

Transcending Anger

A Handbook for Those Who Wish
to Give Up Anger

Note: This PDF includes the Preface and
Introduction to *Transcending Anger*

By
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Transcending Anger

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PREFACE

Making Anger Disappear

Anger [is a wind which] blows out the lamp of the mind.

–Robert G. Ingersoll (19th Century Theologian)

Anger is a short madness.

Horace (Roman Philosopher)

We are born, we live, we die. No matter what else we do or we believe, this trio of events will happen to every one of us. And only one process, our ongoing life, gives us the opportunity to make free choices, to consciously choose what to do and what to avoid, to experience true freedom while we live. In other words, to have free choices on how to live our lives.

To consciously choose what we do is the only way to experience freedom. Personal freedom, by its very nature, is defined by the conscious choices we make. Free choices are uninfluenced (and therefore not controlled) by emotion, psychological drives, political manipulation, social pressures, or neurotic (or psychotic) influences. To be free is to consciously and clearly evaluate options and choose the options most appropriate for you – for your life goals, your relationships, your health, the Planet, your future.

And for most people, the most powerful emotion that drives out freedom, the most obvious thief of freedom, is anger.

Anger: It takes thoughtful, conscious control from you, forces you to act irrationally, and often results in regrettable consequences. It influences behavior more powerfully than any other emotion. It overpowers reasoned, rational thought and takes control over you.

Most people go through life assuming that they can't change how they react with anger. They assume that "the situation" creates the anger. This assumption is false. When you understand how and why anger is experienced, you will have begun the process of letting go of anger.

This book is designed to enable you to transcend anger.

At a basic level, it seems rather simple: Change your thoughts and you solve the problem. Well, it's not that simple: your thoughts are based on your beliefs, and beliefs are not easy to alter, not always conscious. Some beliefs are rational, but many are not. Some beliefs are based on interpretations of events from your past, some based on learning from others (especially your parents).

Some are the mind's way of dealing with upsetting or paradoxical information you have encountered. All in all, dealing with the panorama of your thoughts and beliefs is extremely complex.

In *Transcending Anger*, you will learn a unique and effective method of examining unrealistic anger-related beliefs, and changing them in the light of objective reality. You may well find that changing unrealistic beliefs is not easy! After all, **something** caused you to create these beliefs. So, the first step is to admit to yourself that some of your beliefs may well be unrealistic; that is, wrong, and that they have had a negative effect on your life. If you have the willingness to examine and possibly change your beliefs, *Transcending Anger* will work for you.

Your greatest challenges will be the goals of (1) examining specific beliefs which you have developed over the years, and re-evaluating them in the light of reason and facts, and, (2) replacing these beliefs with those based on objective reality. We'll make these challenges easier by providing a variety of techniques for reaching these goals.

...our brains contain a belief-generating machine, an engine that can produce beliefs with little relation to what is actually true.

–Lewis Wolpert (Writer, Biologist)

Anger is a killing thing: it kills the man who angers, for each rage leaves him less than he had been before - it takes something from him.

– Louis L'Amour (20th Century Writer)

This is a very important practice. Live your daily life in a way that you never lose yourself. When you are carried away with your worries, fears, cravings, anger, and desire, you run away from yourself and you lose yourself. The practice is always to go back to oneself.

- Thich Nhat Hanh (Zen Buddhist Master)

If there were in the world today any large number of people who desired their own happiness more than they desired the unhappiness of others, we could have a paradise in a few years.

– Bertrand Russell (Philosopher, Mathematician)

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Organizing is what you do before you do something, so that when you do it, it is not all mixed up.

– A. A. Milne (British Author)

Life is difficult. This is the great truth, one of the greatest truths—it is a great truth because once we see this truth, we transcend it.

– M. Scott Peck (American Psychiatrist, Author)

INTRODUCTION

Holding anger is a poison. It eats you from inside. We think that hating is a weapon that attacks the person who harmed us. But hatred is a curved blade. And the harms we do, we do to ourselves.

– Mitch Albom (*Author, Journalist, Screenwriter, Musician*)

It's been over 30 years since I let go of my anger.

Although my anger was never dangerously out of control – that is, I never actually physically attacked anyone in anger – I had been frustrated by my lack of restraint; why couldn't I just not get angry? There had to be a way for me to avoid getting angry: This was my challenge.

I discovered the events that would trigger my anger:

- *Doing “stupid things,” like misplacing items*

For example, I recall a number of times inadvertently dropping my keys between my sofa cushions, taking 10 to 20 minutes to find them, all the time swearing like a sailor!

- *Getting lost while driving*

I got lost one night as I drove to pick up a friend. I recall the tension created by the anger I felt at myself for not carefully following the map I had briefly checked before leaving. I recall clenching my teeth and squeezing the steering wheel, and thinking to myself, “What an idiot!”

- *Getting stuck in traffic*

Driving to New York City from New Jersey on the New Jersey Turnpike at 8:00 AM almost guarantees significant traffic.

Nonetheless, I was always angry, tapping my foot, ready to snap at any car that **dared** to cut in front of me.

- *Being insulted, disrespected*

A friend was furious with his boss. Over coffee, he told me that his boss had insulted him about his work habits in front of a couple of his co-workers. My friend's face was bright red with anger, his hands balled into fists.

- *Being misunderstood and needing to repeat (or clarify) my statements*

At work, I thought I was clear when I invited a co-worker to dinner that evening. When she didn't show up that night, I asked her the next day what had happened. She said "Oh, did you mean LAST night?" I simmered and stewed, and slowly, perhaps sarcastically, said, "Yes, last night."

I seemed to react rather quickly to these activating events, and those reactions were themselves frustrating. They triggered my anger responses almost immediately. Counselors and psychologists have called these types of events "anger triggers," and I experienced them directly.

I also noticed that some of my anger triggers resulted in my getting angry at myself, while other triggers were interpersonal – getting angry at others. It also seemed that many, if not most, of my anger triggers were related to frustration. It appeared that the feeling of frustration often initiated a reaction of anger. I knew that I'd have to look into this relationship.

And so began my search for answers.

My approach began by researching a wide variety of disciplines. My search took me to many philosophical, psychological and counseling procedures. It included a review of about two dozen “How To” books on controlling anger. The books were consistent; their goal was to control anger. Their problem was that the techniques they espoused did not eliminate anger - they just reduced its strength.

But my goal was different. I didn't believe that anger was like the air pressure in a balloon, something that had to be **released** or it would grow larger and more dangerous, possibly to explosive levels, and therefore had to be controlled. I had a strong suspicion that anger was a reaction based on beliefs about when one **should** get angry. For me, it appeared that if I got frustrated, the frustration would trigger my anger. If I could insert a thought that would enable me to avoid anger – some way to tell myself that I needn't react with anger – I should be able to avoid getting angry.

And so I thought that if I can alter my thoughts and choose thoughts that were not anger-related, I could avoid anger. And what I needed to do was change the beliefs that created the thoughts that caused that anger reaction.

And that's where I started; I needed to learn all about beliefs - how they are formed and how they can be changed.

It was tough: even the **formation** of beliefs is usually an unconscious process. They arise from the myriad of experiences you have, especially when you're young. These beliefs determine how you react to each following experience in your life.

For example, if a stranger inadvertently bumps into you, you react with anger. Your belief that others should respect your “space” creates the thought, “That person bumped into me: I should be angry,” and you react with anger.

Event to belief to thought to emotion; the links that cause anger.

And more: We are extremely complex beings, and every one of our experiences can affect us in a wide, unpredictable variety of ways. Our

experiences can affect everything – our knowledge, our beliefs, our thoughts, and especially our actions.

This is where I spent much time, considering how to reach, understand and re-orient these beliefs and thoughts.

Over three years, I was able to form and organize the insights that, I believe, would enable others to give up, to let go of, anger. It was a powerful realization, a justification for the time and energy I expended, and it gave me the insight that I would be able to share the process with others.

It turns out that for letting go of anger, my answers paralleled a variety of ideas presented in a group of approaches to mental health and wellness. As I researched information for this book, I found four powerful psychological approaches that focused on how to examine and alter beliefs, thoughts and emotions. These four are the following:

[1] We each live as a continuously experiencing being. Gestalt Therapy, founded by Fritz and Laura Perls, has examined this experiencing, “living in the here and now,” and developed one approach to personal freedom and self-fulfillment. The Gestalt Therapy focus is on awareness of the current moment, and the relationship between the inner self and its environment.

Gestalt Therapy helped me examine not just beliefs, but their **context**, the **background** of beliefs as this continual experiencing of our ongoing lives. It’s important because it affects our beliefs, and beliefs affect thoughts, which induce emotions, including anger.

[2] Cognitive Therapy is a group of tools designed to evaluate and initiate changes from unrealistic to realistic beliefs. This powerful and often effective system, developed by Aaron T. Beck in the 1960s, has become popular with counselors, social workers, and psychologists.

[3] I had long admired the work of Dr. Albert Ellis, founder of Rational Emotive Therapy (now known as Rational Emotive Behavioral Therapy). It formed the basis for the development of Cognitive Therapy. It is a powerful therapeutic approach to a variety of

psychological conditions, and focuses on confronting and altering specific unhealthy, unrealistic beliefs.

[4] I also studied Social Learning Theory, developed by psychologist Albert Bandura in the late 1950s to early 1960s, which focuses on the relationship between cognitive, behavioral and environmental factors in determining behavior, especially of youngsters. Bandura noted that behaviors such as aggression were learned at an early age, and determined by observation of others (especially parents), feedback (“payoffs”), self-reinforcement, and reduction of inner tension. Bandura found that therapeutic steps suggested by his theory were effective in controlling aggression in children. Social learning theory is often the technique used by clinical psychologists working with young people.

Other related approaches were also included in the group of techniques I studied in preparation of this book. There are a number of philosophical, psychological, and counseling-related systems that focus on unconscious beliefs and the ongoing experience of living. Further descriptions and details on the history and development of these techniques are found in Chapter 14 (Resources), and definitions of many of the terms used here are in the Glossary.

Once I had come to a full understanding of these concepts and procedures, I chose as my goal to determine, analyze, organize, and distill the various theories and insights I had gained. This process had led to the steps I took to transcend anger, and could now enable me to effectively share the system with others.

The challenge to sharing my insights, I found, was to put into words how to understand and alter the many conscious and unconscious steps we usually go through as we get angry.

I found that the most effective method for creating personal change, change that can work through the reading of a book, is a consistent, clear group of instructions that enables the reader to focus on – and practice – the steps necessary to reach the book’s goal. These steps must include enabling the reader to examine concepts often well-hidden (not conscious), and to carefully and consciously re-evaluate

those concepts. The steps must also include tools to **shortcut** anger triggers in order to avoid automatic anger reactions..

From these steps evolved this book.

This book, *Transcending Anger*, accurately and effectively presents the concepts and methods I successfully used to transcend my anger.

One of the insights necessary to free oneself from anger is to understand the power of emotion. The Cherokee Story of Two Wolves provides a deep metaphoric understanding of how our emotions are empowered:

The Cherokee Story of Two Wolves

One day an old Cherokee told his grandson about a battle that goes on inside each of us. He said, "Little one, the battle is between two wolves inside us all.

One is Evil. It is anger, envy, jealousy, sorrow, regret, greed, self-pity, guilt, resentment, inferiority, lies, false pride, and arrogance.

The other is Good. It is joy, peace, love, hope, serenity, humility, kindness, benevolence, empathy, generosity, truth, and compassion."

The grandson thought about it for a minute and then asked his grandfather, "Which wolf wins?"

The old Cherokee replied, "The one you feed."

Transcending Anger is a step-by-step manual designed to free you from anger. Chapters 1 through 7 ("*Getting Ready*") prepare you for looking at your thoughts and beliefs in new ways. Chapter 8, ("*Changing*,") provides the steps necessary for change, and Chapters 9 through 14 ("*What's Next*") provide resources for effectively using your new freedom. Enjoy the journey!

The first step towards getting somewhere is to decide that you are not going to stay where you are.

–J. Pierpont Morgan (19th Century Financier, Philanthropist)

Progress is impossible without change, and those who cannot change their minds cannot change anything.

– George Bernard Show (Playwright, Author)

"I lose my temper, but it's all over in a minute," said the student. "So is the hydrogen bomb," I replied. "But think of the damage it produces!"

– George Sweeting (Religious Philosopher)

NOTE: *Transcending Anger* is available as a paperback or an Ebook. See www.transcendinganger.com.