



THE JOURNEY: A Guide for Reflection

Anger

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In recent years, there's been a spate of self-help books that speak to different approaches we humans tend to take when it comes to love, to making and receiving apologies, to death and dying, and more. I'm not aware of such a book on the topic of anger, but perhaps that's a book just waiting to be written.

This month, we take up the theme of anger. It may seem an odd choice of topic for exploration within a religious community. But it shouldn't be. Anger is a part of life, a part of the human experience—and it often has something to teach us about what matters deeply to us, or, perhaps, points to some healing work that might be helpful for us to undertake.

Anger, of course, can take many forms. I recall a quote I found many years ago that suggested whining is anger slowly leaking out through a very narrow aperture. Anger can also obviously be immediate and explosive and, at times, feel (or be) violent and dangerous. Anger expressed in this way can be scary and toxic. And, yet, anger can also be cathartic. It can be healthy. And it can be healing. When it comes to addressing some injustice, it can take on a righteous quality, like that summoned by the prophetic tradition in ancient scriptures or by the Raging Grannies calling for justice today at protests at Queen's Park.

In the coming weeks, I hope you'll give studied focus on how and where and when you find yourself feeling angry. In those moments, ask yourself what's really going on. What is it that you're finding so upsetting? And is your response to that situation one you feel okay about?

When someone these days demonstrates a pattern of inappropriate behaviour in various settings, they are required by their employer or some other higher-up to take part in an "anger management" course. Unfortunately, such workshops have become the butt of jokes. But there is value in us all learning healthier ways of being when it comes to our emotions—and to learn that it truly is possible to be good and mad.

As you delve into this month's theme, may you learn helpful things about yourself and those around you, and may you move towards growth in whatever ways may serve you well.

In faith and love,
Shawn

Questions to Live With



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1. When was the last time you recall feeling really angry? What was going on? What prompted your feelings and what eventually came of them?
2. What's your typical approach to anger? Is anger something that comes and goes quickly for you, or does it tend to simmer for a longer period of time?
3. Describe a time when you used your anger for good, or it motivated you to change your life circumstances.
4. What did you learn about anger growing up or at some later stage of your life? Has your approach to anger changed as you've grown older?
5. What is your experience of righteous anger? Is there some injustice, personal or political, that is really causing you to seethe with anger these days? If so, what is angering you and what, if anything, are you feeling moved to do about it?
6. If not one of these questions, what is your question about anger for this month?

For Inspiration

Anger as soon as fed is dead
'Tis starving makes it fat.

- Emily Dickinson

Conquer anger by love.

- *Dhammapada* 223

Hope has two beautiful daughters. Their names are anger and courage; anger at the way things are, and courage to see that they do not remain the way they are.

- St. Augustine

It's my rule never to lose my temper till it would be detrimental to keep it.

- Sean O'Casey

Temper tantrums, however fun they may be to throw, rarely solve whatever problem is causing them.

- Lemony Snicket

Hatred is a passion requiring one hundred times the energy of love. Keep it for a cause, not an individual. Keep it for intolerance, injustice, stupidity. For hatred is the strength of the sensitive. Its power and its greatness depend on the selflessness of its use.

- Olive Moore

There may be times when we are powerless to prevent injustice, but there must never be a time when we fail to protest.

- Elie Wiesel

Maybe your anger has the same capacity for beauty as your happiness.

- Cole Arthur Riley, *Black Liturgies*

Of the Seven Deadly Sins, anger is possibly the most fun. To lick your wounds, to smack your lips over grievances long past, to roll over your tongue the prospect of bitter confrontations still to come, to savour the last toothsome morsel of both the pain you are given and the pain you are giving back—in so many ways it is a feast fit for a king. The chief drawback is that what you are wolfing down is yourself. The skeleton at the feast is you.

- Frederick Buechner

You should be angry. You must not be bitter. Bitterness is like cancer. It eats upon the host. It doesn't do anything to the object of its displeasure. So use that anger. You write it. You paint it. You dance it. You march it. You vote it. You do everything about it. You talk it. Never stop talking it.

- Maya Angelou

Anger is a signal, and one worth listening to. Our anger may be a message that we are being hurt, that our rights are being violated, that our needs or wants are not being adequately met, or simply that something is not right. Our anger may tell us that we are not addressing an important emotional issue in our lives, or that too much of our self – our beliefs, values, desires, or ambitions – is being compromised in a relationship. Our anger may be a signal that we are doing more and giving more than we can comfortably do or give. Or our anger may warn us that others are doing too much for us, at the expense of our own competence and growth. Just as physical pain tells us to take our hand off the hot stove, the pain of our anger preserves the very integrity of our self. Our anger can motivate us to say "no" to the ways in which we are defined by others and "yes" to the dictates of our inner self.

- Harriet Lerner

Unfocused anger has self-destructive properties. Destruction may purge and even on some levels purify, but I'm no longer convinced it facilitates healing—perhaps even the opposite. Our answers somehow lie in building and creating, moving forward and beyond, allowing wounds to heal and scars to fade gracefully. Not to forget or deny pain, but to embrace it and move on.

- Renee M. Martinez

What if instead of struggling with our anger, we consider that when we feel angry inside, maybe it doesn't mean that there's something wrong with us? Maybe it means there's something wrong. Not wrong with *us*: wrong out there; something that we might be able to help change.

- Glennon Doyle

Declare your jihad on thirteen enemies you cannot see—egoism, arrogance, conceit, selfishness, greed, lust, intolerance, anger, lying, cheating, gossiping and slandering. If you can master and destroy them, then you will be ready to fight the enemy you can see.

- Al-Ghazzali



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On some positions, Cowardice asks the question, "Is it safe?" Expediency asks the question, "Is it politic?" And Vanity comes along and asks the question, "Is it popular?" But Conscience asks the question "Is it right?" And there comes a time when we must take a position that is neither safe, nor politic, nor popular, but we must do it because Conscience tells us it is right.

- Martin Luther King, Jr.

We can commit to both humanizing our enemies and working against the ways our differences lead to the subjugation and suffering of others. The work for each of us is to discern the limits of difference [of opinion] and recognize when power turns these differences to enmity. In all of this, we are called to live into the truth that all people, even our enemies, are made in the image of God. Our longing is for a world that frees each of us from the destruction of hate and harm.

- Melissa Florer-Bixler, *How to Have an Enemy: Righteous Anger and the Work of Peace*

Just by breathing deeply on your anger, you will calm it. You are being mindful of your anger, not suppressing it ... touching it with the energy of mindfulness. You are not denying it at all. If we know how to handle our anger, it can be very positive.

- Thich Nhat Hanh

Take no revenge that you have not pondered beneath a starry sky, or on a canyon overlook, or to the lapping of waves and the mewing of a distant gull.

- Robert Brault

Transformation is my favorite game and in my experience, anger and frustration are the result of you not being authentic somewhere in your life or with someone in your life. Being fake about anything creates a block inside of you. Life can't work for you if you don't show up as you.

- Jason Mraz



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“La Haine” (Hatred) - Susan Dane

It starts as a small little thing,
indignation at a trespass,
anger, having been wronged.
It grows into a flag,
parading first down small streets,
sweeping up the meanderers,
then avenues and winning crowds,
cheers along the way.
It writes an anthem,
builds a campaign.
Marching through the mind
it settles thoroughly in memory and vein,
changing our posture,
the way we hold our chin.
By the time it reaches bone,
it has eaten through sinew and spine,
cost us all that was benign.
Then, rises up the starless night,
no song no light.
Suddenly afraid,
we want it out:
cut, poison, burn the blighted stem.
But rampant right breeds cell on cell
out of control,
And having eaten heart
it eats the soul.

“Revolution” - Lynn Ungar

You say you want a revolution,
and who could argue with that?
Bad is avalanching into worse
and we are all in its path.
But don't buy a gun.
The people you would be fighting
already have bigger guns, and
more will to shoot them.

Don't bother arming yourself.
Instead, disarm.
Disarm yourself of assumptions,
and of your brittle belief that you know
how things should be.
Disarm yourself of expectation.
You will be wrong.

Disarm yourself of the need
for comfort. Go lightly
into places where you are a stranger.
Disarm yourself of loyalty
to what is normal, but false.
Pledge allegiance
to the tree outside your window,
to your neighbour's children,
to the speed of light.

Fill your arms with fruit, with flowers,
with a dog or a cat or a lover
or a mug of hot tea.
Fill your body with singing
or dancing or the scent
of bay trees in the rain.
Empty your world of all
that fails to serve the revolution,
that fails the test
of the seventh generation.

Commit to the revolution and
I promise we will win.
Not, of course, that everything
will be fine. It never is.
Revolution isn't the same as victory.
Revolution is the turning of a wheel
whose essence is change.

“The World Rising” - Alice Walker

The world rising
Can put an end
To anything:
The murder of children
Whales
Elephants
Forests
Oceans.
Get up. Roll over
On that part
Of you
That will not
Welcome
Recognize
Encourage
Or even see
Our rise.
A compassionate roll:
We must be done
With cruelty
Especially to ourselves,
To start again
Beaming like the sun;
Fresh.
But a roll that shows
We've reached the end
Of polite moves to
Repair and re-create the Earth,
And will press hard
On any parts of us
Even those we've loved,
That insist
On remaining
Oblivious
and
Asleep.

Optional Spiritual Exercise

This month's spiritual exercise invites us to pay attention to where and when and how anger shows up in our lives. For some of us, this will be an easy task; for others, it will require intentional effort to notice what causes mild upset and even stronger emotions. This month, try to observe moments of anger as they arise, no matter how small. Consider if the situation is a fleeting feeling or something deeper; either way, give thought to why you're feeling what you're feeling. You might keep a journal of these reflections. As well, undertake an anger audit. You might try this for a day, a week, or the entire month. Each night before bed, reflect back on moments of anger that cropped up across the day. What patterns start to emerge? What if any changes would you like to address in how anger appears in your life?

Join Us

Join a Journey Group

Journey Groups are a great way to go deeper with our monthly theme by sharing with small group of people for a couple of hours each month. Groups meet online on Zoom and are scheduled at different times during the month.

For more information, visit our website firstunitariantoronto.org/journey-groups/ or look for the link in *First Light*.

Upcoming Themes

April – Welcome | May – Freedom

Upcoming Services | Sundays at 10:30 a.m.

March 5th | International Women's Day
Patti Pettigrew and
the Reconciliation Working Group

March 12th | "The Art of the Apology"
Rev. Shawn Newton

March 19th | "The Gift of Forgiveness"
Rev. Shawn Newton

March 26th | "The Price of Perfection"
Rev. Shawn Newton

The Journey Team

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