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JOYFUL MUSINGS

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Are You Angry?

Everybody gets angry sometimes. Anger, in and of itself, is neither good nor bad. The way we express our anger, however, can create either a positive *or* negative experience. When expressed constructively, anger can fuel the energy to get something difficult or unpleasant accomplished, while negatively expressed anger can hurt those around us and make a bad situation even worse.

Consciously or unconsciously we choose a way to express our angry feelings. You might choose to calm down by going for a walk or listening to relaxing music. You might use the energy of the anger to finally do something about a problem that has been bugging you for a long time. Or you might vent your anger at the unfortunate person who happened to be in the same room with you at the wrong time.

It might happen so quickly and subconsciously that you don't even realize you're making a choice, but there are always a multitude of ways you could have responded. Most people tend to have a habitual style of expressing their anger that reflects their overall personality. Some people implode, directing their anger inward at ourselves (sometimes manifesting as depression) while other people explode, directing it outward at others.

An important first step in dealing with your own anger is learning to recognize when you're angry. Some of the angriest people I know don't think they are angry. Unacknowledged anger is an all-too-common trait. Whether or not we know we're angry, the feelings are always somehow expressed and can be sensed by those around us.

Here is a short checklist of some signs of hidden anger:

1. Procrastination in completion of imposed tasks
2. Habitual lateness
3. Over-politeness, attitude of "grin-and-bear-it"
4. Constant cheerfulness, smiling while hurting inside
5. Sarcasm, cynicism, and sadistic humor
6. Frequent sighing
7. Excessive irritability over trifles
8. Habitual fist clenching, chronically stiff neck or shoulder muscles
9. Boredom, apathy, loss of interest in things you enjoyed before
10. Chronic depression for no particular reason

These are only a few of many hidden anger signs. If you recognize several of these signs in yourself, it would be a good idea to get in touch with what's going on internally. Unrecognized anger takes the joy out of everyday living and can affect your relationships with others in ways that only serve to fuel more anger. And until you realize that you're angry and what you're angry about, you can't do much about it.

Some people unmistakably know when they're angry: tempers flare and they say and do things they wish later they could undo. If you're prone to angry outbursts or destructive behaviors, you would do well to remember the simple acronym "STOP" the next time you feel your temperature rising. S is for STOP. That's what you tell yourself firmly *before* you let your temper get away from you. Then take a moment to THINK about what exactly has you so mad. If necessary, remove yourself from the situation to think more clearly. Angry rages are often the result of frustration and unmet expectations. Don't waste energy fuming over something you can't do anything about. Figure out what you *can* do, and brainstorm some OPTIONS. Be creative and think up every possible thing you could do, even the ones you know you'll never do. Then consider the likely outcome of each option, choose the best one, and develop a PLAN of what to do next. STOP and figure out a positive and productive next step instead of making things worse for yourself and those around you.

Don't let anger take control of your life – even if you don't know you're angry.