in this world and can never progress in spiritual life.

Anger can manifest in myriad forms. Often it is difficult to recognize; for it can hide its nature under different guises such as cynicism, pessimism, looking down with coldness and indifference upon others, constant grumbling, dissatisfaction with one's life etc. Whatever the expression the underlying cause is the same - anger.

### **Causes of anger**

Anger, of course, is a symptom and not the disease itself. The root cause of anger is egotism. The ego, when ignorant of its true nature, identifies itself with body and mind. This ignorance leads to passions like lust, anger, greed etc. The *Bhagavad Gita* gives a graphic description of the cause of desire: *"When a man dwells constantly on sense-objects, he feels an attachment for them. Attachment gives rise to desire, and desire (when thwarted) breeds anger. From anger comes delusion; from delusion, failure of memory; from the failure of memory, discrimination is lost; and from the loss of discrimination man perishes."* Now we can see that anger, in a way, is thwarted desire and expectation.

### **Expressions of anger**

Anger can be expressed mainly in three ways - suppression, irrational outburst and sublimation. In some it bursts forth in the form of instantaneous and aggressive behaviour often leading to tragic consequences. Other people, specially those who are timid, try to suppress and internalise this emotion bringing harm to themselves. However it cannot be suppressed for long but will be out some time or other and with greater violence. These two ways of expressing anger are counter-productive and lead to great damage.

But spiritual aspirants have a better and productive way of expressing their anger. They control, sublimate and direct it towards a higher goal. Sometimes it may even be their duty to express righteous anger. Sri Ramakrishna used to say *"It is sometimes very necessary to hiss but never to bite!"*

Here is a quotation from Aristotle: *"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."* Perhaps only a saint can express anger in this way!

### **Ways to control anger**

Those who wish to control anger must have a firm determination and a higher spiritual goal. Even a noble but worldly goal may not be enough. Since egotism is the root of all passions we must realise that the only way to control anger is to uproot egotism. Naturally this involves controlling other passions too. It is a hard task but not an impossible one.

Here are some ways of controlling anger:

1. One way is to look upon all persons and objects as divine
2. Another way is to consider that whatever happens in life is the result of our past Karma. This is easy for those who believe in the law of Karma and its corollary rebirth.
3. Regular meditation, japa, prayer, study of scriptures, keeping company of holy people and places - all these spiritual disciplines are of great help. Marcus Aurelius writes in his Meditation: *"When you are angry above measure, think within yourself, how momentary is man's life. Let us think how much more grievous are the consequences of our anger than the acts which arouse it. Let*

*this truth be present to you in the excitement of anger, that to be moved by passion is not manly, but that mildness and gentleness, as they are more human, so also are they more manly."*

4. Passions by themselves are neutral. They become good or evil according to the way we use them. In any case they cannot be eradicated. Sri Ramakrishna advises: *"Since you cannot get rid of your passions - your lust, your anger, and so on - give them a new direction. Instead of desiring worldly pleasures, desire God. Have intercourse with Brahman. If you cannot get rid of anger, then change its direction. Assume the tamasic attitude of bhakti, and say: 'What? I have repeated the hallowed name of Durga, and shall I not be liberated? How can I be a sinner any more? How can I be bound any more?' If you cannot get rid of temptation, direct it towards God. Be infatuated with God's beauty. If you cannot get rid of pride, then be proud to say that you are the servant of God, you are the child of God. Thus turn the six passions towards God."*

5. Having a definite goal and a daily routine helps immensely. Otherwise we are likely to brood over unhappy experiences and increase our anger.

6. Patanjali advocates the eradication of negative emotions by meditating on their opposite, positive qualities. The positive quality opposed to anger is love. Constantly thinking of love gradually erodes anger.

7. Ignorance makes us unrealistic. We expect everything to go according to plan - our plan. This world, unfortunately, does not come up to our expectations many times. So we must be prepared to expect the unexpected and graciously accept life as it comes.

8. Ours also is an age of impatience. We become annoyed if things do not go according to plan and quickly. Deep breathing and relaxation can help us curb undue impatience to some extent.

9. A bit of humour is very helpful. As a wag said, "If one can learn to laugh at oneself one will never again lack entertainment." Humour helps us by making light of things which we take too seriously and makes us see the funny side of life.

10. Above all, prayer for the welfare of all, specially those who injure or annoy us, is of immense help.

Anger is a passion that every spiritual aspirant needs to address. We come across many interesting incidents in the lives of holy men and women. They show us definite ways and means of controlling it giving us courage and inspiration.

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