

# ANGER

## UNDERSTANDING AND HANDLING IT

*I am not a professional psychologist. The thoughts and observations that follow are drawn from what I have read, from what I have observed of my own behaviour, and from my interactions with others. I offer them as a help along our common journey to self-knowledge. Their truth for you should not be based on any professional expertise of mine but is to be verified against the background of each one's experience.*

*In my own case, much of my experience has been drawn especially from my work with priests and religious, as well as from regular contact with other people. I believe that there is an enormous amount of unrecognized and unintegrated anger present in both groups.*

*This problem is but one manifestation of the broader problem of the lack of awareness of feelings in the community at large. It is certainly a priority issue for both priests and religious. A similar problem is to be found also in the recognition and integration of the sexual drive, and at some points the problems of anger and sexuality intertwine.*

*I believe that this lack of awareness and insensitivity to the inner world of feelings presents a considerable problem that needs to be faced urgently. The present article focuses on the issue of anger.*

John McKinnon

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**Anger is a very important component in everyone's life. The degree to which it is present depends on a number of factors, but some anger will inevitably be present in the lives of us all.**

## Glossary

*The meanings of most of the technical words that occur in the article are explained in the body of the text. Sometimes, however, the words may occur before their meaning has been developed. The following brief listing may therefore prove useful for the reader.*

**Emotion:** an inner experience and energy surge that arises automatically and spontaneously from within ourselves in response to some perceived stimulus. We may not always be aware of its presence and influence. Because it is automatic and spontaneous, it is independent of the will.

**Feeling:** an inner experience or emotion that we are to some extent aware of. It arises spontaneously from within. It is not simply a response to a raw stimulus, but to a stimulus that has been filtered by our own perception of it. Strictly speaking, it is not caused by others though it may be occasioned by their behaviour. (Examples: mad, sad, glad, scared!)

**Integrate:** to situate a part in relation to the whole. In the context of feelings, to integrate means to recognize the feeling, to accept it as my own, to accept responsibility for it, to allow it to be, and to choose what to do in light of it. (To name, claim, tame, and aim!)

**Repress:** an unconscious process by which feelings are automatically prevented from coming into consciousness. The preventing mechanism is generally *fear* of the feeling. Repression does not make the energy of the feeling dissipate.

**Sin:** the word is used differently in many contexts. However, when used in the personal sense and applied strictly, it can be taken to refer to attitudes and/or behaviour that are ultimately wrong (destructive of self or of others), whose wrongness is consciously recognized, and that are performed freely and deliberately. It involves, therefore, objective wrongness, knowledge of the wrongness, and free consent to it.

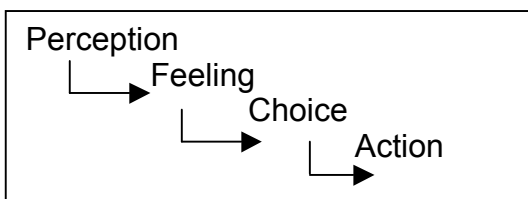
**Sublimate:** to channel the energy invested in a feeling away from the direction towards which it draws us and to direct it instead into what is seen as more constructive activity. Sublimation draws on the energy of the feeling and uses it.

**Suppress:** the deliberate process to try to make disturbing feelings slip out of consciousness. The process is directed at the feeling itself and not simply at the behaviour to which it draws us. Even when successful it does not make the energy of the feeling dissipate.

# UNDERSTANDING ANGER

## Feeling or Behaviour?

In any discussion of feelings, it is important immediately to distinguish feelings from behaviour (actions). Feelings are familiar factors of our inner life - inner sensations or emotions such as fear or anger or desire that occur spontaneously. In this they differ from perceptions or thoughts that we consciously produce. They are certainly different from actions. The feeling precedes the action, and between the feeling and the action, the mind and the will can become involved. Because feelings arise spontaneously, we are never directly responsible for them; we can, however, be responsible for our actions and our behaviour.



## Morality

Because we are never directly responsible for our feelings, they can have no morality. They cannot be morally either right or wrong. They are morally neutral. By themselves, feelings can never be sinful. We can be responsible for our actions and behaviour, on the other hand, and so they can and do enter the realm of morality, i.e., of sinful or virtuous behaviour. Before behaviour and actions can become sinful, however, they require that we sufficiently recognize their wrongness and are sufficiently free to make a clear choice.

Let us apply this immediately to the question of anger. Despite what many people have told us, feelings of anger are neither right nor wrong. Not even angry behaviour is necessarily wrong either, though it can be so. Its wrongness depends on whether the behaviour is destructive or inappropriate in the circumstances.

Many people think that they do not have feelings of anger. That claim is simply an indication that they are not aware of them - but they still inevitably have them. Anger is one of the four general feeling reactions to the experiences of life. (The four are: joy, desire, anger and fear).

## Putting Anger in Context.

Life experiences can be experienced as either good for us or bad, creative or destructive; and these experiences are either past, present or future. The automatic reaction to something we perceive to be good for us is pleasure. If the pleasure is present (either directly or in our memory), we feel *joy*. If it is not yet and still in the future, we feel *desire*. That is, we enjoy present or remembered pleasures; we desire future ones.

The automatic reaction to a bad or hurtful experience can be generally summed up as one of sadness and pain. If it is coming from a present hurt or a past one still retained in the memory, it tends to generate *anger*. If it is threatening but still in the future, it generates *fear*.

Hurt need not be seen as something dramatic. It simply means an experience that we do not like or want, or the absence of something we would like or want. It is something that is perceived to threaten in one way or other our security and peace, or our self-esteem and reputation, etc.. The experience of sadness or pain moves us to want either to remove or fight the source of the hurt or to flee from it - to fight in anger or to flee in fear (fight or flight). It is accompanied by an instinctive physical and nervous reaction that prepares the body for action.

So our basic feeling reactions to the experiences of life can be grouped under the four categories of joy, desire, anger and fear. And since the experiences of life cause us either pleasure or sadness in some form or other (and we cannot always prevent other people and situations being what they are), then we can expect our feeling reactions to life to be a constantly changing mixture of all four: joy, anger, desire and fear. The only way not to have them is not to be alive.

### **Importance of Anger**

Anger is an extremely important and necessary reaction to present hurt. It is an instinctive survival reaction, and draws its power and energy component from our survival instinct. Without it we would simply not survive in our hostile and aggressive world. It is the energy source that enables us to change what is wrong. It is the energy source behind the struggle for justice, for renewal, for change for the better. Without it the world - and we ourselves for that matter - would not be protected and would not progress. It is a very powerful energy source, as are joy and desire and fear. They are the energy sources from which our decisions to love (or hate, which is its opposite) draw.

### **Varieties**

We often call anger by other names which specify its nature. We experience disappointment, frustration, irritation, etc.. We experience it when our expectations (conscious or unconscious) of ourselves or of others (or of God) are not met. It has a thousand shapes, and a thousand degrees of intensity. But they are all basically manifestations of anger.

### **Intensity**

The degree of intensity of our feeling depends on a variety of factors. One is the perceived size of the stimulus. This involves basically an objective element - e.g. a light touch or a heavy blow, a light criticism or a serious calumny. The greater the wrong that is done to us, the greater the pain and the greater, therefore, the anger. A significant subjective factor is also involved, of course, and this consists not so much in the objective size of the stimulus as in how we subjectively perceive and rate it.

A further factor can be just as important, and perhaps even more so. It is the degree of rawness inside us, our subjective sensitivity. We have very little control over this; it is a

fact of life and the result of our past history and experiences. A wrong that touches a raw spot produces a stronger reaction of hurt. A parallel can make this clearer: if we hit one hand with the other, we may feel a little pain; but if there is a severe gravel rash on the palm of the hand, then even a light touch can cause considerable pain. Similarly, even a slight rejection or criticism that touches the emotional raw spots of our unhealed (and accumulated) hurts from the past can generate a strong reaction.

Another factor affecting the intensity of the feeling is the cumulative effect of a series of previous minor irritations. The final stimulus seems to excite a degree of intensity well beyond a reaction proportionate to the stimulus itself and more proportionate to the sum of the previous unresolved irritations.

For some reason or other, the feeling of anger has inherited a bad name. We seem to believe that we should not feel angry, especially if we are trying to be good Christians (especially good priests or religious!). The same comment could be made about sexual feelings and desires. We have sometimes been culturally conditioned to feel that it is in some way ungentlemanly or unladylike or even sinful. To be consistent we should say the same about joy. (Perhaps some Christians do!). It is sad that anger has this bad name. It certainly does not deserve it.

## RESPONDING TO ANGER

Since anger is an inevitable reaction to the experiences of life, it is important to examine what we do with it, i.e. how we act in the light of it. As I see it, there are five possible responses: we can integrate, express, repress, suppress or sublimate it.

### Integration

In general to integrate is to situate a part within the broader whole. Integrating our anger means to let it consciously be part of ourselves. This supposes that we first *recognize* our anger. That in its turn means that we have previously allowed ourselves to feel the hurt that has generated it, without denying it or deceiving ourselves into believing that we are not hurting (when in truth we may possibly be hurting very much).

Integration also means that we *own* our anger. This involves that we admit to ourselves that we are feeling angry, without making any deliberate effort to censure it or to say that we should not. It also means that we own responsibility for our own feelings and see them as originating in ourselves and not as the result of the actions of others. (Others may provide the occasion, not the cause, of our feelings).

We give ourselves the *right* and the *permission* to feel our anger. We appreciate it and are even thankful for it, because its presence indicates that we are alive and reacting normally. To act angrily may or may not be unreasonable, but to feel angry is a fact that is neither reasonable nor unreasonable. It has an existence of its own independently of shoulds, musts etc.. We let ourselves feel it for as long as it is there, neither pushing it away nor using it as a means to win pity from ourselves or others.

We then *choose* how to act: whether to express it directly or not. In either case we live with it until the energy invested in it has dissipated. And that is what eventually happens. In time, provided it is not repressed or suppressed, the anger loses its energy

and goes - unless its cause is continual, in which case the anger also persists. But then its energy can be drawn on and expressed constructively, or diverted into some other constructive enterprise. This can be a painful time.

Jesus may have found much of the energy he needed to endure the crucifixion and to remain present to the suffering in all its depth from the anger that he felt and owned, but sublimated, and chose not to direct aggressively towards the chief priests and those who jeered at him.

In the meantime the energy of the anger can be felt quite powerfully. It can persistently keep pushing a variety of ideas and images into our minds, even when we do not want them. We can find ourselves thinking a thousand times of what we could have said or might still say, what we should have done or would like to do. These thoughts arise especially at the times that our concentration is not absorbed by some other matter at hand, or often when we lie awake at night. They are often strong enough to push other issues aside for a time. The amount of energy invested in these thoughts can be gauged by the degree of difficulty involved in trying to free the mind of them. If we can move beyond the thoughts and images to focus instead on naming, owning and sifting the hurts and angers behind them, we can reach a state of peace more quickly.

## Expression

We can express our anger, i.e. we can behave angrily. When we express it without the moderating control of our mind and will, we call it temper. Temper is anger expressed in action without control. Because it may at least to some degree be expressed in a spontaneous outburst before the intervention of thought and choice, it may not always be a moral action. Morality presupposes knowledge of what we are doing (i.e. of its wrongness or rightness) and sufficient freedom (and time!) to consent responsibly. Temper is normally an inappropriate way to express anger and is often destructive in some way or other.

But anger can also be expressed after thought and with consent. It may be expressed either with a degree of force or in a non-violent way. (Violence is understood to involve either unjust or excessive force.) The forceful expression can be appropriate when there is a just reason and moderation is used.

Jesus acted angrily and with a degree of force in clearing the Temple, in some cases of healings, in challenging the Pharisees by miracles done on the Sabbath, and in condemning them. Indeed, his action in dying for us on the cross drew its *motivation* from his love - for his own integrity, for his Father, for us human persons - but it drew its *energy* from his deep hurt and anger at the harm that people were doing to themselves and to each other, an anger whose energy he drew on in his struggle with sin and the evil one.

The non-violent expression of anger hardly differs from assertion. "I feel quite angry because what you have done hurts me, and I hope you will not do it again". When it takes the form of simply communicating to the other that we feel hurt and angry, it is less likely to provoke retaliation, and can be a very positive form of communication.

However, when anger is expressed inappropriately, either because it is not justified or because moderation is not used, it is quite wrong. In that case, given sufficient appreciation of the wrongness and sufficient self-control and freedom, it can be sinful. It is

generally destructive and is usually counter-productive. It is probably the fear of this destructive use of anger that is responsible for the current cultural disapproval of all expressions of anger.

## **Repression**

There are other ways, however, of dealing with anger than expressing it outwardly. Some of these ways are healthy enough; some are not. Among the unhealthy ways of handling anger are repression and suppression.

Repression is a technical word which refers to a psychological process whereby the feelings of anger arising from some hurt are automatically diverted into the unconscious areas of our being without our being aware that they have arisen at all. The process is automatic; we do not consciously divert them. The energy source that does the repressing is our *fear*. We picked up that fear of anger from our childhood; and it may have been consolidated sometimes in later life by erroneous teaching that anger was sinful. A result is that some people can honestly believe that they never feel angry. We can know of its presence only because our behaviour will reveal it in one way or another, generally through psycho-somatic symptoms, neuroses or various forms of passive aggression. Because the process of repression is automatic and unconscious, there is little that we can do about it directly.

## **Suppression**

We can also divert our feelings of anger consciously by suppressing them. Suppression is the dismissal of something disturbing from our consciousness: we fight against the *feeling* directly, trying to make it go away so that we no longer feel it. Our reason for doing this is again either our mistaken notion that we should not feel angry or even our fear that anger is sinful. Suppression of the feeling needs to be distinguished from the sometimes necessary effort to control our behaviour. We can control our behaviour without trying to make the feeling disappear. To control the energy flowing from the feeling does not necessitate trying to get rid of the feeling. We can control our behaviour while being quite aware of our feeling and content to let it remain, even though we may feel uncomfortable.

## **Effects of Repression and Suppression**

The conscious suppression of anger has results similar to those of unconscious repression. The energy does not go away. It simply goes somewhere else and causes trouble.

A clear effect of repression and suppression is that they tie up much of our energy sources, and we can feel ourselves to be, and come across to others, as *lifeless and colourless* personalities, or rigid and unfeeling. Anger is a powerful energy source. It takes an equal amount of fear energy to balance it. When both those energy sources are taken up counteracting each other, there is little energy left with which to live life. I have in mind the mental image of two steam-trains on the same line pushing in opposite directions. A lot of steam is generated and enormous power exerted, but there is no movement!

The trouble with both repressed and suppressed feelings is that they do not disappear; they stay around within us. However, because they are prevented from coming up as themselves, they become transformed into something else. Because of our

conscious and unconscious fears, we are not able to direct our repressed or suppressed angers in a constructive way towards the persons to whom they should be directed. We may unconsciously feel that it is less dangerous to direct our anger at someone safe - namely, at ourselves.

When this anger is inappropriately diverted to ourselves, it can often be experienced as *guilt*. "I am to blame for his aggression; it is my own fault; I brought it on myself". We feel vaguely guilty, convincing ourselves that it must have been our own fault that we were hurt. When the feelings of anger are not tracked down to their true source and recognized to be inappropriate, they can also eventually come to be experienced as *depression*.

Depression can also arise directly, and perhaps even more commonly, from the denial or inappropriate diversion of anger without the experience of guilt necessarily intervening.

It is interesting to note that the *loneliness* that we sometimes feel can be a combination of aloneness plus depression, and it can often therefore be the result of repressed or suppressed anger. Perhaps, in a deep level of our being, the denial and suppression of the anger can cause a kind of estrangement from ourselves and within ourselves. We feel vaguely aware that we are "shut off" from some significant part of our own inner being, and this separation is felt as loneliness.

An important way to grow out of the spontaneous tendency to direct our anger towards ourselves is to learn to love ourselves, to build our self-esteem (truthfully), and to forgive ourselves for our real or imagined guilts. A person with good self-esteem and ready love of self does not accept any devious self-imputation of guilt. In this process a faithful *friend* becomes a virtual necessity. The Christian can also find a life of genuine *prayer* a further help, not as a substitute for friendship, but as a further experience of it. Through a deliberate exercise of faith we can let God reveal to us the fact of our worth and preciousness and the constant availability of forgiveness. This may involve purifying our image of God from the inadequate images developed in childhood and early adulthood.

Repressed or suppressed anger can also be destructive of others. In those cases where it is not diverted to ourselves it can be directed at others, sometimes indiscriminately, with irrational and excessive *violence*, verbal or otherwise, or in a covert way that is not obvious to ourselves and often seems inexplicable to others.

This covert expression of anger can take the form of *passive aggression*. "I do not get angry, I just get even". It can be the unrecognized energy source behind obstructionist behaviour, such as unpunctuality, forgetfulness, stubborn-ness, intentional inefficiency or passivity, or the unexpected cutting-off of a relationship, etc.. In reactions such as these, the desired change in behaviour is so difficult to achieve because the cause of the behaviour, the anger, is generally at work unconsciously and inappropriately.

Anger is accompanied by *physical reactions*, too. In the instinctive readying for "fight or flight" some muscles may stiffen, and adrenalin can be released into the blood stream and set off a whole chain of other physical changes. When the anger is repressed or suppressed, the physical reactions can still occur. The anger is kept out of my conscious awareness, but my body still recognizes it and exhibits symptoms of its presence such as organic and skeletal problems - ulcers, bad backs, etc..



## Special Cases

It is normal to be angry with those we love, indeed especially with those we love. The effect of love is that it raises expectations. It also makes us supremely open and able to be hurt.

So inevitably we have angers towards our **parents** whose love could never have adequately satisfied our fragile and insecure hearts, and whose intentions and behaviour were not always understood and even sometimes misunderstood. There were times, also, when they were selfish and inconsistent. Nobody can claim to have had perfect parents.

However, we are often shocked or frightened by this reaction. We unconsciously (or even consciously) fear that we may lose the love or approval of somebody significant, our mother or father. This touches a very deep and primitive area of our being where we can interpret the loss of the love of somebody significant as the total rejection of ourselves, the emptying of our own self-worth, and the virtual equivalent to death. And so, in what can be seen as being in the interest of survival itself, the angers are repressed or suppressed.

As was noted above, these repressed or suppressed angers do not go away but are transformed into something else that acts destructively within us. It is important to remember that our feelings are spontaneous. Their existence says nothing about our true attitudes or faithfulness. We can feel very angry with those whom we truly love deeply. It is important that we unmask our mistaken fear that the anger in our hearts will somehow render us unworthy and unloved. We need to recognize these angers and bring them into the open, to give them permission to be, to accept responsibility for them, to choose what to do about them, and to allow their energy to dissipate.

Many Christians repress or suppress the anger they feel towards **God**. It is normal to feel angry with God. We all have expectations of how God should act. We are aware of some of these expectations; of others we are not. But we inevitably have them. We may expect God to protect us or other good people from tragedy and suffering; we may expect that God enable us to feel warm and affirmed when we pray, at least sometimes, etc.. When these expectations are not met, we inevitably feel hurt and therefore angry.

It is important to remember again that our feelings are spontaneous and have a life of their own. We may believe with all our hearts that God is good and somehow there must be an explanation for what we feel to be unjust. We may know there is a reason for the way things happen. But what we believe and what we know have no immediate or essential connection with what we feel, and can be quite different. We may still feel angry even though we know and believe that God is good and is not responsible for what we feel to be unjust.

The Hebrew psalmists had a wonderful freedom to express their feelings, even their negative feelings, to God. Jesus was brought up in that same school of spirituality. In their accounts of Jesus' Passion, Matthew and Mark saw it as quite appropriate to present the dying Jesus as shouting out, "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?", a cry that to pious ears could sound almost blasphemous. Matthew and Mark referred to the spontaneous feelings of Jesus. It is interesting to note the different emphasis in Luke's account of the Passion: he focused on the deliberate, considered responses of Jesus, and recorded his last words as, "Father, into your hands I commit my spirit", an expression of faith rather than of feelings. The two emphases are not mutually exclusive.

Because of our sometimes undetected fears of God, we may repress our angers and be unaware of them, or we may suppress them as though they were sinful or irrational or ungrateful, etc..

One result of this is that God is felt as very *distant*. Anger so often has the effect of making us feel distant from the ones we are angry with. We can be nice and polite, but there is a definite distancing. And so the expectations become even more frustrated, the angers deepen, and the sense of dryness between God and ourselves can be desperate.

The dryness that a number of good people experience in their prayer is often due to their unrecognized and repressed angers, or their deliberately suppressed ones, with God. And they just cannot believe it! (There can of course be other reasons for dryness at prayer that are perfectly normal and to be expected).

### **Sublimation**

Another way by which we can deal consciously with our anger is to try to sublimate it. There can be times when the energy invested in our anger is so strong that it cannot be quietly integrated. We recognize our need for a safety valve. We divert the energy involved in our anger and deliberately use it in some other activity that we see to be constructive. We know that we are angry, we allow the anger to be, but we burn up the energy of the anger in some other constructive activity.

We may, for example, feel anger in face of the injustices to ourselves (or to those we love or whose dignity we respect) that we see constantly perpetrated by the institutions to which we belong. So, drawing on the energy invested in the anger, we may devote ourselves to a ministry that endeavours to change these institutions and the people who make them up, and in this way to remove the injustices.

We can also burn up our excessive anger sometimes without our realizing very clearly what we are doing. Without identifying our anger, and therefore without properly integrating it, we simply feel the need to "let off steam" and somehow to use up our energy. We may kick a tree instead of hitting a person; we may bang the table rather than punch a face. Or we can use the energy to do something useful. We might use it to chop some wood, to polish a floor, or to go for a run or a walk. An energy source of compulsive "workaholics" could well be an anger that has not been clearly integrated.

## **DEALING WITH HURTS**

### **Forgiving**

For peace to be fully regained after the experience of anger, it is necessary that we either honestly excuse or forgive the person or persons with whom we are angry. Forgiveness is something of a mystery, like love! It is easier to say what it is not than to say what it is. It certainly involves more than to say, "Forget it!". That is to by-pass forgiveness.

It also means more than to excuse. Excusing is necessary where it is appropriate. It is certainly helpful to realize that we sometimes contribute to the hurts that others inflict on

us by our own unjust treatment of them, deliberate or otherwise. However, forgiveness really starts where excusing stops, since strictly there is no need to forgive what can be excused. We forgive what we cannot excuse.

Among other things, forgiveness means the decision to love the person in the same way we would if he or she had not hurt us. Forgiveness involves our readiness to reach back in love to those who have hurt or are still hurting us. Ideally it would involve the effort on our part to communicate our forgiveness. It would mean, where possible, trying to re-establish community. This, in turn, may mean a determined effort to discover the "common ground" beneath the differences that may still persist between us. Certainly it means a decision never to store away in order to use again the memory of the hurt, either to accuse the person concerned, or to bolster our own self-pity.

In all this we may still feel awkward, and even hypocritical. Our choice to love may necessitate our keeping away from the ones who have hurt us, at least temporarily, until they have changed their attitudes. And, since love does not mean that we cannot try to change a situation, neither need forgiveness paralyse us or prevent our trying either to stop others hurting us or to counter their aggression.

It may help us to understand forgiveness if we observe the way that God forgives us. God does not deny our sin nor stop trying to get us to change our sinful ways nor pat us on the head as though our sin were nothing to be concerned about. In fact God continues to love us and to leave the way open for our repentance and return, continuing to respect our own responsibility and refusing to coerce or to manipulate our response.

There seems to be a mysterious power in forgiveness. It stretches our sense of personal wholeness; and when it leads to reconciliation, the intimacy that it makes possible is somehow stronger and deeper than what existed before. Perhaps it is in the mutual recognition of weakness and vulnerability that human persons transcend their selfishness and actualize depths of their own being that would otherwise have never been touched.

## **Refusing Forgiveness**

When anger is not integrated and hurts are not forgiven, the anger turns into resentment, and the resentment in time becomes *bitterness*. Both have the effect of poisoning our relationships and preventing our experience of inner peace.

It is something of a mystery why people refuse to forgive because the alternative, bitterness, is not really enjoyable. Perhaps in a twisted way the hurt and anger are used to give a perverted sense of self-worth and identity. It may be a little like the attitude of the hysterical child for whom any notice is better than no notice at all, even if the notice takes the form of punishment. The twisted self-esteem of "martyrdom" may seem preferable to its surrender through forgiveness. Or it may be that people wonder what would be left of their self-esteem, their principles, their loyalty to their friends and everything else they stood for if they were to let go of their hurt and their anger and choose to forgive. Forgiveness can seem like a real death, a real dying to self. But it is the condition for finding self and experiencing the freedom that was so much part of the life of Jesus.

As with depression, so too with forgiveness. A sound self-love and a healthy self-esteem are almost indispensable factors for true forgiveness to happen.

## Healing Accumulated Hurts

If someone has habitually repressed or suppressed anger, it can be quite difficult to uncover it. Yet it is important that it be uncovered and eventually integrated because it persists all the same and is destructive both to the person who denies the anger and to others.

There are ways that help this discovery and lead to eventual integration.

**Healing Buried Memories.** When a person feels guilt and depression, the hurts behind them can sometimes be brought into awareness by a determined exercise of memory. It is important that the originating hurts be allowed to be felt again and observed, and that any feelings of anger that may have been directed at the self be diverted towards the persons associated with the hurts in the memory. If only part of the hurt is surfaced, only part of the anger is released. To feel the hurt and anger again can be quite difficult.

Especially when the anger is not clearly felt, some people have found it helpful to try deliberately to express the vague anger in a safe way, imaginatively or through some kind of action, in language or gesture. They may, for example, scream loudly or punch a pillow. Sometimes the anger can be unearthed by noticing any pain or tenseness in the body and concentrating on it until the feeling that is triggering it comes into awareness. If and when the anger eventually comes into focus, it then needs to be looked at and owned for what it is and allowed to remain until its energy has dissipated and the feeling integrated.

Because the readiness to allow the hurt to be felt again can be a very painful experience, it may sometimes be helpful and, in cases where the feelings are strong or the person's own self-love and esteem are low, it may perhaps even be necessary to have somebody else present as a source of reassurance, support and love.

A number of people have found that a prayerful atmosphere is very supportive and healing. Some allow their imagination to fuse with their memory in such a way that they revisualise the hurtful experience and allow Jesus to enter imaginatively into the scene. After all, since he lives in each of us, he was present to the original event. His presence was a loving presence that in the trauma of the hurt was not realized and sometimes indeed could not have been. But had it been known and experienced at the time, its power would have been enough to neutralize the destructive power of the hurt. Since categories of time, of past and present, have no relevance to the risen Christ, the power of his past love can be drawn on in the present to counteract the hurt kept in the memory.

After the owning of the hurt and the anger the decision to forgive needs to be faced. Forgiveness ties up the loose ends; it removes the destructiveness from the hurts and angers, and it leaves nothing but bad memories that no longer generate anxiety and fear.

It may be important at times eventually to communicate the anger and forgiveness to the persons concerned, not simply imaginatively but in fact. This may not always be necessary; but when it is not done, it is helpful to know and own the reason why not, even if the reason be the fear of being rejected or otherwise hurt again. This fear can be a quite reasonable fear, but it too needs to be recognized, owned and integrated.

***Preventing Build-up.*** A helpful exercise for people who are frequently out of touch with their anger is to review their activities at the end of each day and search for the various experiences of hurt, disappointment, irritation, frustration etc. that may have occurred. When these have been noted, the next step is to find out what happened to the angers that presumably were associated with the hurts. Where did they go? What was done with them? If they were not integrated, then the integration can be begun there and then. Once they are integrated, the decision can be made about expressing them appropriately should the occasion to do so occur in the future. Making a deliberate choice to forgive can conclude the process. The whole exercise can be situated within the context of God's presence and God's desire to love each of us fully into life.

## **CONCLUSION**

We may fear at times that the expression of anger will endanger the development of relationships. The contrary is in fact the truth. The constructive and respectful expression of anger is a condition of mature friendship. True intimacy supposes that each party be real to the other. "All that I am, just as I am, relating to all that you are, just as you are." When people do not relate to each other on the basis of intimacy, inevitably they relate on the basis of power in one or other of its myriad forms. This is ultimately destructive of true human dignity.

The experience of anger comes naturally. How we deal with it, however, is a skill that has to be learnt. Much of that learning is done spontaneously by observing how others behave. In our present culture some of that learning has to be unlearnt, and new skills consciously developed. But for the sake of intimacy and of living life to the full many of us need to learn how to get in touch with our feelings again and how to express them in ways that are constructive and respectful.