



Processing Anger With An Open Heart, by John Robbins and Ann Mortimer

Anger is an intense and primal expression of the life force, a burning flame that cannot be ignored. It is the psyche's alarm system, demanding that attention be given to a limit or boundary of ours that is being invaded, to an injury or pain that is being denied, or to an area of our being that has become unhealthy. The function of anger is similar to the function of a fever. It helps to burn out unwanted, inharmonious elements. Its purpose is to restore balance and well-being.

If the symptoms of a fever are suppressed and ignored, then the illness will remain unchecked. So it is with anger. It is useful to listen for the message it brings and then to use it for growth and wellness.

We need to remember that the anger we feel toward someone else is not an accurate evaluation or judgment of who that person actually is. It is merely our own feelings communicating with us, telling us more about ourselves than about the other person. It is the beginning of greater clarity and discrimination, so that we can live our passion with integrity, develop our inner power, and become capable of acting assertively, rather than aggressively, on behalf of what we cherish.

There should really be two different words—one for "anger-with-the-heart-closed" and one for "anger with-the-heart-open." Most anger in our society is "anger-with-the-heart-closed." Many of us are in the habit of automatically using our anger vindictively to protect ourselves or to impose our will upon others. We may believe ourselves totally justified in demeaning others' self-esteem. We may believe that we do this for "their own good." We may even believe that the will we are trying to impose is God's will. From such unconsciousness have come generations of abuse. From such self-righteousness have come millennia of "holy" wars.

"Anger-with-the-heart-closed" is destructive. But there are times when our anger can be a gift to the other person, when it is not simply our own ego twisting in a knot, and trying to use the other person to undo the strain. Though we may feel great heat and urgency, there need be nothing mean in the way we express ourselves. For when there is no desire to wound or punish or blame, we become able to speak with great clarity and power. We may roar like a lion, but it is a healing roar. We may be challenging, but we are infinitely fair. We may be outraged, but we are respectful. This is "anger-with-the-heart-open" and it has a beauty, a passion, and a clarity that is unmistakable.

