

## The Evolution of Anger

Millions of years ago, anger had the purpose of alerting an individual to the danger of an enemy attack, and then arousing the individual to counter-attack and harm or kill the attacker. This had obvious survival value.

In today's world, direct attacks by enemies are not very common, but human beings still get angry quite often. This anger takes many forms, with many causes, explanations, and excuses. Anger and arguing lead to stress, depression, divorce, the loss of jobs, and other situational calamities.

What makes this even more perplexing is that many people appear to be angry from an objective perspective, but they themselves deny that they are angry. "I am not angry." "Then why are you shouting?" "I may have raised my voice, but I have no intent to harm anyone: I am not angry."

Close examination of the phenomenon of anger leads to the observation that the unconscious mind's experience of anger has changed significantly during the last several million years. The trigger for anger today is not likely to be an enemy attacking us. A far more common trigger is the experience that "*something is terribly wrong!*" This powerful experience gives us an immediate activation which sets us into motion, propelling us to fix the problem with which we are faced.

Just as "killing our enemies" had survival value, so does "solving a problem." In fact, solving problems has more survival value now than killing our enemies does. So from the perspective of the unconscious mind, this is a valuable reaction. The motivation, activation, and energy of this reaction helps us to solve problems.

However, the unconscious mind is hampered by many limitations, including a limited perspective, tunnel vision, and limited processing capability. Thus, the unconscious mind can spring into action when there is no need to do so and the energy of its drive can direct us to carry out unskillful actions. As such, it is better not to allow the unconscious mind to control our thoughts, feelings, and actions. The conscious mind has a broader perspective, greater processing capability, and better judgment.

The transformation from destructiveness toward problem solving has not been a complete one. We do not have a separate, distinct drive to solve problems. There is a close proximity of the anger circuits to the problem-solving ones. Failure to solve a problem can trigger a state of anger, which can lead to hostile, destructive acts.

This tendency to erupt into anger is a part of the antiquated programming of the unconscious mind which can be counterproductive and self-defeating. If we are to respond effectively to this inner pressure and anger, then we must understand the dynamics. We need to understand that the anger drive is closely intertwined with the drive to succeed.

The usual response to anger and pressure is to get angry in return, or to blame the person. But when we closely examine the sequence of reactions, we become aware that ultimately we are blaming the person for *trying to succeed*. The intention to succeed is a good one, but it has gotten out of control. We need to help the person change the series of reactions that leads to negative results. But blaming the person for being bad, or responding to him with anger leads to more problems. With compassion and understanding, we can uncover what is going on, and learn to deal with these reactions in an effective manner.

The psychological situation is the same within our own mind. We tend to blame ourselves just as much as we blame others who get pressured and angry. There is no justification for this. We need to understand and accept the workings of our unconscious mind, recognize its limitations, and learn to deal with it effectively.

- John Nadas