



ANGER MANAGEMENT

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Do you wish you had better control over your temper? Do the people around you, your spouse, your friends, your boyfriend or girlfriend, your children, wish you had better control over your temper?

Unfair or excessive anger is a major cause of marital strife, of tensions between parents and children, and of tensions in work places. Sometimes anger is responsible for more than just tension. “Road rage,” for example, is implicated in hundreds of deaths and thousands of accidents each year.

Of course, anger is not always wrong. Sometimes it’s absolutely necessary. There is evil in the world and sometimes in our own lives. If that didn’t make us angry, neither nations nor individuals would ever oppose it. Think about it for a moment: Would you want to live in a world where no one except victims felt anger toward terrorists, rapists and murderers?

But that’s not the sort of anger I am talking about now. I’m talking about day-to-day anger and the role an angry disposition plays in poisoning our daily lives and the lives of those around us. People with quick tempers sometimes say that they can’t control their anger. But that’s not true. People can’t always control how they feel, but they can almost always control how they act.

Let me offer an example: Imagine you’re walking down the street when suddenly you’re confronted by a person with a weapon demanding your money. Clearly, you’re furious. But do you shout at the person? Do you curse him? Very unlikely. You speak in as calm a voice as you can, probably even in a respectful manner – if you speak at all! We all know why we would act in such a calm way – in order to save our life. Obviously, then, we can control our tempers when we really want to.

Now there are whole courses on “anger management” and they undoubtedly have many ideas and suggestions. But I would like to offer one rule that will enable you to control your anger and almost guarantee that you will never say something that will lead to an irrevocable break or a permanent hurt in your relationship with another person: No matter how angry you get, restrict the expression of your anger to the incident that provoked it.

This means when someone has done something wrong and has hurt you, express anger for what they did – but only concerning that incident. Don’t use words like “always,” or “never.” “You’re always inconsiderate,” “You never think before you act.” What’s the other person supposed to say? “You’re right. I am always inconsiderate.” In addition to making the other person defensive – who wouldn’t become defensive when accused of always being anything

bad – your statement is untrue. No one is always inconsiderate. No one never thinks before he or she acts.

That someone has done something wrong to you doesn't give you the right to lie to or about them.

Also, expressing thoughts like this is destructive in another way. One of the sad and unfair consequences of anger is that people think that what you say when you're angry is what you really think. Now, it might be. But usually it isn't what you really think. It's what you are thinking at that moment. Who hasn't had some really angry and unfair thoughts about their spouse, their child, or about a good friend? No one.

But most of the time we make sure not to express these angry thoughts. Because the moment we express them, it becomes hard, if not impossible, for the other person to ever forget what you've said.

A medieval philosopher offered wise guidance: "I can take back words I didn't say, but I can't take back words I did say." How hard is it to practice this rule? For some, it might be pretty hard. For others less so. But everyone can do it. You have to stay focused, and you have to exercise self-control. If you have issues with your temper, this might well be a life-transforming suggestion, so let me repeat it one final time.

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I'm Joseph Telushkin for Prager University.