



Anger

By Wendy Marks
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Is anger more prevalent in the world? Or do I just feel more surrounded and assaulted by it? It feels like every time I venture out of my balanced, sheltered, and energetically clean office I am assaulted by anger in many forms.

I get in my car and drive down the street, happily singing a song or listening to NPR and all of a sudden somebody cuts in front of me and honks their horn, often with an epithet, saying that I am going too slowly. Yes, I know I have a tendency to space out, but usually I'm driving the speed limit. I feel assaulted by strangers directing all of this "road rage" at me. They are going about filled with anger, and anything that comes near them seems to be the focus of it. Yikes!

I am standing in line at Trader Joe's and I let someone in front of me who has two items, when I have significantly more than that. The people behind me act as if I had beaten a small child. I was just trying to be a nice person. Can it really matter

if they wait an extra 60 seconds to check out? And the parking lot. YIKES. I have felt waves of anger from someone being cut off from a parking spot. I have totally given up on the lot and now park in front on the street to avoid angry people.

Our rage is not confined to supermarkets and roadways. I hear it in my office. People seem to be angry about things that they could much more easily let pass, such as barking dogs, loud neighbors, or uncut lawns... are we in the midst of an anger epidemic?

When I began writing this article and thinking about anger, I reread an article that I had written 12 years ago about the culture not allowing women to get angry. I advocated that women find their healthy anger and express it to the people around them in appropriate ways. I felt that we had a right to this anger and that we had been suppressing it for too long. I reread the message of a much less mature me, and I barely recognize myself... I have changed a lot since then. I think I was equating feminism with the assumed right to be as angry as our male counterparts — when anger is never the best expression for anyone. I was saying that anger and its expression is a normal and good way to communicate. I came from a “if you can’t beat them, be them” place. I couldn’t disagree with myself more.

I am in no way saying that I never get angry. But what I have learned over the years is that most of the time if I sleep on it I can find a better way to communicate with the person that I’m angry with— a way that is not an angry expression. I can explain the way I felt and the way that their actions affected me and in this matter get what I need from a situation without going to a place that feels dark and disturbing. I’m sure you’ve noticed that you can work up a head of steam, and in the moments after you express it, it really feels good. But does it feel good in the hours or days after that? Anger is, in a way, like a bug bite. It asks to be scratched but if we scratch it, we just make it bloody and more irritated and it’s likely to become infected. If we calm it, it heals much faster.

If I were conducting myself now in the way I advocated 15 years ago, I would be adding to the degree of anger in the world, instead of asking that people learn to identify anger as the destructive force that it is and to turn the temperature down in all situations. A lot of my change in attitude has corresponded with my own spiritual growth. Anger is always of a lower vibration. It is always going to make things worse. I am not saying in any way that there are not angering situations or that I never get angry. What I am saying is that I have learned over the years that expressing my anger rarely helps the situation and quite often escalates it. People hear your anger and they become angry. If you become angry either out of defensiveness or a feeling of being attacked, it can too easily spiral out of control.

I think that often the feeling of anger springs from a feeling of powerlessness. Somebody does something to us, or there is a situation that we feel we cannot change and we feel angry about it. I think the country, and to a great extent the world in general, has become more angry. The general temperature of peoples’ emotions has escalated. People are running around with an “anger fever.” It’s almost as if they are waiting for somebody to pull the trigger so that they can become angry and perhaps release some frustration and feel less powerless. I think

a lot of the anger that we are feeling in the world comes from our fear. Every day we are exposed to horrible news and scary headlines all over the world and in our backyard that make us feel afraid to go out into the world and do normal things. Random acts of violence are occurring everywhere, in our cities and in our small towns. Nowhere feels quite safe. I think it is that lack of safety that is triggering the fear that is expressed as anger.

I hope you know me well enough by now, after reading these articles, to know that I'm not trying to preach (even if some of my friends call it preaching). The questions that I ask here, as in most of my monthly missives, are questions that I'm working on and trying to solve myself.

I am trying in this lifetime to express anger in as few situations as possible, because anger makes me feel out of control, and does no good. This is kind of paradoxical because I believe when we feel the anger and want to express it is because we are trying to take control. But anger never gives us control. It is more like spilling our emotions and leaving a mess for somebody else to clean up. I believe that the energy of anger escalates in the world in a dark way.

I am advocating for de-escalation.

When you get angry, sleep on it. Don't take an action in the moment. Often acting on your anger will make the situation worse.

When you feel angry, take some breaths. Allow your body to calm. When you feel angry or helpless, try to find ways that you can make the world a better place in whatever small or large way you can. This will help you to take back your power, and you will feel less angry.

When you feel angry, pray, in whatever way that is meaningful or works for you.

When you feel angry, go into a room by yourself and sit with your feelings and let those feelings pass through you and transition to something else.

When you feel angry, find a way that you can change what angers you through your actions. Move to a higher vibration. Move to a place of positive change and growth. Transform your anger into something positive and vibrant and growing. Change your anger to caring and healing.

I often joke that I wish to be in my bodhisattva nature 85% of the time. That is my goal. I may never get there but I'll keep trying. My bodhisattva nature would always have the wish to do things that would move humankind forward and benefit all sentient beings. Not a bad goal.

Anger has no place in that goal.

Namaste,

Wendy