



September 2005

Volume 5, No. 3

LIVING IN A PLACE OF LOVE RATHER THAN ANGER, HURT AND FEAR

Daniel J. Benor, MD, ABIHM
IJHC Editor

There is one Moral Principle the Love which springs forth from a willing heart, surrendered in service to God and Humanity, and which blooms in deeds of beneficence.

– Hazrat Inayat Khan

Introduction

Living in a place of love generates healing in you and in those with whom you interact. By clearing your blocks to being a vehicle for healing, you can bring more healing into the world. Through the web of consciousness and life you can contribute your healing to all of creation.

Anger

Anger is never without a reason, but seldom a good one.

– Benjamin Franklin

Anger is a common emotion between people who live and work together. Couples and children argue and fight, parents are often angry with their children; children with their parents; employees often chafe and fester over employers' actions; and supervisors frequently are upset by employees' actions and inactions.

The good news is that anger often is a way of showing that we care, particularly in our personal relationships. It is a safe way to express caring, in that it doesn't leave the angry person vulnerable to rejection after exposing a 'soft belly' of positive feelings that

are then not reciprocated. If we didn't care about the person who is the target of our angers, we would respond to perceived provocations with indifference, simply dismissing or ignoring them.

Anger does not have to be hurtful. If I state my anger as statements of how I am feeling, this opens a door to discussion about how the situation and relationships that brought out my anger can be addressed. (This is in contrast to angers expressed in blaming and attacking ways.)

Hurt and fear

Let us not look back in anger or forward in fear, but around in awareness.

– James Thurber

Anger is generated when we feel mistreated, misunderstood or rejected. We are hurt and want to hurt back. We feel abused or violated and want to re-assert our boundaries and demonstrate our ability to defend ourselves. This helps to diminish our perceived vulnerability, raised when we feel attacked.

The bad news is that we often carry inner bucketfuls of anger from hurts in the past that were not resolved. A slight or injury in the present may easily stir the feelings buried in the past, offering an opportunity to spill the festering old angers on the target of our present anger, along with the angers that this person stirred within us in the present.

Anger not only serves to avenge our actual and perceived injuries and assert our strength, it also helps to cover over our hurts – hiding them from others and from ourselves. We may not want to reveal to others how hurt we are, as we often fear that this would expose our weaknesses, leaving us vulnerable to further attacks. We may not want to admit to ourselves how hurt we feel, so it is easy to divert our attention into anger.

Anger begets more anger

Responding to anger with anger stimulates further cycles of anger. It is readily apparent that such vicious circles of perpetuated anger occur between individuals, families, diverse cultural, religious and ethnic groups, and nations. What may be less apparent is that this often occurs internally, within the unconscious mind of individuals as well.

When anger is vented, it frequently becomes the habitual, default response to situations in which a person feels wronged. The more people take out their angers on

others, the more easy it becomes to continue to repeat this pattern. The more firmly this habit becomes entrenched, the less likely it is that people will examine themselves to identify the hurts and fears that lie behind the angers.

Much more about anger is considered in an earlier editorial, *Choices in Anger* (Benor, 2003).

Let us not look back in anger or forward in fear, but around in awareness.

– James Thurber

Love

Surface levels

Shifting to responding to anger from a place of love can be quite a challenge. It requires patience and centeredness – not just with the person who is behaving provocatively but also with ourselves.

The clerk at the grocery store was obviously in a bad mood, which wasn't helped by the long lines and the late evening hour before Thanksgiving day. She snapped at the two people ahead of me – at the first for fumbling in writing her check, and at the second for presenting discount coupons which didn't exactly match his purchases.

I was tired after a long day's work, feeling stressed after having dealt with several psychiatric emergencies. Coming from a space of anger, this could have been an opportunity to reprimand the clerk for being impatient with elderly people, and at the same time an opportunity to dump a load on the clerk from my bucket.

Taking a deep breath, and choosing consciously to come from a space of love, I empathized with the clerk over the long line at the end of a long day... and was pleased to see a bit of easing in the tightness of his jaw, not quite extending to a smile, but definitely softening the tone of his voice.

This may seem like an insignificant, infinitesimal pixel on the screen of existence – in the gigabytes of collective angers that endlessly bounce around the web of our awareness – but in real life, our interactions spread like waves on an infinite sea of interactions and consciousness, far beyond the edge of the field of our immediate awareness.

If less anger is generated in little ways like these, there will be less anger in the buckets of people going home from the market; less anger in their interactions with family and friends; less dross in their buckets to carry around and to dump elsewhere; and perhaps most importantly, less angers programmed into the default systems of their children.

For many people it is far easier in situations with strangers to practice the alchemy of transmuting minor angers into love. Where colleagues, friends and family stir angers,

the resentments stored in our buckets from previous interactions with these people may more easily tempt us to dump sloshes of anger.

For others, however, taboos against expressing angers at family and friends may make it easier for them to dump angers on strangers. This approach may even be legitimized as the venting of angers on 'others' who are outside our immediate circle of familiarity and allegiances. This readily becomes systematized into various class, racial, religious and national prejudices. Politicians through the ages have used this tactic, manipulating people into directing their angers against 'outsiders,' as a convenient and very effective way to divert angers away from themselves.

Moving deeper

Love may feel at first like a vulnerable place to come from. If you open your heart and are rejected, you may feel hurt... and then come the choices of taking it personally and responding from hurt and anger, or standing back and continuing to come from a place of love, in situations with minor as well as major challenges.

I returned home at the end of a long day to find that the pharmacist had left a message on my voicemail that she couldn't fill a prescription for a new antibiotic for my eye infection that my doctor had called in. The terse message said that my insurance plan doesn't cover this. I was suffering considerable pain and discomfort, as I need my eyes for writing, editing and reviewing books, in addition to my clinical duties.

My first reaction was frustration and annoyance over the inconvenience of having to sort this out, then anger at being forced to stop my work. My second reaction was to phone and give the insurance company a piece of my mind. Taking a deep breath before responding, I relaxed and was quickly able to connect with more healing ways of responding (after several years of practice, I should add!).

I phoned and expressed my sympathy for the pharmacist, who was caught here in the middle of a situation that was not of her own creation or intention. She found an equivalent substitute antibiotic, and the practical problem was resolved.

Reflecting on my initial angry response, I realized that this situation was stirring something more substantial in my bucket that was ready to pour out, catching a ride on the invitation to release anger that the insurance company had provided. The insurance company was managing its resources with a tight budget. I was also budgeting my resources very tightly – having taken on obligations that crowded the available hours in every day, to the point that there was little slack to allow for unscheduled demands, much less sufficient slack to offer the nourishment of down-time. Some of my anger had to do with frustrations at myself that I was unable to resolve – without dropping one or another activity which I valued and was reluctant to relinquish.

On deeper reflection, asking myself why my eye might be calling for my attention by getting an infection, I could see that my unconscious mind was inviting me to take a more careful look at my crowded schedule and to consider whether I couldn't re-order my priorities to allow myself a less harried and more healing existence.

I see many families in therapy, usually initiated to address children's misbehaviors. The perception of the parents is usually that there is something wrong with the child that needs fixing. The parents have often used every approach they can devise, with limited response from their children. They come to me with frustration and anger, hoping I will fix their problems. In many cases, the problem is a combination of conflicts of wills and personalities among family members, with the children being the most open in expressing distress over the family tensions. Let me share a composite vignette to illustrate how anger can bounce around in a family.

Donna and Jeff called to schedule an appointment to evaluate Cindy, their 8 year old daughter. Cindy had temper outbursts several times daily at home and in school. Whenever she was corrected, she would argue defensively and very quickly escalate into angry outbursts that could include shouting, throwing anything that happened to be in her hands, and occasionally hitting other children. At my request, they also brought their other children, 10 year old Greg and 5 year old Lori.

Cindy was a bright and articulate girl who was very outgoing and up front in discussing her views and opinions. Her parents and siblings were all much more reserved and quiet. I found nothing seriously wrong with Cindy, but could readily see that she must have been experienced as a jarring vibration in what would otherwise be a quiet family. Clarifying further, both parents agreed that Cindy's misbehaviors began shortly after the start of the school year, when Donna had gone back to teaching math in high school, after many years of being the mother and housewife. The decision to do this was based on Lori's entering pre-school and strained family finances. This was creating considerable tensions in the home, as everyone had to pitch in and help more. Jeff and Donna had been stressed for many months, with frequent arguments about how to budget their limited income.

I find this a very common experience in family therapy. Children are stressed when parents are angry. They will often take the heat off their parents by misbehaving, thereby drawing the anger to themselves – as in Cindy's example. In other instances, they become agitated due to the tensions and angers vented in the home, and commonly express this through their own anger, depression, or psychosomatic symptoms.

Donna and Jeff were open to exploring better ways to deal with their tensions. Within a few sessions, they were able to work out the practical problems that were stressing them. In the course of doing so, they were also able to establish a calmer and warmer atmosphere in their home. Cindy's behaviors improved as quiet returned to the household.

Now many therapists would stop at this point, as the crisis was past. This is the crisis management model. A very different perspective is suggested by a spiritual perspective, where there are no coincidences in life, and where we are all reflections of the world around us – as the world is reflected in us. From a spiritual perspective, a crisis is an invitation to ask questions about ourselves and to learn further lessons on our spiritual path.

Donna and Jeff responded with interest when I invited them to explore how to build further on the positives in their lives. I strongly believe in building a *sweetening spiral* (my term for the opposite of a *vicious circle*) to continue the positive momentum of therapy. Building on their successes in dealing with problems that brought them to therapy, people are often ready to go further. They are willing to work further to reverse their negative attitudes and behaviors, which begot negative responses and worsened the negatives in their relationships. So, we worked on acknowledging positives and responding with positives, to build Jeff and Donna's sweetening spiral.

I won't go into details of the psychological and relational issues we worked on, as therapy for these sorts of issues are well covered in other literature on marital and family therapy. What I'd like to focus on are the spiritual aspects of psychotherapy.

Exploring spiritual awareness

Crises and life challenges are particularly good opportunities for examining one's relationships with the world at large, in addition to examining one's relationships with family, colleagues and friends. Energetic blocks in our physical, emotional or mental selves will often resonate with energetic blocks in social and spiritual dimensions.

Jeff and Donna both felt that while they couldn't rightfully claim that anything major was wrong in their lives, individually or as a couple, it still felt like something more was needed in order to feel complete. Jeff was doing well in his computer repair shop, working fewer hours now than in the past four years when he had put in a lot of overtime to build up the business. He enjoyed having more time with the children and a weekly basketball game with pals he had played with since high school. Donna, likewise, was coasting along in a comfortable groove, having sorted out her teaching plans for the 3rd grade classes she taught, so that they could be recycled with minor updates from one year to the next. While she complained of having to chauffeur the children to activities more than she liked, she still had time to read in the evenings and to attend her monthly book club. Neither could put their finger on what was missing. They were taking time to be with each other and had no complaints about their marital relationship. Still, something definitely felt like it was missing.

When the question of their spiritual satisfaction with life was raised, both responded with curiosity and an eagerness to explore what might be enhanced in this area of their lives. Each in their own way had resonations with spiritual awarenesses. Jeff's thoughts went towards shifting to a church with more social activities and Donna said she would like to learn to meditate or practice yoga. While they proceeded to explore both of these suggestions, it was the discussion of spirituality in their lives in general that they felt was by far and away the most helpful. Reconnecting with their spiritual awareness put everything in their lives into a more meaningful perspective. This, in turn, opened into a deeper appreciation for the gifts they had in their lives.

Donna and Jeff came into these awarenesses through the relatively light challenges of dealing with the issues of their 10-year-old daughter. Others have reconnected with the spiritual parts of their lives through more intense changes in their lives, such as illnesses, accidents or injuries; dissatisfying relationships or work situations; the death of a close person or animal; waking up to a bad habit or addiction; or some other way of being jarred into asking serious questions about one's place in the world and the meaning of life.

I find that most people are able to identify both the spiritual needs in their lives – once the question is raised that brings this to their attention – and the ways in which they might satisfy these needs. We start with questions about their satisfying and unsatisfying experiences with spirituality in the past, which often provide ready suggestions for where to look for satisfaction of these needs in their present lives. As with going to a restaurant, it sometimes helps to look at a menu to find items to taste that one might not have otherwise considered. The menu I lay out for them includes:

- Active participation in church/synagogue/other formal religious groups;
- Individual/couple/family (re)dedication to religious/spiritual commitments/practices – noting that spirituality may be found outside religious institutions, as in prayer or meditation;
- Reading religious and/or spiritual books;
- Charitable/volunteer work, especially in helping others;
- Developing one's healing gifts, individually or through a prayer or healing group;
- Mindful, living spirituality – making every action a dedication to bringing love and healing into the world; giving thanks for large and small blessings throughout the day; acknowledging one's blessings at family gatherings (e.g. at dinner – daily or weekly); spending time in one's personal place of peace and healing;
- Connecting with spirituality through nature;
- Connecting with spirituality through music, poetry, dance and other creative arts;
- 12-step programs;

References

Benor, Daniel J. Choices in Anger, *IJHC* 2003, 3(1), 1-21.

Franklin, Benjamin. Attributed.

Khan, Hazrat Inayat. (One of the ten thoughts which form the foundation of Sufism), http://psychcentral.com/psypsych/Hazrat_Inayat_Khan.

Thurber, James. Attributed.

IN THIS ISSUE OF IJHC

Christian J. Hallman, PhD details his research on children's intuition, showing gender and age differences. His study confirms the common observation that children lose much of their intuitive awarenesses as they grow up.

Alexander P. Dubrov, PhD, is a plant biologist and expert in psychic phenomena in St. Petersburg, Russia, who has a long-standing interest in energy medicine, with a particular focus on earth energies and dowsing. He reviews and discusses research and theory in distant healing, including studies of qigong.

Dubrov's perspectives on research are interesting and informative – beyond the review of published research. In Russia and other East European countries the approaches and criteria for validating healing and bioenergy assessments and interventions differ from ours in the West. Dubrov's review of a controlled study that compares the half life survival of control vs. experimental groups of patients has not been used in the West, but could become a helpful indicator of treatment effectiveness. The focus on such controlled studies is recent, as until recent years, evidence from observational studies has often been accepted as adequate for confirmation of the validity of clinical approaches, with less reliance on randomized controlled studies.

Judith Landau, MD, is a highly respected, internationally renowned expert in family therapy – as well as a highly gifted intuitive and healer. She shares from her rich clinical practice how she helps people find and use their inner 'place of joy' as a sanctuary for dealing with strong emotional releases that may occur during past life regressions. Landau also describes methods for doing past life regressions simultaneously with multiple members of a family.

Lana Thomas, MS, addresses the societal madness that is destroying our planet. She suggests ways that Ecopsychology, combining psychology, ecology, modern physics and religion can combine to heal Gaia.

Dina Greenberg, in 'Walking the 'sacred landscape' with a hospital chaplain' describes how she 'shadowed' a chaplain on her pastoral care rounds in a hospital, learning about herself at the same time as she learned about pastoral work and patients' spiritual succor.

Meredith Jordan describes the heroic journey of a dear friend into a rare degenerative brain disease and her healing way of saying goodbye to friends and family.

Cay Randall-May, PhD, a highly gifted medical intuitive, suggests ways we can optimize our internal balance as we develop and use medical intuition.

Ellen Fisher-Turk developed ways to help women deal with serious psychological challenges, using Photo Therapy. Turk illustrates in deeply impacting words and photos how this powerful intervention has been transformative for women who had sexual abuse, obesity, bulimia and anorexia.

Lana Thomas, MS explores ecopsychology, the study of how we interact with our environment, suggesting a variety of approaches for healing our planet.

Aerika shares the unexpected blessings that came with a brain tumor, and **Teri Goldman** transforms this travail into a poetic experience. This is a sample from an unusual book that is built upon a series of such pairs of personal experiences with their paired poetic reflections.

Ric Masten, in his regular column, 'Poetry and Humor are Healing,' reflects on adversities that contributed to his growth and on being an honored guest at a medical conference on prostate cancer.

TERMS OF USE

The International Journal of Healing and Caring On Line is distributed electronically. You may choose to print your downloaded copy for relaxed reading. Feel free to forward this to others.

The International Journal of Healing and Caring
P.O. Box 76, Bellmawr, NJ 08099
Phone (609) 714-1885 - Fax (609) 714-3553

Email: center@ijhc.org Web Site: <http://www.ijhc.org>

Copyright 2001 IJHC. All rights reserved.