

When examining this construct called self it is important to be able to distinguish between certain aspects affecting us. A clear example of why this is important comes when we examine the anger/rage paradigm.

Many people assume that when we talk about rage we are talking about an intensified form of anger. It is as if the two are one and the same but differ only in intensity. This is a very common assumption, however it is an erroneous assumption. The reality is that they are two very distinct set of phenomena which do not bear as much in common as people think. Let us examine some of the differences:

Rage primarily is a dissociative phenomenon in that one of its prime features is a loss of contact with self. This type of loss of contact with self is not to be confused with ego loss. Rather it is a very primal form of self which for all intents and purposes operates with barely any consciousness. It is the lack of contact with thoughts, emotions and bodily sensations which are good indicators of a rage episode. Often people will remark I do not know what came over me or it was as if I was blinded with anger when they experience a rage episode. Sometimes people will go blank and suffer from amnesia. It is common for people to be out of touch with the situation, where the situation seems to get completely out of hand.

Anger by contrast is not a dissociative experience. We usually are very aware of our anger and how it affects us. We are in contact with our thoughts and emotions by and large. We might not always act in our best interests, but we are in contact is a good way to think of it. Anger also allows for a semblance of logic to appear where a good rational self-talk can often diffuse the anger very quickly. We can be talked down from our angry state, made to laugh and so on. Anger is far more malleable than rage.

Rage and anger differ markedly because rage is a flight/fight response in action but without any of our normal constraints. For example, I might walk past an unseen dog and the dog frightens me. I would feel this fright somewhere in my body, e.g. elevated heart rate etc. My body is preparing to either run (flight) or fight and is beginning to release chemicals in the bodily system to do that. If it was a real threat say like a lion instead of a dog, then that flight/fight response would be crucial to survival.

In a raging episode the response differs in that the normal constraints are not intact. Someone experiencing a rage episode may well injure the dog, or its owners or even strangers. Quite literally the mechanism that would normally be in place to prevent that sort of behaviour has been lost. The person who is experiencing the rage attacks acts as if it is actually a life threatening situation, rather than recognizing that no harm was really done other than a minor scare.

In the brain of the person who is raging there has been a physiological and neurological pattern which has developed over time. Synaptic pathways and inhibitors have developed differently through over stimulation and repeated episodes of the attack. In other words what was meant to be a simple flight/fight response to a real life threatening situation has been so overly stimulated that the brain now responds to many varied situations as if they are life threatening even when clearly they are not.

The onset of a rage episode is almost instant. People will often talk about snapping or seeing red and going into a blind rage. Anger by contrast has a much slower build up. It can take anywhere between minutes to hours to days for anger to build up. This is because anger works through the parasympathetic system which by necessity requires a buildup. Rage works through the adrenal glands which dispense powerful chemicals that hijack the body and mind immediately.

What is really important to understand about a rage episode is that once it is underway it cannot be stopped. There is no technique that will subside the rage and it has to run its course. This is because effectively the person is under the control of the mind chemicals that have been released into the body. They temporarily have lost the ability to effectively manage the situation and are logically incoherent. This is an extremely important point to remember because it has implications as to the best methods to utilize to help the person.

For example, asking a raging person to get in present moment awareness or to accept what is will likely exacerbate the problem. Mindfulness techniques are close to useless in this particular scenario as are cognitive behavioral strategies or any emotion based therapy. Similarly asking people to consider the consequence of their actions just will not apply. It is because the person is in an altered state that normal methods will not succeed.

Most of the above techniques and strategies can be used outside of the rage episode to good effect. It is not that the above mentioned techniques and strategies are not useful in a therapeutic setting. We can help people use different strategies to help people gain a sense of control in their lives. It is just that at the very moment when a rage attack takes hold of being, there are only a few things which do help.

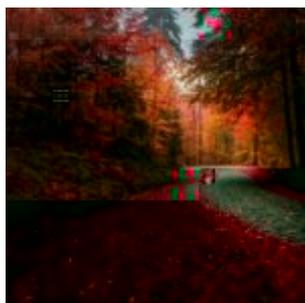
The best thing to do in such an episode is to take a time out. It is one of the few things which works, not because it lessens the rage, but because it does not escalate it further. The whole strategy at this point should be about lessening stimuli and finding ways to soothe. This is why a timeout is such an effective behavior and why it is so recommended by professionals. It is also important to remember that it can take several hours for all the chemicals to be discharged from the body. While this process is underway, a good thing to

do is to find ways to self-soothe and relax.

Rage is almost always destructive in nature. It is one of the prime causes for violence in relationships. What underlies a lot of rage episodes are underlying shame and or abandonment that took roots in formative years. Generally rage comes from a poor upbringing or traumatic events in childhood. Rage can be dealt with appropriately, but it needs the help of a trained professional and requires commitment and time on the client's behalf.

Anger does not necessarily involve trauma, shame, guilt etc. Anger when used constructively can be a great energizer, it also can relieve tension and gives us information about what's important to us. However if anger is stored and not dealt with appropriately it can have many negative effects. It can affect our health, relationships and career. Consequently it is important to learn to use anger appropriately.

Rage differs in that it cannot be used appropriately or for a person's benefit. It has to be dispensed with or managed even if that management means taking medication for the rage attacks for a period of time. If you are experiencing rage attacks I would encourage you to seek some help and advice on the best way to manage the episodes.



Spiritual Exercises -  
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The Effects of Trauma on  
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Manifestation and Clearing  
the Unconscious



A Perspective on the  
Meaning of Synchronicity