

Day 5 Protective Mechanism: Anger and lashing out



One of the ways we defend ourselves is through the fight response. We lash out verbally with cutting remarks. People whose primary trauma response is anger or rage understandably have more trouble with relationships.

What happens when we are emotionally flooded? Adrenaline and cortisol flood our system and we feel we are fighting for our life. We say things we don't really mean that are intended to hurt. We lash out.

Feeling powerless is often what triggers a threat response. We are trying to keep ourselves safe. Many people with a rage response shame themselves for having that response. Feeling anger is preferable to shame or helplessness. Anger and mobilizing into fight is one of our normal responses to situations where we perceive a threat.

It is scary if you go into rage or someone in your life does. Anger so often feels justified, especially anger at someone else or at the world. Anger can be a healthy response to injustice.

Take a moment to notice what your body feels like right now. There is a certain energetic feel to anger. Low-level irritation feels different from rage and isn't the same as anger stewing on the back burner ready to explode with the right trigger.

[If you're feeling angry](#) or you can bring up a situation where you were angry, notice the details. What is the circumstance? What are your thoughts? Where do you feel it in your body? How would you describe it? Does it affect your breath?

Take some deeper breaths and notice the energy and sensations in your body. If you feel angry right now, how do you know that's anger? Do you feel it in your whole body? Is it in your chest and arms? Is it hot and painful? Is it still or moving? Is it hot and fiery or cold and implacable?

Notice any words or images. Memories of situations come up with the energy of anger.

Maintain mindfulness that you are doing an inquiry. You're not actually in a situation. You can afford to take time to stay grounded, breathe and inquire.

Tune in to the space around the energy. Focus on your breath and the feeling of your feet on the ground. Is it safe to be angry? What is your felt sense of that? If you pay attention to the anger will it get stronger? Could it cause you to explode?

Notice you are working with feeling the energy, not expressing it. Can you welcome the energy in your body? Put your attention right into the location where you feel it most strongly. Ask the energy some mining questions.

Why are you here? What are you angry about? What do you need?

Listen. We're not trying to figure it out in the mind. We are listening and paying attention as thoughts come up. This is what is associated with anger.

Are you making yourself wrong because you feel anger? Do you allow yourself to feel anger? Stay connected with your breath and your whole body as you look.

What are some of your beliefs about anger? *It's scary. I'm bad.* What beliefs did you absorb as a child about anger?

Is there anything else here besides anger? Is there sadness or anything else that needs attention? Are you open to feeling that?

We have a range of experience with anger. Children are often the target of inappropriately expressed anger. Someone is in a rage and they take it out on us. It's scary.

Anger can be a fiery clear way to help us see a truth. With any strong emotion, remember to stay grounded by focusing on your body and breath. You could tap on your forehead or take a break from it and come back to the inquiry another time.

We are afraid of other people's anger, especially if we have known someone who is violent or abusive. Notice if there is a fear of your own anger. Is there a sense it needs to be controlled or that it is not safe to let it out?

Reflect back on your experiences as a child. Were you allowed to feel it? What happened when you

expressed it or did you suppress it because it was never safe to be angry? We can see through those beliefs now we are adults.

What does your expression of anger mean about you? Does that make you a certain kind of person? Is there shame or judgment around feeling angry? Shaming ourselves is different from taking responsibility for the hurt we caused through our anger.

Are you afraid of what might happen if you start to feel anger now or express it?

As adults, we can get to know ourselves and develop strategies. We can recognize when we feel threatened and emotionally flooded. It takes about twenty minutes for adrenaline and cortisol to recede and for our higher level cognitive thinking brain to come back online. We could say something like “I’m angry right now. I need some time to work this through. Let’s meet again in a half hour after I’ve walked it off.”

We don’t have mastery at first. There might be a fear of feeling anger and certainly about expressing it. Stay connected with your body. We’re just giving ourselves some room to look at our experiences and beliefs. If you weren’t allowed to express anger as a child, is that still true now? Are you preemptively controlling in order to protect yourself and others?

Tune into the anger in your body. Does it feel like it wants to hurt you? Is it here to protect or help you? Whatever your answer, notice how you know that. Look into your relationship with that. Do you need to get rid of it or does it feel workable? Is it something you could welcome to be here?

Anger is a normal healthy response to situations of injustice and abuse. It can be a cover-up for sadness or shame. It is intense and can feel scary.

There are practices we can do to work with anger. Even, smooth, diaphragmatic breathing helps, as do longer exhalations. Be mindful of your inner state as you feel emotionally flooded and take a twenty minute break.

Notice the difference between feeling anger and expressing it. Observe like a scientist. How would you describe it to yourself? Notice the space all around the energy. Notice it often dissipates on its own as we feel into it.

Intense anger can be intrusive and we might need a strong practice of inquiry and tapping or tracing. It grabs our attention and feels urgent.

Notice as you're paying attention if you are willing to let things cool off. Can you do practices like tapping or tracing? We can get attached and charged up with anger that feels justified. Set aside the question of right or wrong. We're working with anger as an energy, noticing what it feels like in our body. Stay as a witness or observer, grounded and present in your body and breath.

Could you have compassion for yourself? The experience of anger can be difficult and triggering. There is a compulsiveness in our thoughts. Our bodies get tight and contracted. Bring kindness and compassion to yourself and acknowledge the difficulty and intensity of anger.

There is a cooling yoga practice of *sitali* breathing. You can do it when you're feeling fiery or as part of a daily practice.

[Sitali breathing](#): open your mouth and stick out your tongue. Curl it so you make a straw or channel to inhale through. If you can't form a channel (it's genetic), let the air flow over the coolness of your tongue.

Breathe in through that wetness in the channel you created with your tongue, then breathe out naturally through your nose. Do *sitali* breathing for a few minutes to release fiery energy on the spot or as a daily practice.

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