

Want to get rid of anger in a minute or so? OK that sounds like one of those “quick fixes” doesn’t it? However, the following exercise is not so much about getting rid of anger as it is about demonstrating the impermanence of anger. I learned this technique in my undergraduate course in an interpersonal communication class.

Find a friend or close relative to practice with. If no one is available make use of your imagination and ‘pretend’ that someone is there with you. Our imagination can readily suffice if need be.

Then think about all your angry experiences of the past so that you tap into the anger realm. The next step is to pretend to be angry with your friend. It is important to allow the anger to flourish to the surface. In subjective experience, it should feel as if you are angry.

The next part of the exercise is very important. Lay down on the floor and have your friend stand over you. In other words, they are standing up, looking down on you, while you are laying down on the floor looking up at them. Now unleash your anger by verbally venting at the other person. Do not try and be polite or “politically correct”, instead vent with as little inhibition as can be mustered. Also, do not try and get up, even though you may feel like doing so.

What most people will find is that they will have great difficulty in holding the anger and then verbalizing it beyond the minute mark. A lot of people may laugh at the absurdity of anger when they are in that position. Others may feel frustrated, even helpless which is not as bad as it sounds. The helplessness of the situation still gives valuable information about the state of anger.

People may complain that it is a ‘pretend situation’ and therefore not relevant. However, if this was a real-life situation a similar outcome would be obtained. It is extremely difficult to hold onto anger when in the laying down position. Incidentally, if you have the occasion to watch a verbal fight, particularly one in which both participants are initially sitting down, please do so. Notice that as the anger level rise then one or the other or both will rise up of the chair. They will be unconsciously attempting to stand over the person.

One of the things we might observe is that anger has a correlation with dominance and power. Anger often is about control or the lack of it. The dominant position (standing over a person) reveals that it is far easier to hold onto anger. A conclusion could be made that when there is an attempt at dominance then there is also an attempt at control. Anger

could be viewed as one of the ways people attempt to control situations and other people.

But when someone lies down in a submissive gesture, then it is also a form of surrender. It is a way of giving up the attempt at control and power via dominance. And what happens to the initial anger? It dissipates. We find that anger can change very quickly. Our subjective experience will tell us this. It tells us that anger's nature can be fleeting and almost always is impermanent.

It is well worth noting that anger is not the bad guy. In fact, some scientific studies point to a much more constructive view of anger than is readily espoused. For instance, it can be a starting point to bring things out into the open for discussion with a view to resolving the issue at hand. It can also be the impetus for changing 'wrongs' or for fuelling a motivation to change.

Anger can become problematic when we inadvertently become attached to it. It can impact negatively on our health. It can also harm the way we interact with people. Stewing on anger isn't a great way to live life.

If you are up for it, try the exercise from both perspectives, the dominant and the more submissive positions. See what occurs when there is a conscious effort to give up power and control. Then see if there are other ways or methods where power and control can be let go of, in favour of a more rewarding life.

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