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# ANGER

Alcofribas -2026

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# 1 - Genesis of anger

Most human beings feel some type of imperfection, some discrepancy between their immediate reality and their expectations. Be it a desire, a will, or a need. Therefore, we are dissatisfied, at different degrees, with different intensities, a common source of anger. There might be an assumption that the universe, an individual's particular circumstances, or relationships ought to have a certain justice to them, a balance to life that is not quite working as it should. Life is not fair, a frustrating evidence, to say the least. Thus some react with their victimhood, since they are being treated unfairly by others, by society or by nature. Then they have a choice: to seek compassion or to fight for their “cause”. And if they choose this fight, often instinctually, automatically, before they are able to process what they are doing with rationality, we can state they are in a state of anger. They have been wronged by a lack of justice, their limits are overtaxed, and they express it. Depending on personalities, psychological limits may be low, as with immature people who are accustomed to getting their own way, or people within the victim mentality who do not see the problem to be their own reaction to life, but the circumstances that trigger their anger. Or high, as with more mature people who have trained their capacity of patience, compassion, optimism or humility, in order to have some allowances for the injustice they routinely encounter.

Nevertheless, the feeling of dissatisfaction, and a residual sense of victimhood, always remains present in different proportions. On the psychological or existential level, we have different ways, different strategies to deal with this frustration. Some prefer to stay withdrawn; they choose to hide and suffer silently, humbly thinking that most other persons are better than them; they feel less worthy than others, they are too ashamed of themselves. Others prefer to project their dissatisfaction on their surroundings: by focusing on the limits and drawbacks of others, constantly criticizing them, so they can forget their dissatisfaction with themselves. When of course, they could try to impose their beneficent or salvific will upon those miserable others, but “giving” is not for them an option. And a third category, opting for “worth by proxy”, finds some

hero: a parent, a child, a spouse, a teacher, a spiritual, intellectual or political leader, or else, that they focus on as a hero, with an enthusiasm that can save them from their own feeling of worthlessness. They admire this person, glorify him, praise him, and through a reverberation effect, their own self benefits from the "great value" of this "luminous being" and they feel better about themselves. Although this admirative dependency never makes them totally forget their own insufficiency.

But, whatever the scheme, a sense of finitude inhabits the human soul, carrying its load of bitterness, disgruntlement and frustration. in spite of numerous forms of consolation one might invent and get involved in. This engenders a certain irascibility, a certain susceptibility, largely varying with the temperament of the individuals. More mature persons, more peaceful, balanced or self-controlled, manage to relatively dominate or attenuate this power of irritability in themselves, maintain it at a low level or in the background, or just avoid expressing it, if only for relation or social reasons. But periodically, because of external circumstances, because of internal physiological disturbances, because of tiredness, because of general or momentary stress, they allow anger to take over, in a stifled or discrete way, or in a strong way, getting really and openly angry, what is called bursting out. Of course, when this happens, they generally view and accuse the outside circumstances, the person in front of them, the external factors as the main cause of this anger: they tend to overlook or forget their own inner turmoil, their own pain and dissatisfaction, they instinctively prefer to attribute the problem to the immediate, visible and efficient cause: the outside is responsible for their own outrage. Such an explanation is easier, more comfortable, more immediate. Of course, it does not mean that the external cause might not be problematic, but at that moment, even if he is right, most likely the angry person is not capable of making adequate and critical judgments. He is taken over by his emotions, his thinking is not clear, he lacks distance too much to be clear headed. He expresses his pain in relation to events he does not master, occurrences he is not responsible for and that he despises. But even if what he denounces is justifiably criticized, the excessive reaction blurs the issue: he is most likely blowing up the reality of this "atrocious" cause, and his reaction is often out of bounds, and inefficient. Although some persons on some occasions are taken over by what is called "holy anger": a totally justified wrath towards some odious or sickening behavior or situation. But most angry people

fall in the trap of a categorically self-justified, “holier than thou” attitude: they are totally right and legitimate by principle.
When the emotion strikes, the pain of the anger itself largely overtakes the pain of its efficient and immediate cause, but it is used anyhow as a relief mechanism. Nevertheless, one can defend the idea that the expression of anger is useful and necessary, both to relieve the inner stress and to warn someone that his behavior is painful and unacceptable to us. People who are unable to express their anger have behaviors that unconsciously aim to release anger, diversions, but fail to do so, which can have serious consequences on morale and health. A “Swallowed” anger, or anger rendered inoperative by any diversion process, will probably reappear in parasitic feelings, or in various psychological games, with a possible passage through the persecuting function, during its course or at the end of it.
Some specific attitudes are actually the expression of disguised anger, such as cynicism, sarcasm, arrogance, scorn, most likely hiding some feelings of intense sadness and depressive tendencies. But someone who is often angry, who yells, who often gets in arguments or fights, will necessarily feel guilty, and tired, in spite of the numerous rationalizations one can indulge in, such as the need for screaming, with sentences like “Otherwise nothing gets done around here”.

# 2 - Nature of anger

Anger is a basic feeling or emotion, manifested in discontent, annoyance**,** irritation, exasperation, it is a reaction to a situation that is judged “bad” in one way or another. It usually follows pain, injury, deprivation, shame, humiliation, or even fear, especially the loss of a loved one. But the phenomenon of anger is actually made up of different factors.
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- The first factor is an appetence, in the form of a desire, an expectation, a will or a need. We long for the possession of an object, the fulfilling of an action, some acknowledgment, love or gratitude, the realization of a principle such as justice or respect, the realization of something that has

importance for us, that is dear to us, and maybe to others. The strength of the attachment to this object, the pain its absence or its downgrading represents, the intensity of the desire or greed inhabiting the subject, increases the difficulty to control this anger, amplifies the power of the emotion, weakens the self-controlling mechanism.

- The second factor is the lack, the fact that the object of desire is not granted, engendering a sense of frustration, awaking the general feeling of discontentment in the subject. Nevertheless, a particular disappointment always inscribes itself in a general psychological and existential pattern that determines the strength of its impact. The more someone feels already discontent and worried, the stronger the effect of a particular misfortune. Some persons are for this reason quite sensitive and observers will be surprised at their excessive reaction to a given event, when even some objectively insignificant matter provokes unpredictable and disproportionate reactions.
- The third factor is the ignorance of how to satisfy the frustrated desire, for emotional or cognitive reasons. At this point, reason is absent, creativity is dulled; the subject either cannot find a solution or does not even attempt to find one, he has given up on any efficient strategy. This happens frequently when this frustration is a repeated phenomenon, for example someone who expects recognition, love, respect or obedience from others, and hardly ever gets it, or less than wanted. For example, when a parent wants something from his child and just keeps desperately repeating on and on the same instruction without any positive effect. Or a spouse that uselessly attempts to get attention or solicitude from his partner.
- The fourth factor is the sense of impotence this situation provokes in the subject, therefore suffering from a sense of helplessness, experiencing the impossibility of an efficient action. The subject, deprived of any sensation of power feels reduced, thwarted, repressed, alienated from his own self, even annihilated. He perceives himself as a helpless victim. Let us not forget that power, our capacity to act upon the world, is at the heart of the adventure of existence. At this point, when the subject feels overwhelmed, either he enters a passive phase, rather sad and depressed, and he sort of gives up on reality and his expectations, or he reacts and

gets angry, short of any alternative or better strategy. Although it is common for many people to alternate between those two emotions, sadness and anger, as two facets of the same phenomenon: the depressive phase and the manic phase. Depending on their temperament, some sway more to one side than to the other.

The switching between sadness and anger depends as well on the strength of the feeling of legitimacy one undergoes and of the strength of his self-esteem, which makes one more or less potent, or rather passive. For example, if one believes that the constraint and the inhibition of his self is purely due to external injustice and not to his inadequacy, one feels more legitimate to express himself openly in the outward angry mode, as he instinctively believes the power of his outbreak might have some effects on the “evil”. On the opposite, if someone feels rather impotent by nature, for no specific reason, or for both vague external and internal factors which he does not believe he can modify, he retreats on himself, expressing his vexation through a helpless sadness or through a passive-aggressive behavior. He does not believe that the expression of his anger would change anything around him, or he lacks the energy to express it. He feels like a victim, he takes his impotence as an unchangeable state of things, he does not see any reason to burst out or he does not feel legitimate to do it. His outwardly expressed anger is rather a rare event. This feature can apply to people who have internalized a structural sense of inferiority, contrary to the other type, which is more of a dominant behavior. The latter is found for example in women who are called "hysterical" because they periodically express their anger. Although the excessive frequency of such a behavior can as well lead to discombobulation and despair.

As well, we should mention a typical way to hide or repress anger, common in some individuals and widespread in some cultures like in Asia: the forced smiling, a nervous, strained and rigid smiling. A smile that denies anger, that manifests an emotion opposite to anger, displayed for two different reasons. A psychological reason: because we would not please the other, he would reject us, he would not love us anymore. Or because we are scared of our own anger, of our own inner violence. And a moral reason: because we are supposed to remain polite, respectful, well-behaved, and anger would be shameful. Thus one forces a smile on his face, until or unless anger is too heavy and then it explodes

strongly, violently. This smile can as well be displayed as a reaction to the other one's anger, as an attempt to thwart it, since one should not get angry at a nice smiling person, exhibiting his good will. Forced smiling is then used as an instinctive means to prevent violent behavior, but it has a very repressive side, quite painful for the subject, since he has to forcefully inhibit some powerful emotion and in doing so hides his own self, which in a way causes even more anger.

Another "typical" female way of dealing with anger, again quite common in certain cultures, for example in the Slavic world, is to express or hide anger with tears. lt is a different way to camouflage anger, not behind a smile but behind tears. Just like in the "smiling" reaction, anger is considered normatively inappropriate to display, especially for women, since they are supposed to be nice and well-behaved. Violence is then prohibited and repressed, much more than with men, for psychological, cultural and moral reasons. Hence when those women get angry, they are more likely to weep, with tears of anger, like if they were saddened by the situation. We observe this phenomenon as well with young girls who are "good girls", "good students", well groomed, that tend to be well-appreciated by adults and wish to maintain this appreciation even in conflictual situations. The tears are not here a simple indicator of sadness, as tears often are, but a sign of repressed anger. The mechanism is the following. The tears are meant to show that the subject is willing to endure the unfavorable situation, indicating that she is renouncing the fight, but still manifesting that she is not giving up her opinion, her disagreement or her dislike. In this fashion, she is supposed to be spared from violence, the other person's and especially her own. The tears are as well meant to stimulate compassion or understanding, they still might produce a favorable outcome to the exchange. It therefore represents another way to get what one wants while avoiding conflict, as an unconscious process of course. In some cases, when the anger is admitted and openly expressed, there will still be a shedding of tears, a strange combination of sadness and anger, probably because to be angry is a sad state of things, and it serves as a desperate appeal to obtain accommodation from the other person.

A common strategy, which both hides and manifests anger, is coldness, expressed as formalism, politeness or detachment, expressed even in small

supposedly pleasant or innocuous sentences, such as “Have a nice day”, “Very interesting”, or “Thank you very much”. But it can also be expressed through some less pleasant sentences, nonetheless formal, or more openly aggressive such as: “I regret but I…”, “I am busy”, “I don’t want to hear about such...”, “I have no time to waste with… ”, etc. The main point being the performative dimension of these small sentences, sometimes punctuated by silences, a cautious, formal and not very generous laconism, which leaves nothing to be seen except an attitude of hostility. One can often perceive in it a pretension of self-control or intellectualism. This person may not be systematically in restraint: he may have a few confidants with whom he will confide his dissatisfaction without artifice. His speech will then take an openly emotive form, deceptively ingenuous, in order to ensure for himself assent and indulgence. He will even use this “friendly” context to attest to his "good nature" and show his spontaneous side, as an alibi for his frankness and his openness of mind, which will allow him to deny any accusation of aggressiveness.

This passive-aggressive modality is frequently used in certain circles where one practices a scheme of “proper behavior”, where good manners are required, where one avoids as much as possible to reveal oneself, to reflect on oneself, to engage in a real dialogue with others, especially when one feels threatened, judged or in competition. This behavior can also be classified in the passive-aggressive pattern. The person masks feelings and thoughts that he does not assume: anger, resentment or frustration. The principle is to resist or avoid open relationships or open actions, because this attitude is a form of impotence of which the subject is partially or totally unconscious. It includes bad faith, victimhood, refusal of responsibility and self-unveiling, lack of confidence in oneself and in others, inertia. Some people, very accustomed to this practice, can show themselves quite formally agreeable. It is a form of manipulation in that this person pushes those around him to react strongly and tends to blame others for the difficulties and failures for which he is solely responsible. The passive-aggressive is stubborn, he is lying and susceptible, he tends to indecision and procrastination because he feels easily overwhelmed. He refuses commitment, intimacy, he avoids openly expressing his anger, but on the other hand lets out gestures or attitudes that are unpleasant for those around him. He is morose and does not accept the suggestions of others. He likes to put others in check while maintaining a “beautiful” image. He practices internal anger and

violence, underhanded, recurrent and destructive for himself and for others. He often expresses in a “controlled” way harsh words or unpleasant reflections, and then defends himself by claiming that his interlocutor has misinterpreted them or that he provoked them, resorting to often inconsistent explanations. The passive-aggressive is a person in constant victimization. He has low self-esteem, he is in perpetual denial of confrontation but offers continual resistance to others. And when the other perceives his anger and lets him know, or when he tries to pursue the dialogue, the passive-aggressive will totally deny the obvious, he will get irritated and go on the offensive, or he will finally let his anger explode openly. This pattern is quite common in environments where social codes are heavy and formal, for example in the academic world, which is quite repressive and castrating.

Objectively, anger is an adaptive mechanism of the body intended for responding to a situation that creates a problem, to a phenomenon that urgently requires our attention. More specifically, it represents a combat mechanism, a primitive reaction to facing danger, one among others like fleeing or freezing. In this sense, it is natural, it can be considered legitimate and necessary. When some animals get angry, they make loud sounds, they attempt to look physically larger, they bare their teeth and stare aggressively at their enemy. The behaviors associated with anger are then designed to warn aggressors, to scare them, to stop them from displaying their threatening behavior. Rarely does a physical altercation occur without the prior expression of anger by at least one of the participants. For human beings, it can be expressed through words, through gestures, through actions. Displays of anger can thus be used as a manipulation or relational strategy in order to act upon someone else, to exert social influence. For this reason, we observe that on the interpersonal, political or social level, various strategies are used to channel anger towards other catharsis or outlets. The Roman imperial principle, “Bread and games”, circus fights, was a good example, or more recently the promotion of sports performances as a means of channeling a people potentially in turmoil, and of carrying out an emotional, deviant discharge. thus diverting the target.

Anger is as well a way to muster energy in order to act in a difficult situation. For a person experiencing anger often undergoes physical effects, such as increased heart rate, elevated blood pressure, increased levels of hormones such as adrenaline and noradrenaline. Those physiological processes can be channeled in the production of a short and intense effort, or to initiate such an effort, to compensate for a lack of energy. For example, a person who has a hard time to start some work can become angry as a strategy to start this work, to move himself and overcome the initial obstacles inhibiting the decision or its actualization. In this sense, we can understand the positive dimension of anger, useful and sometimes necessary. We get angry because this world, here and now, is not good enough for us, not fair enough or loving enough, and this can allow us to set in motion behaviors intended to influence the surrounding world, so that it becomes better still. Anger helps to gather a person's energy, and thus helps one to improve the impact of his actions on the outside world. It is thus a significant aid to efficiency in solving problems or in meeting needs. Anger can be both useful and effective when it is primarily aimed at behaviors in others rather than the person itself, a distinction that is far from obvious, especially in an emotional outburst.

Of course, one can criticize such a reaction as the manifestation of a feeling of impotence, when reason or will are failing and cannot be applied. But we have to admit that reason indeed suffers from some limits, and that some dimensions of our psyche, such as desire, instinct and love, rightly escape our power of reason, and that anger can make up for some deficiencies.

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The feeling of anger is generally triggered by the perception of a situation experienced as unfair, demeaning, threatening. It is caused by the sensation of being touched, affected, offended or hurt in one's innermost being. The other's words, behavior, or a given situation are perceived as fundamentally at odds with our own will, beliefs, values, or ideas, they are unacceptable and threatening to us, practically or symbolically. Anger helps us to defend ourselves against a painful feeling, it is a way of reacting toward a menace. Physically, the body is on alert, ready to fight if necessary, or it already launched itself into the fight. Psychologically, the outward signs of anger show others, non-verbally and involuntarily, the importance of one’s stake and the feeling of danger or pain one experiences. The physiological changes when "anger rises" are also clues to

ourselves: to the extent we still have access to reason in these emotional moments, they allow us to become aware of and recognize this emotion and become conscious of our own susceptibility or fragility.
Finally, let us mention three types of anger. Ethical anger, which is indignant at injustices, cowardice, immoralities, perjury, betrayals and bad faith. It occurs when one witnesses abuse of physical force or psychological manipulation. Then intellectual or practical anger, which reacts to errors of reasoning, to negligence, to delays in the tasks to be accomplished, to disinformation. It can also be expressed in the face of conformism or the "dictatorship" of norms, rules and conventions. Then the personal or victimary anger, generated by the feeling of being labeled, dispossessed, ignored, reduced, ridiculed, excluded, abused, or worse, of being hurt, insulted, slandered, that is to say of being treated unfairly. Of course these anger will be more or less legitimate or justified, according to their degree of rationality, sometimes amplified by the excessive sensitivity of the subject. Moreover, the first two are more clear and centered, more controlled, because they rather derive from general principles. The third one, more personal, is therefore more reactive, more powerless, more eager for revenge than rectification, being less targeted.

# 3 - Utility of anger

The term anger often carries a negative connotation. A prejudice reinforced by the fashionable “Zen attitude” or the trendy non-violent communication. It is viewed as not desirable, as bad and harmful, and therefore negative. Let us propose rather that it is negative because it is unpleasant and because it expresses negative intentions, rejection, towards an event or a person. But anger should not be categorically rejected, no more than any other such “negative” emotions, shame, guilt, sadness or else, first because they are part of a natural emotional range, second because they are necessary to the human experience, even though they have both advantages and inconveniences. For example, anger can be used as a mobilizing force in a difficult situation, to get out of inertia or confusion, as if by a kind of redoubling of effort, by mobilizing one's forces. But as a drawback, it inflicts pain on all parties involved, oneself and others, especially when it is repetitive or excessive. An emotion always has

its use in a given context, in the appropriate circumstances. However, it is still necessary to identify its origin and mechanism in order to draw the necessary lessons about the phenomenon, to understand it and master it.

Anger is a language; the issue is to understand this language, its content, form and necessity. It demonstrates the echo of a situation in our being, it shows the impact of a context on our psyche. Generally, it touches on a vulnerability, on a sensitive dimension in our inner self. And of course, it connects to the feeling of dissatisfaction about our being and existence that we mentioned earlier, it is grounded in this general state of discontentment, otherwise we would most likely not get angry, or would do so rarely. It stirs up and intensifies our chronic sense of worthlessness or impotence. But anger is sometimes useful, since it is necessary and liberating to express our pain, to tell or show the other the effect he has on us. Too often, when we show our irritation or anger, we hide its real or substantial reason, either because we are ashamed and prefer to hide it, or simply because we are not very perceptive on the issue, since emotions remain generally on a pre-reflective level: we experience it without being clear or conscious about it. Thus, we might willy-nilly disguise our anger in different rhetorical strategies, camouflage it through various diversions, expecting or not expecting the other to understand our real pain. Often, we actually prefer not to be understood, we just want to be angry and show our anger, we especially do not want the other person to analyze our problem and even less tell us what it substantially relates to. If he did so, if he was insightful, we probably would deny his discernment and be even more angry about it, because the exposure of our vulnerability makes it even more sore. For example, someone who is not well because of a marital problem will not tell people that it is the reason for his anger: he prefers to focus on the particular incident that irritated him. First of all, at the moment of the fit, he might not think about the underlying problem, and afterwards, if he realizes the issue, if he admits to himself that it is what is bothering him, he probably does not want to avow it to everyone and reveal his intimate preoccupations. It is already painful enough as it is without exposing it to everyone's gaze, and even to one’s own gaze. However, it can be said that someone who does not know why he gets angry will never exhaust his anger.

Let's summarize the different functions of anger:

• Anger signals a frustration, a violation of personal territory, by starting a protest movement. It signals a loss of freedom, physical, psychological or spiritual, and it helps to activate in the person concerned a capacity to regain the violated integrity. The angry person lets others know they should be aware of him. In the event of injury, offense, insult, attack on their dignity, the angry person will therefore exert some pressure, leading others to realize their wrongdoing, and to undertake reparations.
• Anger arouses the price of awareness of an alert situation. The angry person will have a mobilizing power not displayed by the neutral one. It is more present, more noticeable to others, and produces a more attentive listening on the part of others.
• Anger strengthens internal unity. The angry person shows that his relationship with others is not fusional and that he intends to reconstitute interpersonal boundaries. Even people who are depressed or poorly structured feel united on the inside and much stronger when they are angry.
• Anger functionalizes the energy of the subject: it improves efficiency by increasing perceptual acuity, by directing attention to a goal, which is in fact the mission that anger must allow to accomplish. It allows us to pull ourselves together, to escape inertia or confusion. For example in order to take back what is due, remove an obstacle, to revolt against injustice, to chase an intruder, etc. It is efficient when it sharply targets what needs to be changed.
• Anger signals the strength of the bond with the target person. As it tests the strength of this relationship, the anger shows that a given change matters to the angry person. It will modify the relationship from a fusional, symbiotic or co-dependent stage towards a differentiated and a more autonomous attachment. Thus the relationships which support the anger of their protagonists are more solid, deeper than those where anger cannot have a place.
• Anger manifests a recognition by the subject of his own importance, a recognition of the importance of the other, as well as of the contract that binds them. As it targets a behavior, not the person, it should therefore be understood as a precise cry of pain emitted with energy. To prohibit anger would therefore amount, to a certain extent, to prohibiting shouting "Ouch!".

• The importance of anger is, contrary to what one might think at first glance, proportional to the love that one has for the other, and to the love that one wants to receive from him. On the other hand, anger does not in any way define or constrain a particular choice of action or behavior by its very existence. In particular, it should in no way serve as a justification for abandoning one's responsibility, it is not in itself a modality of action. And in no way does it justify violence. Physical violence, which represents the desire to destroy the other, would translate the opposite of love for this other, the opposite of the search for a greater love of the other for oneself. Violence is the reverse of what anger is aimed at, a contradiction all the more obvious when anger is targeted and operationalized.

# 4 - Diverse forms of anger

In general, when we are angry, we target another person, or the outside world, when most times the real issue is within ourselves. Although sometimes our anger can be turned directly upon ourselves, for actions we have committed, or on the reverse for actions we have not been able to commit. But in all cases, in order to work on our anger, to control it, an internal switching or reorientation would be necessary: to be able to look honestly at ourselves and examine our internal turmoil and susceptibility. But this conversion is rather difficult, for obvious reasons, since it would imply taking distance from our own self and looking at it more serenely and objectively. It is a question of knowing how to distinguish in the cause of our anger what really belongs to others and what concerns ourselves. On one side our excessive susceptibility, our obsessions, our disproportionate expectations, and on the other side the external reality, the external causes, the shortcomings of others, in order to assess the situation more objectively. This blindness toward our own person, this lack of introspection and even this desire to ignore our own reality, is an important part of the reasons why some persons get angry too often, too much, too quickly, in an inconsiderate way.

Another point to mention is that anger is a strong emotion, very demanding physically and psychologically because of the extreme tension it implies, so it cannot last very long. Seven minutes maximum, say some psychologists. At this point, anger has different ways to prolong itself. Either it was a momentary flurry, and it dies down, especially if one has the sense it was a meaningless outbreak. Then one might even apologize for it. Or one can also blame his own nature or physiology for having had an angry outburst: "It was stronger than me". If the pain is still there, it can turn into a depressive mode, and become sadness. Or it can maintain itself in a more subdued mode, in the form of resentment, which we will now examine.

## A – Resentment

Resentment is often confused with anger, but even though they have common features, they bear some significant distinctions. Anger is an immediate reaction to a bothersome situation, to an unpleasant event. Resentment, however, is not an automatic response to a situation, it involves a willful act of dwelling on past events. Resentment can be defined as a feeling of bitterness that an individual experiences for being treated unfairly. It can be considered as a colder emotion, made up of anger, pain and disappointment. It is not based on a present event but on a number of past events, which can be awakened or triggered by a present event. Resentment usually involves recalling or reliving a painful experience, over and over again. The individual does not let go of the wound and does not forgive the other, be it an individual, a group or the whole world, and he clings to bitterness. Unlike anger which can sometimes be positive, resentment is never positive as it only hurts the individual. Resentment acts as a barrier that keeps the person from forgetting, forgiving and moving on. In order to let go of resentment, the individual must already recognize his actual state, which can include denials, injuries, pains, etc. While this can be extremely difficult, it is recognizing those features that would allow the individual to overcome his pain. Resentment is rather impotent, it affects the person in an insidious way, gnawing his soul and eroding his willpower: it generally does not lead to any positive action or relief, it just feeds on itself indefinitely. Although resentment periodically manifests itself, often indirectly, for example through

passive-aggressive behavior, or it can sometimes break out in fits of anger. Therefore resentment is a choice the individual makes, and anger turns to resentment when an individual deliberately lets the painful feeling persist in himself, when he wishes or accepts to ruminate over it.

Nevertheless, some persons manage to turn this resentment into a more potent action, which could be called permanent anger, which incites them to take on initiatives and act against what is perceived as the cause of their pain. But in those cases, reason is somewhat integrated in the process, since this action has to be thought through, developed as a strategy, and anger takes a less emotional and reactive form. A combat ensues, for example the one of persons who revolt against some type of tyranny or arbitrariness. In those cases, a channeled or distant anger is used as a means to maintain the energy level and strength to pursue the fight despite the difficulties encountered. Permanent anger will take on a more peaceful and constructed dynamic, that is less immediate, even though the emotion is still active.

Anger can indeed operate on the long term. An anger nestled in the bosom of the self. A reservoir of anger. Uncontrolled, too painful, it becomes chaotic, it surges at any occasion. It is just a scheme to avoid getting depressed and to maintain a semblance of energy. A doctored sadness, well disguised, resting on resentment. But this residual anger can be a source of power, when it is well directed, when it has a meaningful and dignified object, when it is generous and grounded. It then openly admits itself, it is conscious and courageous, it provokes admiration. The first one is scattered and entropic, the second is substantial and strong.

## B – Irritation

In this context, another concept should be presented, another variation of anger: irritation. Irritation is a sort of weaker state of anger, or latent state of anger. In a way, the difference with anger is primarily one of degree, a lower intensity anger, and for this reason it bears less obvious corporal manifestations. In biology and physiology, an irritation is a state of inflammation or painful reaction to a stimulus or agent, the irritant, which induces this state. In psychology, the issue is more one of irritability, which is the excitatory ability

that living organisms have to respond to changes in their environment, both for sane reactions to stimuli and for abnormal or excessive sensitivity. And people are considered “irritable” when they have a tendency to react excessively to stimuli, with the experience of periodic negative affective states, especially anger, and temper outbursts, which may be more or less aggressive, but are distressing or impairing. They have lost any sense of inner peace or harmony: they are unstable. One definition is that irritability is a low threshold for experiencing frustration, although this definition has similarities with the ones of anger and aggressivity. As an emotional and behavioral symptom, someone is considered to be irritable when they have a short temper, become easily frustrated, or feel grouchy or grumpy. Irritation or irritability is more a general state than anger, the latter being generally connected to some specific event, even though some persons can be considered overall bad-tempered or irascible when they often become angry. Since irritation can be considered a continuous state, it is less channeled, less focused than anger. It is more a state of certain sensitivity, like with a skin rash: the skin is irritable when the epidermis is weak. And some persons indeed have a fragile psychological epidermis: any minute disappointment, setback, mistake or failure destabilizes them, upsets them. As we described earlier, this fragility or vulnerability is most likely provoked by a general feeling of dissatisfaction about their life, which they probably keep brooding over, unless some particular situation affects them, like tiredness or illness. This unhappiness or exasperation makes them react in an excessive and violent way toward any negative or unexpected stimulus, although they most likely tend as well to compulsively notice a lot of negativity in their world and in themselves.

## C - Variations of anger

There are as well specific manifestations of anger. We present some examples.

• Hostility and hate, which consist in despising and rejecting someone or something, perceived as threatening and bad, therefore one is not willing to understand or accept it. Hate is a feeling that involves devaluing the other as well as a desire to annihilate him, hostility is rather an attitude whereby the anger towards the other is made visible, for example through scorn.

• Annoyance, which is a milder form of irritation, more controllable.
• Revolt, which is an anger focused on authority, by refusing to acknowledge someone or something who represents power.
• Contempt, which is a mix of anger and disgust, the latter representing a strong feeling of dislike or disapproval for somebody or something that is perceived as morally unacceptable, just like when we are physically disgusted by something or someone that looks or smells unpleasant.
• Jealousy, a common form of anger, is a mix of envy, fear and anger, either because we fear losing what we have or because we desire what someone else has.
• Indignation, which is a type of moral anger, caused by something, some action or behavior, that we think is unfair, unreasonable or ethically unacceptable. And some people tend to experience quite easily this moral outrage.

## D - Frequency and intensity

Overall, anger and its variations are problematic when they become a recurrent habit, systematic and uncontrolled, that accomplish nothing more than expressing and enhancing disappointment, suffering, or a sense of impotence. A behavior which in some persons can become really absurd and painful, both for themselves and people around them. Those affected by such a habit are generally conscious it is a problem, but they often tend to justify it by vouching for the villainy of the ones causing the anger, or they declare themselves incapable to act otherwise, getting stuck in their victimhood. Often it is connected to the fact they want something impossible or very difficult from people around them. For example, a spouse who wants his partner to be other than what he or she really is, or to behave differently than usual, for example wanting more originality or more seriousness from this person. Or a parent who expects from his child something which rather goes counter to his nature, for example being more active or dynamic when the child rather has a passive and contemplative personality. Actually, their anger might provide them with some satisfaction, it can produce some momentary and immediate results, but it is rarely long lasting. The other person, under emotional duress, out of fear of the outburst, might for a little while react accordingly, but most often this will not

produce a meaningful effect. Or the other person will just make an effort to hide his “unpleasant” behavior that triggers the anger. Thus we see parents complaining that their child is lying or being hypocritical about some issue, although they should not be surprised since they induced fear in the mind of the child about this particular issue, who then wants to protect himself from his threatening parent by hiding himself and pretending.

One should be conscious that the angry person gets put in the category of “difficult person” with “particular hang-ups”, thus losing any credibility, if not worse. Most times after getting angry, post calming down, the systematically angry person feels guilt or shame, especially when noticing the effect on the people who normally are dear to him. He sees pain, fear and anxiety in their eyes, when he would like to see trust and love, which makes things even worse for him. But anger also breeds anger, when the subject unfortunately notices the results of his outbursts. Thus some subjects even get violent, and the results of their own violence can become unbearable to them, which can engender even more anger, in a vicious infinite loop from which there seems to have no escape. Another pattern are people who, not feeling so well about their own existence, get upset at the slightest inconvenience, disappointment or frustration, be it about very minor details of their daily life. Such a behavior affects their social life, their work interactions, enhancing their sense of ill-being. This compulsive irritability can take quite a pathological turn, especially when the practical consequences of this irrepressible temper become obvious, heavy and damageable. It will be noted that people who define themselves as emotional are generally of an angry nature, because it seems that emotional overflow very naturally leads to anger, if only through a feeling of helplessness, a lack of inner freedom.

# 5 - Dealing with anger

Of course, it is not always easy to keep one’s self control when facing a stubborn neighbor, a hypercompetitive colleague, a reckless driver, a compulsively complaining or critical spouse, overexcited children, life disappointments, etc. We encounter on a daily basis many reasons to get angry. But there are diverse

techniques that can help us to control or limit this habit, which have a lot to do with leading a healthier life.

## A - Meaningful habit

The first one, which is in general a priority, is to initiate or maintain a pleasant activity, enjoyable for oneself, preferably on a daily basis. An activity that in itself produces joy, independently of performance or results, although it is not forbidden to try bettering ourselves in the practice of this activity. But it should be preferably an activity that provides as well meaning and significance to our existence. The type of activity, as Nietzsche formulates it in his idea of “eternal return”, to which we would be ready to devote our time and energy, in this life and our next lives, forever. If life is just a series of chores, obligations and sacrifices, lightly sprinkled with puny, shallow and ephemeral pleasures, there is no reason why we should not get angry. We need a time for ourselves, a moment for our being, which cannot be reduced to a series of mechanical duties and mere survival preoccupations. And too many people totally deprive themselves of such a necessary privileged moment dedicated to oneself. Although this moment can as well be dedicated to others to the extent it is freely determined and there is no formal obligation whatsoever to do it, which of course implies an activity outside of the family and the household.

## B - Physical activity

The second one is to engage in some regular physical activity, where our body is put into action, a way to release tension and channel our physical and mental energy. Although, if any physical activity is beneficial, some persons should avoid the practices that merely imply to force the body into some kind of performance, such as running, for example. Because it is a rather lonely exercise, and because it is not so joyful. Of course, it allows us to flee the painful reality, escape the usual stress and relax, but it is not in itself so cheerful. Martial arts, dancing, group gymnastics would be more recommended for people who get

angry, to engage in different types of relations with others. Martial arts are particularly useful to exert one's violent impulses, learning to express them and to channel them. Physical exercise can as well be practiced in the form of short moments at different times in a day, like periodically taking a ten minute walk, in order to create ruptures in the routine and the pressure of the day, or when we feel the tension rising. Or practicing stomach breathing, where we recenter our body and induce a deeper and slower rhythm in our physical and mental posture. Even simpler, some small physical rituals can help to reconnect to our body, such as touching our own arm, a different part of our body or even an object when tension builds up or periodically during the day, for a couple of minutes, in order to reconnect and ground ourselves in our own body.

## C – Solitude

The third one is to organize moments of solitude, where one can forget others and just learn to face himself and enjoy it. The idea would then be to engage in some activity that can occupy and nourish those private moments. Meditation can have a soothing and calming effect on the body and mind. Reading, artistic practice, listening to music, dancing, can be some of the activities one can engage on his own, as a peaceful and pleasant moment of solitude. Fearing solitude is an important symptom of illbeing, accepting and enjoying solitude is an important path to self-reconciliation.

## D – Writing

The fourth one is writing, even though it is a difficult task for many people. Writing would be rather natural if there were not a presupposition of performance, of being good, wonderful, genial and even perfect. This fear of being inadequate or bad, the fear of mistake and imperfection is the main obstacle for numerous persons who would like to write. Writing is in fact a dialogue with oneself, since we project our being onto a blank sheet of paper and produce a perceptible object which makes our own self visible. It is this mirror effect that scares people the most: the limits of our speech, the

imperfection of our words constitute an actual experience of our own finitude. Thus the efficient attitude is to forget any idea of performance and just put ourselves into the “writing attitude”. Writing is a state of mind, not a production. If nothing comes, then nothing comes, but anyhow we maintain the “writing attitude”, for a given time, half-hour is a good first initial goal. Then we can write about this “nothing”, or transcribe whatever comes to our mind, and the process will occur by itself: the writing will naturally develop itself and improve. The angry person should take on as a task to write about this very phenomenon in his life. First of all, narrate in detail the fact and circumstances of those different fits of anger. Then try to analyze the reasons for those fits. This process will make anger, its form and function, more conscious and help to control it better. By identifying the sources of anger, it will become possible to treat more adequately, calmly and rationally, both the objective problem that worries us and our own reactivity, probably excessive and uncontrolled.

## E – Dialogue

The fifth one is to not hide the discontentment and to express our qualms, in the way of a calm dialogue. In some cases, anger comes from the fact of not verbalizing issues that bother us, repressing them until the pressure becomes unbearable, then it comes out in the form of an outburst, as the product of a repressed emotion, as resentment. Thus we should develop the habit of dialogue, learning to express calmly our problems to someone else, to anyone, but in particular to the concerned person. In order to do this, we have to become available, to take our time, to be capable of listening to others, to understand and even to accept the fact that the listener might have a different perception of the situation. We do not have to agree with them, we have to learn to agree to disagree, but we should learn to explain our own position, to express our pain, and to give arguments for our conclusions. The fact we can dialogue reconciles us with our own potency and self-identity, getting ourselves out of the victim position, to escape the sense of powerlessness which is so conducive to anger. To express our anger directly should not be forbidden, but we should learn how and when to do it, rather than being totally taken over by the emotion. Then it will be less systematic and more controlled.

One crucial reflex to acquire is the one of pausing, as a condition to rational dialogue. To pause is to interrupt the ceaseless flow of life and emotions, the permanent chaos we are caught in, and create a space for peaceful non-urgent dialogue, where neither do we expect anything, nor do we try to convince anyone. When anger arises, it usually takes us over like a wave, it comes as a reflex, which is the operation of our survival instincts. Thus consciously pausing between being stimulated and giving a response will be useful in order to regain our freedom to act and speak instead of remaining a slave to our own impulsivity. When we start feeling the "heat" in a discussion, we should interrupt it for a short while, and take a pause. Just by taking a couple of minutes break, or longer, we can observe our own reaction, examine rationally the stakes of the discussion, be more conscious of those involved in the situation and gather the available resources to deal with a difficult moment. Such pause is often all we need in order to calm down and let our reason contribute to the formulation of our response.

## F - Reflection

Sixth, we should engage in a reflection about our own existence, examining the nature and reasons of our dissatisfaction in a deeper way. This exercise is the most difficult, because it implies on one side cognitive capacities: to identify and name issues, to analyze and evaluate our mental processes and ideas, to relate to different types of other possible schemes of thinking, etc. And on the other side it implies psychological availability: to be able to focus and not let our mind jump chaotically, to accept our own limits, to be able to engage in self-criticism, to accept to look at ourselves simultaneously with a distant and sympathetic eye, etc. The arduous and laborious challenge of this task is the reason why the assistance of a philosophical practitioner would be helpful for such an endeavor. Although if our degree of anger is so strong or persistent that we cannot engage in such an exercise, more appropriate would be a therapist, psychologist, psychoanalyst or else. In such a philosophical reflective work, we should examine the nature of our existence, our values, our goals, our suffering, in order to see more clearly and evaluate who we are, what we are doing, how we relate to others, what are our existential alternatives, what we want to do with

our life, etc. In order to accomplish this, we have to identify the source of our primary anxieties which condition our compulsive behavior and mental chaos. This is useful both to understand our own functioning and to calm down our own mind, make it more peaceful and clearer.

Actually, there are not so many different issues that create obsession, havoc and mayhem in human existence. Here is the list of what we have identified through years of practice as the main causes for our fears and anxieties.

- Fear of death, fear of mortality, ours and other's.
- Fear of not being loved.
- Fear of loneliness.
- Fear of not being recognized, being ignored and not valued by others.
- Fear of uselessness, fear of not being needed by others.
- Fear of not being free, of being bound in our will and actions.
- Fear of worthlessness, fear of nothingness, of our self and of the world.
- Fear of meaninglessness, lack of interest and significance of our self and the world.
- Fear of being stupid or looking stupid, fear of mistakes and foolishness.
- Fear of suffering, fear of pains of all kinds.
- Fear of insanity, fear of becoming or being crazy.
- Fear of impotence, fear of potency, feeling like a victim.

Most of the time, we try to hide and compensate for these anxieties with wishful thinking, with posturing, what can be called bad faith. This self-delusion is often difficult to deconstruct, since it has built and solidified itself over the years. We have constructed our existential schemes around this make-believe identity, but it remains fragile: something in the back of our mind knows it does not really work, that it is superficial and weak, full of fissures and fundamentally anxiogenic. Anger is often a "strong" defense against what we fear and even against realizing what we fear. Anger will be present in all forms of resistance, like a tough wall that supposedly will not break.

Therefore, patiently analyzing and dismantling these existential contraptions and facing our fears is a necessary step for a reconciliation with our own self, in

order to pacify our psyche and deal with the endemic anger. But in order to engage in this process and pursue it, we need to develop our capacity of thinking and enjoy exercising our own power of reason. An undisciplined mind tends to think and do things that arouse anger, such as worrying, overgeneralizing, jumping to conclusions, making unfounded assumptions and diverse reasoning fallacies. As well, our internal chaos makes us feel insecure. Many of the "triggers" of one's anger are not "outside" the subject, they are not events, people and circumstances, but they result from an untrained reason, from the misuse of one's thinking capacities. The exercises of philosophical practice not only help to dedramatize our life, but they foster a clearer and more plastic thinking. Such a process, by deconstructing many assumptions, somewhat removes many of these so-called "reasons" to get angry.