



VICTORY IN THE LABYRINTH

Pagans defeating anger and depression

by Morgause Fontelève, Phos Erebos,
Charles van Bergen and Wotanwulf

SUCCESSFULLY WALKING THE LABYRINTH by Morgause Fontelève

“Holding on to anger is like grasping a hot coal with the intent of throwing it at someone else; you are the one who gets burned.” The Buddha

Life is strange. Anger. What is anger? And is anger bad? Truth is that sometime or other in our life, we are going to argue with someone, disagree, and consequently get upset or angry.

But is it wrong to get angry?

Anger is a legitimate emotion; an alarm bell, which informs us that something is wrong inside ourselves or with those around us. We experience anger when someone is taking advantage of us or says something unsavory to provoke our ire. We should be committed to restoring conflict in an unfrontational manner as possible and doing so with a level head, avoiding the escalation of anger.

Anger is a valid emotion as it lets us know that something is wrong inside ourselves or between ourselves and others. Rage is the term used to define the actions that stem from anger. Therefore, anger is an emotion and rage is the physical acting out of the anger.

Many of us have grown up in homes where verbal abuse, abusive behaviour and anger were the order of the day. We are so conditioned to regard it as the norm that we actually fail to see how these insidious social cankers permeate our lives. We do not see that indulging in verbal abuse escalates the anger which wells up inside of us finally destroying homes and families, affecting our and our children's psyches.

Name-calling is hurtful and discredits the person. It is a tactic used by the perpetrator to make the other person feel “less than” and to force them into submissive behaviour. Judging and unedifying criticism are also forms of verbal abuse that are resorted to when anger takes over our ability to reason. It leads to withdrawal.

Ordering and threatening is used to create fear and submission, momentary compliance and could lead to physical violence. Accusations and blaming is the inability to take responsibility for our shortcomings and errors. This provokes resentment and eventually rebellion.

Joking and laughing matters off, and discounting another's issues trivializes a potentially serious situation. It is a form of disrespect and this leads to the flaring up of tempers on both sides, which in turn will lead to the withholding of attention, affection, pertinent information, undermining a person by going behind their backs, making promises you don't intend to keep, etc. (Yet another form of abusive behaviour; the abuse of trust being in question here).

Denial and “selective forgetting” will not make the problem go away. Anger left unattended can kill.

Let us remember that acting out in anger is resorting to the wrong form of communication learnt whilst growing up. It is about power and control over others because personally the angry persons lack control over their own lives

and thinking processes. People who are abusive are so because they lack in self-esteem and self-control. Furthermore they lack the knowledge of themselves and how their feelings as well as emotions operate and do not know how to deal with them adequately.

Anger combined with substance abuse causes tragedies on our roads every single day, tears apart homes, causes fights and leads to imprisonment. With these come more anger, shame and lack of self-worth.

The quality of our lives is directly measured up against the quality of the relationships in our lives. It is in direct proportion to it and in turn it is related to how we manage pressure, stress, problems, disagreements, confrontation, etc.

What is needed, is the admission of being caught up in this negative programming and consenting to and committing oneself to learning more effective and less harmful methods of communication.

The Legend of the Minotaur

Long before Athens became the ruling capital of Greece, on the isle of Crete, lived a King called Minos who angered Poseidon (the Earth-Shaker) by not offering in sacrifice to Him a great white bull that had been destined for that purpose.

Indignant Poseidon made Pasiphae [Minos' wife] fall in love with the bull. Pasiphae disguised herself as a cow (inside a statue) and the bull copulated with her. The result of this union was a hideous and fierce-looking creature, half man, half beast, which was hid inside an enormous labyrinth built by the master architect, Daedalus, at the Knossos. The creature bore the name, Minotaur, or be it, Mino's Bull.

In accordance with ancient Greek mythology, the great but defeated Greek King Aegeus was forced to pay tribute to King Minos of the Minoans, who lived upon his kingdom on the Isle of Crete. Every nine years the defeated King Aegeus of Athens would send seven young men and seven young women in a sailing boat with black sails en route to Crete to pay his tribute to the Minoan King. They would be dressed in the finest robes and fed the most sumptuous meals, before being left to their own devices in the labyrinth's corridors. Inside the maze Minos kept his wife's son, the hideous monster called Minotaur. The fourteen youths would be abandoned in the labyrinth and wander lost until they would be cornered and eaten by the Minotaur.

It is said that nobody ever exited the labyrinth. Nobody ever returned.

One particular year, King Aegeus' son, Theseus, begged his father to send him on that boat. He had heard about the Minotaur and wished with all his heart to slay it.

King Aegeus was reluctant to send his only son, but on his insistence, Aegeus let Theseus depart for the Knossos.

At the banquet before the sacrifice the handsome and courageous youth sat next to Minos and his daughter Ariadne, and the two young people fell hopelessly in love. Theseus proposed that if he defeated the Minotaur, he could take Ariadne back to Athens and believing that this was not possible, King Minos consented.

The love-stricken Ariadne desired Theseus to be successful in his endeavor, so she presented him with a ball of thread, which Theseus attached to the door, as she had bade him do, unwinding the thread as he progressed into the belly of the earth and leaving the way back and out, carefully marked. Brandishing his sword Theseus walked into the underground cavernous maze and courageously made his way towards the sleeping Minotaur.

Sensing that someone was coming, the Minotaur awoke and awaited the meal that bravely and stealthily wove its way towards him. First scuffling and then a valorous battle ensued between the two royal sons, arousing so much clamor and turmoil in the bowels of the ancient Earth, that the court of King Minos above held their breath in anticipated fear.

But Theseus managed to kill the Minotaur. He slew the monstrous creature and then used the trail of twine he'd started laying down at the entrance of the labyrinth to find his way out of the maze.

The young couple embraced, and true to his word, King Minos allowed them to leave for Athens.

Whilst Theseus and Ariadne sailed back to Athens, Theseus saw Dionysus in a dream. In this dream the Chthonic God requested that Theseus do not marry Ariadne, but rather, leave her on the isle of Naxos where His cult was practiced.

Dionysus wanted her as His bride and would find her and take her with Him he told Theseus.

Well, the devoted Theseus did as he was bid, but the isle became so gloomy and so filled with sorrow, reflecting the abandoned Adriane's heartache. Theseus was so mortified by her hurt that he forgot to remove the black sails before sailing back to Athens.

Aegeus had watched the sea for days anxious to find out the outcome of his son's encounter with the terrible Minotaur and on seeing the returning ship with the black sails unfurled in the wind, Aegeus believed his son had died in the labyrinth at Knossos. Filled with grief, he cast himself into the sea where he allowed himself to be overcome by waves and drowned.

That very sea, the Aegean sea, was named after the grieving Greek King.

Upon his return Theseus became King, becoming an Athenian hero, linked to the founding of Athenian democracy as well as a King who helped the poor.

The Inner Mystery

Anger will never disappear so long as thoughts of resentment are cherished in the mind. Anger will disappear just as soon as thoughts of resentment are forgotten.” The Buddha

We who like King Minos (our conscience) have angered Poseidon (the divine self) by not sacrificing our animal nature (the white bull) and who, like Pasiphae (emotional persona) has taken the seed of the bull (the negative destructive feelings in us) have given birth to a fierce half-man-half-beast creature, the Minotaur, which hides within the labyrinth of our mind, continuously making itself heard through the roaring bellows of our raging heart.

Like Aegeus (vulnerability/helplessness), we have sailed young men and women (our ideals), dressed them in the finest of robes and fed them with the delights of the earth and sea, as well as accompanied them to the doors of the labyrinth, where we have sacrificed their happiness and innocence to the beast that lives in the maze within.

Like Theseus (courage and devotion), we need to make avail of Ariadne's ingenuity, the connecting thread (the golden thread of Divine Consciousness) that will lead us out of danger, matter and spirit working towards our advancement and final liberation from the visceral windings of material ego and its entrapments.

Poseidon's unpredictable and violent tremors send us into panic and destructive mode which leads to temperamental outbursts, dictated by our lack of emotional quotient and the skills to manage these intense emotions.

Yes, the labyrinth is the intimidating reality within us. Like Theseus we need to volunteer ourselves as the sacrifice. Like him we need to decide to volunteer as one of the sacrificial victims, so that we can attempt to kill the Minotaur within.

How do we effectively manage our own personal anger? How do we conquer the beastly monster within us?

The Mechanism of Anger:

Anger is never without a reason, but seldom with a good one.” Benjamin Franklin

In order to be able to manage our own personal anger we need to understand anger and the anger mechanism, in the first place. We need to recognize its signs, determine who or what makes us angry and how this mechanism affects us and others surrounding us, how frequently this happens and what happens between one bout of anger and the next.

Anger is the result of accumulated negative emotions such as displeasure, the desire for retaliation, fury and or inflammation through words and negative emotional reasoning.

Most of us are not aware that there are intermediate phases of anger which can be recognized by one who has decided to be vigilant and win the battle.

Our bodies, our state of mind, our emotions provide us with clues as to these phases:

- Increased and accelerated breathing
- Back pains,
- Sweaty palms
- Shaking
- Headaches
- Stomach ache
- Ulcers
- Anxiety
- Irritability
- Depression
- Need for escapism
- Need to lash out verbally
- Need to hit someone
- Guilt
- Resentfulness
- Rubbing of hands or head
- Pacing
- Clenching of fists and jaws
- Sarcasm
- Being abusive
- Cynicism
- Craving substances and alcohol
- Breaking and kicking things
- Crying
- Denial
- Withdrawing affection and information
- Isolating oneself
- Becoming violent
- Compulsive eating, cleaning and spending
- Fantasizing about revenge
- Justification for poor behaviour
- Avoiding others
- Arguing with everyone
- Having short fuse
- Bullying others
- Being demeaning
- Abuse of power
- Being forceful
- Cruelty
- Road rage
- Tension
- Making threats
- Verbal abuse

- Name-calling
- Over-domination of others
- Suicidal tendencies
- Frustration
- Inability to face reality
- Accumulation of hatred and malice
- Losing control over trivial issues
- Sudden violent impulses
- Need to hurt someone

Though anger is a basic and normal emotion, it is also one of the greatest challenges or stumbling blocks on our path of spiritual progression.

Planning to Face the Minotaur

“Peace comes from within. Do not seek it without.” The Buddha

Before entering the cavernous home of the Minotaur, Theseus had envisaged his victory. His decision had been made. He was resolute. He had balked the enemy’s advantage and had reasoned his way in and out of the beastly lair. He was the diligent general and kept his wits (his soldiers) about him.

We have to determine what the origin of our anger is, the circumstances, determine who is involved in these formative episodes and recognize the patterns in our behaviour and reactions. Are we stressed, tired, lonely, frustrated, filled with fear, etc. How does this reflect those formative incidents?

And let us not fall in the trap of self-deceit, for that is equal to remaining imprisoned inside the labyrinth of our chemical make-up, the meandering wilderness of our personal psychology, wandering lost without the ability to exit, excepting through make-believe attempts and day-dreams of victory in a battle not yet won.

The Positive Side of Anger

Psychologists state that the rush which anger procures can be compared to a hit of cocaine, a burst of adrenaline, of a stiff shot of liquor. It may function as a warning system when someone is taking advantage of us, or violating our rights. The enervating energy of anger, helps us to react, driving us and giving us the necessary energy to address the issues at hand.

Chronic Anger

“In a controversy, the instant we feel anger, we have already ceased striving for truth and have begun striving for ourselves.” Abraham H. Heschel

Some people are chronically angry at others and therefore experience difficulty getting along with them. It leads to physical/emotional abusive relationships, to things like abuse of power, emotional abuse, incessant argumentation, fights, road rage, outbursts of anger, aggressive or violent behaviour, verbal abuse,

headaches, digestive problems, hypertension, heart problems, anxiety and a long list of other nervous disorders.

Passive aggression

Is one who deliberately baits others into arguments, avoiding being pin-pointed as the aggressor. Although openly refraining from hurting others, the latent anger can be perceived especially in the building up of resentment which of course leads to withdrawal and alienation.

Frustration leads to anger which is a defensive response to underlying fears, vulnerability and powerlessness.

Signs that we are not coping with anger are:

- Inability to debate and difference of opinion
- Demeaning and hurting others close to you
- Often feeling that you are not treated fairly
- Being abusive (threatening, swearing, name-calling, etc.)
- Feeling like you are out of control and losing control
- Taking out your anger on people extraneous to the situation
- Destructive behaviour and lashing out
- Being arrested, (resorting to violence leads to trouble and destruction)
- Use of drugs, alcohol to “calm down”
- Others (at work, family, friends, lovers) are concerned about your outbursts
- Indulging in escapism (running away from the situation)

MECHANISM OF ANGER

In a controversy, the instant we feel anger, we have already ceased striving for truth and have begun striving for ourselves” Abraham J. Heschel

Do you lose it completely and then fly off the handle when you are angry?
And is your anger outburst a threat to your safety, your career, your family, friends and environment?

Eliminating Common Negative Behaviour

Why is it that so many people who need anger management cannot admit to being spurred on by fear, vulnerability, sadness, disappointment, hurt, ego and so forth?

On our spiritual path, “Know Thyself” is what the ancient philosophers exhorted us to. Why are we so reluctant to recognize these in our lives? Why are we so unable to look at the real “we” inside ourselves? There behind all that negative programming lies the true “us”.

Eliminating fear, arrogance, envy; jealousy, ego-laden expectations, guilt, phobias, greed, shame is one of the easiest and phenomenal way to empower oneself. Once the pessimism and negative programming are gone, the true innate nature may come to the fore allowing us to blossom to our fullest potential.

One's energy will be synchronized in such a way to empower one with the ability to manage all of life's situations. Our will power becomes a tool of positive dominion and no longer the weapon of domination.

How do we do this? Is our aggressive behaviour not largely instinctual? Yes, it is. But by being Adepts, true to our Initiations and the Lessons thereof, we will be constantly vigilant. By remembering that negative emotions and lack of emotional equilibrium stem from our psyche's and that this is often aggravated by circumstances we will read the signs and commence our internal dialogue or battle with the inner beast .

Yes, there is medication and help available through psychological and psychiatric consultation, diagnosis and medication (both chemical and homeopathic), and we will not advocate the abandoning of the medical solution to this problem, but what is better than willfully eliminating negativity from our existence? What is better than eliminating greed, fear, anxiety, fear, uncontrollable anger, complexes, unfounded suspicions, melancholy, escapism, bitterness, emotional instability, arrogance, guilt, shame, poor will power, power tactics, tactics of avoidance, laziness, lack of communication, law grasping, etc.

If you can face every life challenge in life avoiding the pessimistic, suspicious, vindictive approach, you will be empowered with the ability to derive maximum pleasure and procure that to those around you who have loved you, nurtured you, guided you, etc.

Negative emotions are tremendously powerful. They debilitate our economy.

Causes of Uncontrolled Anger

“Anger will never disappear so long as thoughts of resentment are cherished in the mind. Anger will disappear just as soon as thoughts of resentment are forgotten.” ~ Buddha

More often the causes are more mental than physical, history of abuse, stress, anxiety, poor self-image, bad failure relationship. These tendencies are seeded deep in the mind of the individual, and the monster is fed by excessive negativity or in the indulgence thereof.

Practical suggestions to deal with anger:

1. Say nothing – speaking in anger aggravates the situation. We say what we shouldn't and we hurt others and the other person will respond in like manner. A spiral of negative anger will thus be created. By remaining silent, the negative emotions are able to leave us. Count to ten, and if it does not help, count to a hundred if need be.

2. Remain indifferent – do not allow others to provoke you into getting angry. Detachment and indifference to their words will prove to you that they have no power over you. The adversary will lose interest and desist.
3. Reason – use reason to mitigate and stop anger. Tell yourself that succumbing to anger will just worsen the situation. Let your inner voice dissuade you from engaging the emotion of anger.
4. Kindness – look upon those around you with kindness and compassion. This will prevent you from cashing in emotionally on that cheque called “anger”
5. Peace – exalt peace and value it above ego and above opinion. Remember that anger will make you lose your peace of mind., as Sri Chinmoy said.
6. Detach and remain calm – put away feelings of bias and do not react defensively. Remain calm . Your calmness may just have a positive and calming effect on them.
7. Focus on the positive – concentrate on something completely extraneous to the situation and think in terms of kind and loving feelings. Do not hold grudges. Do not entertain vindictive and negative thoughts. Engage your thoughts with happy things and focus solely on the positive.
8. Breathe deeply – focus on deep, relaxed breathing. It will remove all feelings of anger.
9. Meditate – regular meditation will enhance your inner peace and draw upon it when your patience or temper is tested.
10. Smiling – Smiling helps diffuse all negativity. Smile and abandon yourself to the sensation it procures and all tension will diffuse.

We have all experienced anger before (personally and as a bystander) in its varying degrees and intensities. Anger is a normal, healthy emotion. If it gets out of control, if it makes our life unmanageable, it becomes a destructive tool that will create problems in our relationships, in our place of work and in life in general. This booklet aims at allowing you to understand anger and enable you to be in control of this unpredictable and powerful emotion.

The Mechanics of Anger

The scale of anger [as in a musical scale] varies from emotional state of irritation to intense rage and fury. Dr. Charles Spielberger specializes in anger and in the psychological and biological changes which take place when one gets angry. The heart rate speeds up, the blood pressure increases and your body goes into overdrive as far the secretion of potent hormones like adrenaline into the bloodstream are concerned.

Anger is caused by external and internal events. People, events, even memories can trigger anger.

How to Express Anger

Aggression is the instinctive and natural way to respond to anger. As anger is an adaptive response to threats, it inspires strong, aggressive feelings and behaviour. This survival mechanism empowers us and enables us to stand our ground and defend ourselves (be it physically (as during an attack), mentally or verbally).

But this behaviour isn't always correct or even necessary. It is often deemed as socially unacceptable. We have to set limits to our expression of anger or irritation.

How to Approach Anger:

1. Expressing your anger in an assertive, non-aggressive manner (healthy approach). You have to learn to communicate without harming others. It does not mean that you must be domineering, or pushy or even demanding. Respect of others and yourself is imperative.
2. Suppressing anger – suppression of anger, the re-direction after the conversion of the negative response to the irritating stimulus into something constructive. Beware of allowing that anger to be re-directed inwardly as this could lead to hypertension and or depression.
3. Suppressing anger – keeping calm is one thing, but repressing anger could lead to passive-aggressive behaviour, resentment, cynicism, hostility, etc. People who constantly criticize others, break them down do not know how to constructively express their anger.
4. Maintaining the Calm – could be a problem if one is merely controlling one's outward behaviour, but allowing the entire gamut of negative emotions to run amok internally. It is imperative to control the internal responses and to allow the feelings of anger to subside gradually and systematically.

If none of the above work, well, then “someone, or something is going to get hurt.” (Arnold Schwarzenegger)

Anger Management – does it work?

Does anger management really work? Well, the aim of anger management is to reduce the emotional and psychological stimuli that anger arouses. It is important to understand that the mechanics of anger are natural and cannot be avoided. What is in your power to do is how you react to these stimuli. You can either do it yourself, or in more severe cases, you might need assistance from someone trained to help others find alternative ways to deal with the chemistry and reactions of this potentially destructive emotion.

Some folk's anger is more intense than others. Some folk get angry more easily and have low tolerance for frustration, others who are more prone to irritation, infuriation and moodiness than others, some sulk, brood, some withdraw, some withhold and some develop pathologies. What makes them this way could be physiological or genetic.

Because anger is regarded as a negative emotion, we are discouraged from dealing with it already from a tender age. We are encouraged to deal with other emotions, but to refrain from expressing frustration, irritation, anger, etc. This leads to our inability to channel it correctly. Studies show that those who are fast to anger come from disruptive backgrounds with low emotional communication skills.

Venting Anger

Psychotherapists and psychologists have warned us all about venting anger because innocent bystanders land up getting hurt. Learning to deal with our own anger does not mean that we have license to harm others. It means that it is our duty to realize that swearing, venting only aggravates anger and could even lead to violence.

The correct thing to do, is to discover, through introspection, what it is that triggers off the anger and develop ways (perhaps with the help of your therapist) to preserve the balance and stopping yourself from being pushed over the edge.

Techniques to Control Anger

Disappointment is the primary cause of anger. How do you control it?

- Recognize you are angry, step back and be your own surveillance camera
- Exercises like yoga and tai chi (slow exercise that infuse calmness and relax the muscles).
- Speak to yourself and tell yourself to calm down and relax
- Meditate
- Use breathing exercises geared to relax the body and mind
- Use positive visualization
- Focus on not being angry on a moment for moment basis.
- Discard the ego which supports your anger
- Respond to but do not react to “triggers”
- Retreat and think
- Don't hold grudges
- Remember that humor is the best anger reducing technique
- Do not aggravate things by cursing and swearing
- Be mindful for the tell-tale signs and avoid them
- Don't allow your anger to spill over onto innocent bystanders
- You are in charge and your anger is the expression of your helplessness
- Make the right choice.
- Remember that you are responsible for your own emotional well-being
- Forgive; forgiveness is a gift unto ourselves
- Accept that life is not fair. Have no expectations
- Choose happiness

If you do the above on a regular basis, the behaviour they instill, will become part of your muscle memory and kick in automatically when things get tense.

Problem Solving

Refrain from using negative reinforcement. Replace emotive reactions or thoughts with rational ones. Do not swear, curse or inflame yourself with long colorful discourses about other's incompetence, lack of this or that. Admit that you are frustrated, that it is natural to feel that way. In your internal dialogue use words like upset instead of angry and remind yourself that although this something is upsetting, it is not the end of the world and that there is an actual

solution to the problem. Remember that negative reinforcement humiliates and alienates the loved ones around you (doing quite often irreparable damage) and that getting angry will not change things and won't make you feel better anyway. Being calm and rational and working towards a realistic and practical solution are the only TRUE solutions to the problem.

We guarantee you that logic defeats anger. Pandering to your emotional negative side when you are upset, is a sure way to catapult the situation into one where you become irrational, paranoid, unreasonable and harmful both to yourself and others.

Have you noticed that when you are angry, the issues you object to are to the fact that others are not fair, that life isn't fair, that you are not respected, appreciated, that someone has a different opinion to yours, etc. You then become petulant and demand that your desires be met. Angry people are demanding people. Part of cognitive reconstruction is to translate your expectations (which have transformed into demands) into wishes. By being less demanding, you will develop healthy reactions to your expectations (disappointment, confusion or frustration) and be able to subsequently find a solution to the problem. Do not use the trap of using anger as a tool to avoid feeling hurt, for we assure you that the hurt and disappointment do not go away.

Remember that not all anger is misplaced. It is a healthy and normal emotion and a response to adversities in life. It is also ok to be disappointed in finding out that finding the proverbial solution to every problem is not so easy. It is ok to feel frustrated, but then return to the systematic search for the solution and that the only power you have over that problem, is how you will react to it. This should assist you to keep impatience at bay and that most solutions are actually compromises and that the "all-or-none" sort of attitude is noxious and detrimental to both others and yourself.

Most important. Face your problems. Do not run away from them, for they follow you wherever you go, or else, their memory haunts you mercilessly and causes you to act out from time to time.

Communication Skills

Angry people have the habit of jumping to conclusions. Conclusions (even when carefully deduced) are often inaccurate. Listen to what people are REALLY saying and hear them out. Do not fall into the trap of interpreting what they are trying to say. Mull over what they have said and chose an answer or comment, with utmost care, refraining from engaging whatever is being discussed in an emotive way. Think positive when attempting to figure out what they have said.

It is natural and ok to be on the defensive if someone is leveling criticism at you. Make a habit, however, of not retaliating. Do not allow things to spin out of control. Keep the calm in any given situation and through that avoid the probable degeneration of the situation.

Be your own surveillance camera and do not react. Practice assertiveness rather than aggressiveness.

Laughter and Humor

A good sense of humor can avert a lot of negativity and ease a tense atmosphere. Laughter allows you to detach from the negativity of the situation, takes the edge of the situation and affords you a more balanced perspective. Name-calling only aggravates the situation.

Whatever you decided to do, do not take yourself and your emotional reaction too seriously. Detach and do not succumb to the urge to retaliate, not even through sarcasm and least of all through the use of harsh and angry comments. If you can, laugh it off.

Time Alone

To avoid becoming irritable and seeing that irritation morph into ire and the need to get even, give yourself some time alone. Some “me”-time is an advisable practice and the perfect antidote to outbursts of anger or worse even rage.

Avoid all things that rub you up the wrong way. Especially when you are not in a good head space.

To Need or Not To Need Counseling

If you manage to master detachment you are probably in control of the situation. If your anger is having a negative impact on your relationships, work and ability to enjoy life and be functional, you are then going to need to pay a visit to a professional who can work alongside you towards finding the solution to your anger. The amazingly good news is that with the correct guidance and therapy, a person with severe anger problems can move to a middle-of –the-range angry person in the short period of 8 to 10 weeks.

Being Realistic

Anger is a potentially damaging emotion. It robs us of our peace of mind and leaves us feeling internally perturbed, heavy and depressed. It can be a real obstacle in our pursuit of happiness.

Please try to remember that anger is a normal and healthy emotion. You cannot eliminate your anger altogether. Do not suppress anger, for un-dealt-with anger will lead to frustration, resentment, depression and pain.

Things to Remember

We rarely obtain what we want when in a fit of temper. If we do, the moment of “victory” is tainted by negativity.

If you feel anger welling up in you, pull back and do not react immediately. Thomas Jefferson said: “When angry, count to ten before you speak, and if very angry, count to one hundred.”

Five Reasons to Give Up Anger

1. Anger can cost you what is dearest to you: relationships, friendships, career, your reputation, etc.
2. You are the first person who is damaged by the intensity or uncontrollable nature of your anger. You develop regrets, remorse, ulcers, depression, have heart-attacks, engage in self-destructive behaviour, you become hypersensitive, irritable, paranoid and even have a hard time falling asleep.
3. You cannot reason clearly or express yourself properly when you are on an emotional roller-coaster.
4. Anger interferes with your creative and objective side. Stagnation and the feeling of being in a rut is the result.
5. Others lose their trust in you and in your inherent goodness.

Some More Tips

- Acknowledge your anger and address it. Do not fall into the trap of denial. Your body will bear the brunt of this irresponsible decision.
- Do not Self-medicate through drug or alcohol abuse.
- Confide in someone you trust and who isn't biased
- Take action and solve the issues which plague you.
- Stay happy and channel your anger into positive outlets.
- Learn to accept constructive criticism.

Pagan Means and Ways

“When anger rises, think of the consequences”

I believe that the Virtues of Asatru are the Pagan answer to most of our modern-day problems.

- Boldness/Courage/Bravery
- Truth
- Honour
- Troth/Fidelity
- Discipline/Self-Rule
- Hospitality
- Industriousness
- Self-Reliance and Free-Standing
- Perseverance

Understanding The Stress Mechanisms

<u>FIGHT</u>	<u>FLIGHT</u>	<u>PRETENSE</u>
Open aggression	passive fear – frustration	copping out
Violent behaviour	self-destruction	calm on the surface
Swearing	emotionally withdrawn	passive aggression
Shouting	unable to release pressure	raging & scheming within
Threats	emotional outbursts	lies and sabotage
Damaging property	damages others and self	only appear to accept
Uncontrolled rage	holding anger & grudges	back-stabbing
Breaks all rules	depression	seek revenge
Picking fights	can't express emotions	blames others
Abusive behaviour	self-blame & guilt	won't admit mistakes
Cruelty	seeks solitude	avoids direct conflict

Summarizing Anger:

“Be strong, be safe, and be cool!”

Anger is accumulated negative emotions and displeasure, desire for retaliation, fury, inflammation, etc. It arises out of dissatisfaction.

Anger can be difficult to keep in check. The best response is to detach and always remain cool, calm and collected.

When angry, do not act. The intensity of anger dissipates with time, but if fueled with words and impulsive actions, it affects our psyche and escalates. Whatever you do, never justify violent actions.

Remember that anger is part of normal living and mild anger can be “constructive”. Long-lasting, uncontrolled and repetitive anger gives rise to a cycle of angry outbursts that in turn may lead to rage, violent reactions, abuse, and depression. This weakness can determine our downfall.

You need help when you no longer can cope or manage with your temper, your anger and your feelings. When these affect your relationships at home, in your work environment and in society, when your dissatisfaction and your underlying problem with anger is the cause of physical and emotional problems, then it is time to see an expert.

People tend to repress anger and this leads to frustration, bitterness, the need for revenge, etc. Mild anger (being upset) must be verbalized and expressed in the very same manner; mildly.

The frustration of continued repressed feelings have symptoms on our psyche, body and on our general health. Problems related to anger are ulcers, high blood pressure, stress, anxiety, violent or sadistic behaviour, stiff joints, etc.

Remember that intense, chronic and uncontrolled anger harms you as the hormones released into the bloodstream damage smooth muscle tissue and lead to heart problems. Adrenaline also compromises the immune system causing premature aging and allows us to be prey to diseases and infections.

Anger management is a skill we all need to develop. Always use a civilized approach. Express your disappointment in a calm, mature and productive manner. Yours is the decision not to hurt yourself and those around you.

Admit that you need help!

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DARK NIGHT OF THE SOUL by Phos Erebos

"One may not reach the dawn save by the path of the night." - Kahlil Gibran

INTRODUCTION

There are many medical explanations for depression, but most are based on the unquestioned belief that human beings are (bio)machines, and ignore the fact that it is not matter which builds consciousness, but it is consciousness which shapes matter.

Our ability to create satisfactory meaning out of the events in our lives is an important factor in mental health (1). Spirituality is often defined in terms of meaning and purpose in life, illness, death and other concerns. When defined in this way, spirituality can play an important protective role against depression. People receiving treatment for depression often rate their spirituality as one of the most important parts of their recovery.

PAGANISM, SPIRITUALITY AND DEPRESSION

Many people come to Paganism partially because they feel alienated from and out of place in society. However, it is a bit of a Catch-22 situation, as people who move within the magickal and who are open to the spiritual are very often vulnerable to being deemed “outside society” by people who do not understand them. And because of this, practitioners of magick, energy work, divination, shamanism, witchcraft, Paganism, etc often do not feel safe coming out in the open, which in turn often leads to frustration, anger and depression.

One of the more widespread practices of Pagans is magick. Magick may be used to draw nearer to deity as well as to change one’s immediate reality - including fighting depression by magickal means. With depression relief, as with any magical undertaking, the metaphysical basis is assumed that all things are deeply interconnected. Manipulation of connecting energies is the essence of magick. By tapping the appropriate energies, depression may be affected.

This understanding integrates depression into a worldview where everything is interrelated. While this theory does not single out depression as a spiritual experience, it offers a practical foundation from which depression may be approached. Since magick is for many Pagans deeply tied up with spirituality, depression acquires a spiritual dimension by default and once this foundation is accepted one may begin to take direct “spiritual action” in dealing with depression.

It is worth noting that, rather than treating depression directly, it may be more effective for example to magickally treat factors contributing to depression - a person may conduct a ritual to explore issues of childhood neglect, loss of self-esteem, fear of success, or other factors that add to “the dark night of the soul”(2).

With magick we move from the realm of theory to that of action. For an alternative which combines both theory and action, we may take a look at Shamanism or Neo-Shamanism.

Since the seventies Shamanism has been increasingly influential in Pagan circles. It is almost unique among Pagan paths in that it offers a specific explanation for the cause of depression - soul loss. Like other illnesses, it is believed within Shamanism that depression is caused by the departure of a part of a person’s soul, and it is the Shaman’s task to retrieve the lost part so that the person may become whole again.

For Pagans with Shamanic sympathies, the soul-loss theory offers an appealing alternative to the conventional medical model. Depression is found to have a spiritual dimension, and the pain suffered acquires meaning as an experience of the path to reunion and wholeness. Thus, Shamanism is one path that is capable of integrating the depression experience into a greater worldview and turning an otherwise painful ordeal into something of spiritual value.

What are some of the other relations between paganism and depression?

First, depression can be a driving force for spiritual exploration. Depressed feelings of emptiness or pain may goad a person to seek a higher meaning to life. Second, Pagans may be slightly more apt than non-Pagans to find spiritual meaning in depression, if only because they come to Paganism by choice - they are seekers by nature, and therefore likely to seek meaning in all experiences. Finally, a handy five-point guide to dealing with depression might run as follows:

1. face it head-on;
2. find out what makes you happy and what makes you depressed;
3. realize that there is no quick fix;
4. be honest with yourself and others, and find someone to confide in; and
5. understand that it is okay to feel depressed - do not let anyone tell you that your feelings are “wrong”.

SPIRITUAL BURNOUT

Another major contributor to both anger and depression within Paganism is spiritual burnout. It happens when one “overzealously” engages in an activity to an extent where, on physical, psychological, and emotional levels, one can no longer adequately function. It is thus a result of imbalance.

A person who is “burned out” has used up all resources and often suffers from depression, anxiety, short temper, lethargy, mood swings, loss of or increase in appetite, loss of interest in sex, and inability to interact well with others. Add the spiritual factor to burnout, and there is really big trouble.

The spiritual level encompasses one’s personal connection to the Divine, and one’s way to make sense of how each individual’s web of life interweaves with the lives all around us. Spiritual burnout magnifies all the symptoms of burnout. The loss of the connection to the Divine can send a person into a destructive spiral.

Spiritual burnout can often result in feelings that Divinity is not listening, not appreciating all the work being done, and ultimately, can cause anger and depression. Why honour a Divine Spirit that does not care? Does that mean divinity doesn’t exist? When people are devoted to a cause, activity, or belief, they tend to throw themselves into it to the exclusion of all. When the devotion is not returned in the same fashion, then resentment, anger, and depression often result.

The signs of burnout tend to be more mental than physical. They can include feelings of:

1. Powerlessness
2. Hopelessness
3. Emotional exhaustion
4. Detachment
5. Isolation
6. Irritability
7. Frustration
8. A feeling of being trapped

9. Failure
10. Despair
11. Cynicism, and
12. Apathy

If you're burning out and the burnout expresses itself as irritability, you might find yourself always snapping at people or making snide remarks about them. If the burnout manifests as depression, you might want to sleep all the time or feel "too tired" to do the things that might sustain you. You may turn to escapist behaviors such as drinking, drugs, excessive television watching, etc, to try to escape from your negative reactions. Your relationships may begin to fall apart. You may lose your trust in others, believing that people mostly take and do not give.

Burnout follows unrelenting stress, but the results look different. Stress involves too much: too many pressures that demand too much of you physically, psychologically, or spiritually. Stressed people can still imagine, up to a point, that if they can just get everything under control, they'll feel better. When that point is reached, stress flips to burnout. That flipping point is different for different people, depending on their personal resiliency and circumstances, but none of us is immune.

While you're usually aware of being under a lot of stress, you don't always notice burnout when it happens. The symptoms of burnout can take months to surface. If someone close to you points out changes in your attitude or behaviour that are typical of burnout, listen.

Burnout is not about too much. It is in fact about not enough. Being burned out means feeling empty, devoid of motivation, and beyond caring. People experiencing burnout often do not perceive any hope of positive change in their situations.

TYPES OF BURNOUT

The most common types of spiritual burnouts among magickal people are:

1. The overzealous student: When you start down a new path, you want everything NOW. The truth of the matter is that it takes time. If you do not master the basics, you cannot master the higher levels of skill. There is no substitute for hard work, study, and experience. There is also no substitute for mistakes. Enjoy time with non-magickal friends and family. We live in an amazing and diverse world. Take advantage of it.
2. The overworked high priest or priestess: If you are leading a group, it is easy to fall into martyr syndrome. Teaching is an enormous responsibility and people have put their trust in you, but they also remain responsible for themselves. The most important thing is: if you are feeling overworked and under-appreciated, communicate.
3. The person who has a tragedy occur and feels unsupported: Terrible things happen to good people. It does not mean that such a person has done something to deserve it, or that they are being paid back for something done in a past life, or that the gods hates you. The most important thing to remember is that you are not alone be it on the spiritual

plane or the physical. There are counselors, clinics, support groups - whatever you're going through, if you reach out, you will be able to find someone to help. Find places that make you feel calm and comforted. If you can't create a section of your home that is a sanctuary, find some place close by where you can retreat. Once you get grounded and centered you can start to get things in perspective.

4. Ego. In every instance, stop and take a long, hard look at yourself and how you are behaving in the world. What are you trying to prove and to whom? Why do you think the entire universe needs to be concerned with you?

TAKING A BREAK

Everyone needs a break once in a while. It allows one to reassess goals, desires, and affirmations. And then there are times when you simply need to take time out from everything to "recharge". You may feel that you want to rethink how you relate to Divinity, or you want to commune with Divinity once a week instead of on a daily basis. There is nothing wrong with that, as long as it is done in an honorable fashion.

Time outs can be ritually begun and ritually ended. First of all, figure out what you are getting away from. Then figure out what you want your time period to be. If you belong to a group, ask for a leave of absence. Do not just stop attending events and abdicate your responsibilities. If you are part of a group, participating in some kind of leaving ritual may be a good idea.

Whether you are on your own (solitary) or working with a group, do your own ritual, even if it is just lighting a candle. While you are on your break, do things that you enjoy. Do things that you have denied yourself. Most of all, listen. Divinity has unusual ways of communicating, and you may receive the answers you seek when you least expect them.

ANGER

Anger is one of the most difficult emotions to accept in any spiritual context, particularly when it is directed at one's spiritual group or other aspects of one's spirituality. Many people hold spiritual groups to higher standards making it more difficult to accept their imperfections. In reality, all spiritual groups fall short of perfection. Yet, it seems irreverent to be angry at one's spiritual group or any other aspect of their spirituality.

Anger is normal. Anger is even healthy! And maybe more importantly, anger always has a meaning. Yet for many this is difficult to accept. Many prefer to just deny their feelings pretending they do not exist. However, just as repressing or denying your anger at a friend or a spouse is not very effective, neither is avoiding dealing with anger in spiritual settings.

There are many types of anger. Some anger is based on the injustices and pain we see in the world. This is a healthy and very natural form of anger. Another form of anger results from the perception that we have been harmed. Anger can also result from feelings of powerlessness. At times, anger can also be

misdirected. Anger can also result from a defensive process. When a person feels threatened, they often respond in anger. This kind of anger serves to keep people at a distance and protect the individual.

For spiritual individuals anger at Divinity can be a particularly difficult type of anger. It seems irrational, illogical and just wrong. But denying that you are angry at the gods does not make the anger evaporate. It is more productive and healing to acknowledge the anger and begin to work through it. Remember, the gods do not need to be protected against your emotions.

Anger can in fact be a powerful healing force once it is accepted. For many, it becomes a great source of motivation.

So what's the relationship between spirituality and anger? Are they opposites?

From a Buddhist perspective, anger is a potentially destructive emotion often related to greediness and attachment. While anger can be a source of holy wisdom when it brings awareness, it has the potential to descend into hatred or aggression.

Wicca understands anger to be a force of energy – almost a type of magick – and centers on outcome. What we focus on creates our reality and changes who we are. Further, the world reflects back to us what we send out into it. Anger at injustice is a healthy spiritual response. Anger helps us see what is wrong and can motivate action to create positive change in the world. This sort of response creates a blessing rather than a curse.

But anger can also reflect and intensify our hurt and separation. It presents a temptation to self-righteousness and self-justification that separates us from one another, from the world and from our truest selves. This sort of anger is related to ego rather than spirit. It isolates us. Its power can make it addictive, and some people feel most alive when they are really, really angry.

A BLESSING IN DISGUISE

Remember that adversities, trials, difficulties, diseases, pains and sufferings can be blessings in disguise. They strengthen the will and increase the power of endurance. They force us to perform even beyond our ability. They develop all the talents and capacities lying dormant within us.

Furthermore, nature's law of cause and effect operates with relentless precision. Many of the difficulties that we encounter in life are but lessons we need to learn.

Transforming depression is sacred work. Depression has been described as “the dark night of the soul”, and seeing it as such reframes and renovates it. This “dark night” may be seen as a kind of spiritual exile, but even as such it is not negative, but an occasion for transformation.

The “dark night” can incubate something unexpected and good if we have the proper support. It is invaluable to find a therapist or wise guide familiar with the divine nature of this terrain, or one may be at the mercy of a well-meaning but spiritually clueless practitioner who pathologises our experiences according to a dogmatic medical model.

- IMPORTANT -

PLEASE REMEMBER that spirituality should not replace conventional medical/psychological help, but should complement, support and enable it. Those with severe depression symptoms are encouraged to seek professional assistance.

(1) Recent research in the US at Temple University has, for example, shown that people who attend religious meetings are 30 percent less likely to have had depression in their lifetime, and those who have high levels of existential well-being (refers to a person's sense of meaning and their purpose in life) are 70 percent less likely to have had depression than those who had low levels of existential well-being.

(2) Dark night of the soul was termed by San Juan de la Cruz (24 June 1542 - 14 December 1591), born Juan de Yepes Alvarez, a major figure of the Catholic Reformation, but also a Spanish mystic and writer.

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SPIRITUAL AWAKENING THROUGH THE 12 STEPS by Morgause Fontelève

“You yourself, as much as anybody in the entire universe deserve your love and affection.”

We cannot deny that addiction and dysfunctional behaviour can be considered epidemics of our times. These damaging addictive or co-dependant behaviours include alcoholism, gambling addictions, drug addiction, sex addiction, addiction to the rush of anger, eating disorders, etc.

The AA 12 steps Program has in many cases proven to be more successful than psychotherapy as it provides the structure for a support system for treating addictions and other related disorders.

John Bradshaw coined the idea that we are all adult children. Most of us carry with us the baggage of negative programming and hurts from a possibly dysfunctional background. This in turn gives rise to issues and behavioral

patterns

STEP ONE

Admit we have a problem and that we were powerless over it and consequently our lives became unmanageable. This affirmation is an admission to the severity of the problem which assails us. This recognition is the very moment of liberation. It is the realization that empowers us liberty and freedom to victory over our addiction. From this moment we will not squander our power, money and energy.

STEP TWO

Believe that a Higher Power can restore us and our lives. We have to reach inside ourselves and permit this Higher Power to connect with Itself within us. We have to reach out for help and be au fait with it. We must nurture hope in our hearts and this will enable us to face the difficulties we will encounter during our recovery.

STEP THREE

Make the conscious decision to turn over our will and our lives to the care of the Divine. We undertake to reclaim our will-power and the pride in ourselves as wholesome and functional people and to connect with the Divine Spark within, feeling that we are part and parcel of It and drawing from It the necessary strength and courage to overcome the difficulties of recovery.

STEP FOUR

Make a searching and fearless moral inventory of ourselves, analyzing our behaviour within society and our family environment. Important it is to recognize how cause and effect has influenced who we are and to stand outside judgment. In this manner we can strategize and find ways of coping through understanding. Shame has no place here as shame and guilt often fuel addiction. The greatest part of the addiction rests in self-acceptance, whilst discarding the damaging and self-destructive behaviour. Step outside ourselves and see ourselves as part of this process we once had control over. Analyze the causes and effects of our behaviour and change what needs changing. Make this change permanent.

STEP FIVE

Admit to the Divine and to ourselves, as well as another person the exact nature of our mistakes. Accept their input. By nature we are blind to our own programming, so their point of view is invaluable. Ritual can add to this moment of catharsis. A well-known Pagan once gave up smoking at a Yule ritual fire and turned his tobacco pouch into a *juju* bag for divination, very similar to the *dolosse* bag of *sangomas*.

STEP SIX

Announce that we are ready to allow the Divine to remove the defects from our character, willingly letting old patterns go. Willingness is imperative for recovery. We must let go the old and damaging survival techniques and associated patterns. Letting go of what we believe is what we truly need is scary and discomforting. Resorting or giving in to behavioral patterns have secondary rewards, or gratifying consequences, for instance the euphoria as well as the attention he gets.

STEP SEVEN

Humbly ask the Divine to remove our shortcomings and learn to ask for and accept help. Be receptive to the workings, the prayers and the signs/omens that the Divine and Its representatives extend to you. "Coincidences" are God-sends. Miracles do happen. Love is one of them. The Goddess is everywhere and in everything. Be an open channel to Her energy and do not shut out Her healing energy.

STEP EIGHT

Make a list of those you have unconsciously harmed and be willing to make amends. Make the effort to reconstitute what has been lost, confront those who have harmed us and ask for acknowledgement. If this is not forthcoming, e.g. becoming estranged from parents, we must commit ourselves to restore relationships .

STEP NINE

Make direct amends where possible, excepting when doing so would cause them further injury. Restore the balance where possible and feel your karma-kala lighten up. The last two steps take a long time to effectuate, and it is hard as you may get back a lot of negativity and anger from those whom we've hurt. The great thing about this step, is that it brings about Liberation.

STEP TEN

Persevere with taking the personal inventory and admit when we are or were wrong. Make the commitment to continue with the process of your recovery remembering that making the necessary changes takes time. There are no short-cuts, and being "clever" does not help. We need to monitor ourselves. Stay away from places and people that lead you to temptation.

Do not give in to their pressure and especially not to temptation. Don't let down your guard. Be fully aware at all times. Guard yourself and your resolution.

STEP ELEVEN

Seek through prayer and meditation to improve our conscious contact with the Divine, praying for knowledge of what It desires for us, and executing it. Persevere with maintaining our connection to the Web of Life through appropriate activities, company and a daily spiritual practice. Maintain the "connection". Remember that the Divine is immanent and that understanding comes through effort and through exploration, openness and trust.

STEP TWELVE

Having a spiritual awakening as a result of the aforementioned steps. With this comes a fundamental change in our view of ourselves and of the world. Remember everything and everyone is interconnected. All life is sacred. That includes YOU! No respect means no respect for yourself, and vice versa. They say that teachers teach until they finally learn what they are teaching. Helping others completes the cycle of healing, completes the process which has assisted us. When we have successfully struggled with something, we have become an expert of that struggle. Our understanding of it and our enthusiasm and strong resolve will help another one on the Path of recovery and spiritual existence.

Remember:

**“For every minute you are angry you lose sixty seconds of happiness.” –
Ralph Waldo Emerson**

Keep clean.

Stay away from places and people that will lead to temptation.

There is no such thing as recreational use for an addict (gambling, drugs, alcohol, sex, etc.)

See problems as opportunities against which to measure yourself and for learning more about ourselves and life.

Have compassion for yourself. Practice being well, be better and make the world a better place for yourself and those who love you.

Practice hope and belief in yourself.

Do not replace one addiction with another.

Be Godly! Be Sacred!

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PART 2

RECLAIMING THE WARRIOR: Defeat your Depression by Morgause Fontelève

“It is not because things are difficult that we do not dare; it is because we do not dare that they are difficult.” ~ Seneca



I am not an expert on depression but I have noticed that depression and anger in many cases go hand in hand. I have also observed that depression and chronic pain are also bed-fellows, as well as the coupling of depression and the abuse of alcohol or drugs (as self-medication). Depression has become a problem with a lot of us, but most of depression cases go undiagnosed.

As the individuals that we are, we only have one chance at being happy. Today! Now! So why is it that so many folk today are deeply unhappy, find themselves entrapped in toxic relationships where everybody suffers (despite the love they share for one another), losing out on hours and days of potential contentment, fulfillment, self-realization?

Depression affects people of all races, ages and gender. It is nothing to be ashamed of. At least 35% of the world's population suffers from one or other form of depression. It is an insidious illness that consumes one inwardly and which also destroys the lives of those in the depressive's immediate environment. If the depression is not addressed, the depressive becomes poisonous to those in his family, work environment, etc.

What Causes Depression?

Depression is caused by a chemical imbalance in most cases, or confusion in the "wiring" of the brain and neural pathways.

How Do You Tell if You're Depressed?

Your thoughts, your sleeping pattern, your moods, your appetite, your sex drive, your self-esteem, your temper are all clear indications to this. If you are deeply unhappy, feel hopeless, desperate, feel like you have failed, have to force yourself to go through the motions and drag yourself along, in a progressively worsening manner, chances are you are suffering from depression.

This is not the occasionally feeling sad or down because something bad has happened, or because something has disappointed you. This is a feeling of absolute abysmal hopelessness and the loss of interest in living.

Let's Get This Straight

"I shut my eyes in order to see." ~ Paul Gauguin

Depression is not the illness of the weak. It is an enemy against which you have to battle, day and night, an enemy that robs you of your energy, your will to live, an enemy that arouses in your Warrior's chest doubts about what you represent, where you are going, making you feel worthless, driving you towards moral and spiritual alienation, driving you to self-destruction.

Recognize the Symptoms

If you feel like you've lost all interest and enjoyment in living, if you are feeling empty and sad and cannot see a way forward, have no hopes that the situation will improve, if your words resound with feelings of worthlessness, if you are no longer able to make decisions, if your memory and ability to focus abandon you, if you are reticent and unable to talk to others about what is happening to you, if you are assailed by feelings of being unloved, unwanted, if you harbour feelings of guilt (self-blame), if you are gaining or losing weight, if you struggle to fall asleep and then waking up too, if you are listless, chances are that you are suffering from one or other form of depression. If you cannot stop crying, if you are irritable, restless, always angry, if you seek seclusion, if you lose interest in the things that make you happy, if you are abusing alcohol or drugs (or for that matter engage in some other destructive addictive behaviour), if you fantasize about dying or suicide, then I'm afraid you are probably depressed.

Check List for Depression

Fatigue (cannot rise in the morning)
Aches and pains that return
Difficulty in concentrating/focusing
Unrelentless sadness
Restlessness
Little or no libido
Forgetfulness
Being angry at the whole world
Feeling that life is not fair
Inability to converse
Walking around in a daze
Eating all the time or fasting
Inability to enjoy
Missing work
Self-destructive behaviour
Belief that the good part of life is over
Being upset and harboring grudges
Inability to forgive
Nurturing fears and not admitting to them.

If you scored 5 or more, then you are depressed!

Types of Depression

A major depression can be triggered off by one event in your life or be the result of an accumulation of disappointments or hurts in your life. The symptoms interfere with your ability to enjoy life and function normally. In these instances one wants to take refuge in sleep as wakefulness bring one no joy. Getting up in the morning is a quasi impossible task. This type of depression can run out its course in 6 to 9 months, but tends to repeat itself, returning to take siege of one's life with a vengeance.

Symptoms of a Major Depression

Irritability and outbursts of anger, hopelessness and helplessness, drug and alcohol abuse, brooding over problems, problems at work/school, nurturing the idea that one has nothing to live for, desiring to be left alone, a change in appetite, unconcerned with one's physical appearance, talking about suicide, permanent fatigue and low energy levels, insomnia or sleeping too much, lack of concentration, problems with memory, waking up too early and being unable to fall asleep again. Lethargy, showing less interest in sexual partner, etc.

You can't just work your way through a Major Depression and denying that the problem exists will simply aggravate it. This sort of attitude will only prolong the problem and worsen the severity. Face your problem, admit to it, deal with the problem. Remember that the duty of the warrior is to fight the battles. Not to hide and pretend all is well while outside warfare is raging and many are getting hurt and your life is also in danger.

Chronic Depression

Chronic Depression is a constant sort of depression that lasts from 8 to 9 months generally speaking, that makes the depressive sufferer miserable and pessimistic. Happiness and contentment are always out of his reach and this leads to frustration.

Though not as severe as Major Depression, Chronic Depression is a long-lasting and tends to recur from time to time, affecting the quality of one's life.

Symptoms of Chronic Depression

Sadness, loss of enthusiasm, restlessness, irritability, tiredness, mood swings, complaints and pains, being distracted and unable to focus, social evasiveness, loss of interest in hobbies, difficulty in dealing with others, etc.

This state of depression is like having the flu. You feel out of sorts, can't carry on, you experience no joy in your daily ménage, you find it hard to get intimate with people, you feel like you cannot trust anyone, you are carrying the weight of the world on your shoulders, you find it hard to lighten up and relax, you drink too much but it is the only thing that brings "relief" or "numbness", you cannot settle down for long, you don't believe anyone really cares for you, you hope you will die, there is no physical reason for your pain, you indulge in comfort eating, etc.

Are you someone like this? Someone who is a work-a-holic, who feels there is no reason in his life for optimism, that people don't know what you're about and don't get too excited about your outbursts or down-in-the-dumps mood swings.

The truth is nobody can do anything for you. Only you can decide if you want to take action and make the necessary changes to make your life turn for the better.

Bipolar or Manic Depression

The symptoms vary from person to person.

In the manic phase you feel high, enthusiastic, unable to slow down, impulsive, you are out of yourself and do things you don't regularly do. You are so out of touch with reality that you are out character and do things you don't normally do. Judgment errors lead you to feel ashamed and embarrassed about your actions, and you feel you cannot face people because you have lost face. Your energy levels are electric and you get irritated when people ask you to calm down. You feel like you are all-powerful, invincible, you are talkative in this stage and may even act out sexually.

Somewhere along the line you take a drink or do some drugs to calm down and hit a "downer" and the depression starts. You do not consider the consequences of your actions or even your socially unacceptable behaviour.

Symptoms of Manic Depression

Fatigue, insomnia, physical pains, temper outburst, violent behaviour, meanness, inability to sympathize or empathize with others, thoughts of death and suicide, oversleeping, overeating, needy of solitude, wild and out of control behaviour, feeling humiliated, giving in to escapism.

This form of depression needs medication.

What Causes Depression?

Depression is sometimes hereditary. This is especially true of manic depression. Stress at home or at the office can trigger off depression as well as any event which bring to the fore the following issues present in the prime candidate for depression: low self-esteem, financial setbacks, difficult relationships, personal friction, chronic illness, the loss of a loved one, divorce, losing one's job, any major disruption in one's life or events and circumstances which are beyond our control, not getting one's way, etc.

How Does One Deal With Depression?

First and foremost it is important to understand that a person suffering from depression is not to be regarded as a sociopath or psychotic. Depression sets in through very natural and normal reactions: our ability to experience guilt, disappointment, satisfaction and because one is furnished with a conscience.

Depression is also caused by a chemical imbalance in one's brain which does not permit one's brain to send the correct signals to one's body. It is really nobody's fault. Confusion ensues. The neuro-transmitters and chemicomessengers are not able to deliver the impulses/messages from the brain to the correct centers of the body. In poor words, these impulses are delivered to the incorrect addresses and confusion ensues.

Negative thought-patterns develop during our childhood years as well as during adolescence. This causes one to start thinking that life isn't fair, that one does not get the support needed, that one does not get the necessary approval and praise and love needed. The lack of all those things which allow us to feel positive, unique and very special are root causes of negativity and therefore depression.

Women are more prone to chronic and major depression than men. Women also go for analysis and treatment far more often than men. They are not concerned with the social stigma attached to depression and the treatment thereof. Men, on the other hand, equate depression with "weakness" and are reluctant to admit to being depressed and of needing help.

Women often suffer from post-natal depression (baby blues) due to fatigue and hormonal imbalances post partum. If you are in this place, get family support immediately and visit your GP. He will send you for blood tests and assist you immediately with sorting out the hormonal imbalance. This can be done through pharmaceutical or natural substances, depending on the severity of your condition.

Children who were molested are prone to develop depression as teenagers or as adults. All forms of abuse erode away one's self-image and can lead to self-blame, feelings of loss of control, loneliness, desperation, etc.

Growing up in a dysfunctional family which does not provide you with love, moral support and the joy of acceptance may lead to low morale and eventually to depression. Poverty, financial difficulties may also push one to depression,

because it instills in the individual a feeling of insecurity and the lack of self-worth.

The feeling that “life is not fair” grows into full blown resentments and grudges which the individual secretly carries with him for the rest of his life. Folk suffering of these conditions, may then act out their negative programming through outbursts of anger.

Feelings of worthlessness after retirement, in a society where man’s worth is measured by his contribution, may also lead to depression.

Alcohol and Drugs

How do some folk suffering from depression exit that deep dark pit of depression which they find themselves in? They resort to taking drugs or drinking. Some self-medicate this way. It is easier, faster, and seemingly cheaper than visiting a doctor to obtain a prescription. Alcohol gives you an initial feeling of being on an “upper”, but more drinks just lead to a further and aggravated depression, however. Alcohol and drugs acts on the brain and the levels of tolerance build up. The desired effects are then harder to obtain and substance abuse sets in.

Do not make the mistake of thinking that you are “clever” and that you have it all “under control”. And remember not to substitute one addiction with another. Be courageous and deal with the problem. Face it and resolve it!

Do not drink to calm down or fall asleep, as this will aggravate the depression and will in short, interfere with your ability to deal with the root of your depression. Abusing alcohol to calm down and fall asleep will only culminate in a drinking problem and the inability to fall asleep. Yes, you will not be able to fall asleep unless you drink yourself into an alcoholic or drug-induced stupor.

Small quantities of alcohol lower the inhibitions and make one more talkative and seemingly sociable. Do not ingest alcohol or drugs if your aim is to give you more confidence or to overcome your shyness.

Do not drink and drive. Do not drink and work. Even a few drinks can impair your judgment and co-ordination, give you problems with depth perception, and peripheral vision, cause drowsiness, falling asleep behind the wheel, retard one’s reactions and impair our reflexes. This means accidents, injuries and death - often involving innocent people who know nothing about you or your miserable existence. 90% of road accidents are directly linked to alcohol abuse, not to mention things like unwanted pregnancies, domestic violence, socially unacceptable behaviour, assault and battery, family break-ups,

Remember that regular alcohol abuse leads to addiction. Alcohol is not the way to deal with your problems. It is a sure and easy way to your downfall.

The same applies to drugs. Do not abuse pain-killers; do not abuse prescription drugs, tranquilizers, etc. They may appear to deal with your emotional suffering, but in truth these substances lead only to addiction and financial ruination.

Depression and Chronic Pain

Some folk have one life partner. Pain! This chronic pain pushes one over the edge into a place of deepest depression. Pain is triggered by our brains to warn us that something is wrong. You do something about it. Chronic pain is here to stay (arthritis, irritable bowel syndrome, sciatic pain, bone degenerative diseases, chronic fatigue syndrome, etc.) It takes its toll both emotionally and physically. It can lead to depression, anxiety, anger, insomnia and irritation. Those living with a chronic sufferer suffer along with him. This sort of pain leads to the abuse of pain-killers, anti-inflammatory, mood altering pharmacological cocktails which affect one's disposition. Often combined with alcohol, this form of self-medication becomes a combination which ruins lives. When you land up at your doctor, he does not show much sympathy or even concern. He just prescribes more medication. Your quality of life will be adversely affected.

Depression and anxiety are often coupled with sleeplessness, and sleeplessness leads to irritability, the inability to be happy, bone and muscular stiffness. This may lead to the abuse of substances (alcohol and medication), high levels of blood acidity, being out of touch of reality due to all the narcotics consumed, heart problems, ulcers, misery in and eventually unnecessary surgery. Furthermore there are the issues of misery in the home and within the family.

Do you wish to become part of the Depression Army? Are you just another frustrated soldier against pain (physical/emotional)?

If your answer is no, well, then you do not need isolation. You need group support and you need to be a responsible patient, until your aches and ills are all under control.

Therapy

There are different types of therapy but we will only touch briefly on three:

Psychotherapy: most common form of therapy in which the patient lies on the couch and speaks to the psychologist.

Behaviour Therapy: This type of therapy is limited strictly to the talking about one's behaviour and actions. It does not delve into our past.

Cognitive Therapy: All emotions have their roots in thought. The aim of this type of therapy is to stop your thoughts, question if they are good, edifying thoughts, true, necessary and discard them immediately if they are not. In it the patient is taught to review his typical way of thinking and decide if it is sound or not, making the necessary changes. It is ideal for those who are good with the analysis of their own thoughts, whilst for some it is too complicated. It teaches the patient to relate to his thinking. It focuses on communication skills, on how to express your feelings and on how you relate to others in your life.

Do It Yourself

RECLAIMING YOUR FEELINGS OF SAFETY

One of our basic needs is that of support, and yet for some of us, it is so hard to obtain. Ideally speaking our immediate families should have nurtured and encouraged us in an edifying manner from infancy through to adolescence at least. Teachers, life coaches, colleagues and friends should also have done so.

Through acknowledging our successes, triumphs and achievements the above could have been accomplished, however, some of us never received this critical positive input. Some of us got exactly the opposite.

Ask yourself. If they had the power to influence you negatively in your youth, are you as an adult, going to continue allowing them the same power to influence you negatively for the rest of your existence?

Let me advise you. Do not be afraid to take yourself seriously. You need to do this if you are to move from the realm of shadowy doubts into that of certainty and light.

LOVE AND PROTECT THE INNER CHILD

“Remember your inner child”, I was recently told, whilst crossing a difficult period. Find and protect that child. Do away with self-reproach and self-hatred. Accept yourself with all your faults and improve on them. Remove the things and folk which hamper you in your spiritual and psychological progress. Stop believing that those obstacles and blockages make you feel safe. What you experience is not safety, but the comfort of familiarity. You may be unhappy, but hell, at least you know that you are unhappy.

Core negativity and fear of change keep you enslaved. Use affirmations to achieve a sense of safety and hope. Disown all previous negative reinforcement.

RECLAIM YOUR SELF-IDENTITY

Trusting in your own sanity may feel threatening at first, but do find the courage and the resilience to come unstuck from those insecurities which keep you blocked and confined within your own fears and lack of identity. Remember that reclaiming yourself, your own sanity, may feel to you exactly like you're losing your mind, but let yourself be lifted in the vortex of self-knowledge and build up strength to ward off your attempts of sabotaging this process of self-recovery through the entertainment of self-doubt.

Choose between reclaiming your identity OR resign yourself to being a victim. Just as the recovering alcoholic must at all costs avoid the first drink, so must you avoid engaging the first doubt. Beware and note that the source of doubting is both internal and external.

Avoid temptation, stay away from certain places and from toxic mates who are riddled with doubts themselves and who will, no doubt, infect you with their 'disease' and self-centered delusive inadequacies.

Do not expect your 'sick' friends to applaud your progress and recovery. They won't! Their doubts will re-activate your own. Be alert and keep a safe distance. Take care of yourself. Connect with your true self, at all times. The reward for paying attention to your inner child is HEALING!

RECLAIMING YOUR SENSE OF POWER

Anger is like a fuel. The moment we experience anger we burn with power, we want to vent, we want to strike something or someone. This is however, not socially accepted behaviour, so we suppress anger and we ignore it.

What we should do is LISTEN to it!

Anger should be listened to and acted upon. Not acted out. Anger is a voice, a plea, an alarm bell, a demand. Anger is like a map, it indicates the way. Use it as fuel. Use it to take action.

At all times remember that anger is your tool. You are the master. Tap into anger and from it draw the needed energy for positive ends. Keep yourself in check but do not disempower yourself through suppressing anger.

Life is what we make of it. Do not permit FEAR to block you or to hold you back on your Path to spiritual and evolutionary progress.

Do not deny pain or disappointment, and don't use detachment, escapism or disinterest as a coping mechanism. Denying hurt and disappointment does not ward off the inner vulnerability. Those of us who grew up in dysfunctional homes are experts at devices of denial. This is not a coping mechanism. It is a coping out mechanism. What it really is, is numbing out. Not facing the enemy, but running away from it.

Be firm with yourself and do not entertain self-doubt. Engaging doubt can be stopped, but for that you must be alert, honest with yourself and vigilant.

You will heal!

EASY DOES IT

Growing up can be painful and it takes time. Easy does it. Baby yourself if necessary. Develop the habit of checking up with your inner child. Give yourself quiet time for introspection and encourage yourself in these your pressing endeavors.

“TO THINE SELF BE TRUE”

Dare go on the adventurous discovery of your true self. The trick for successful recovery is to quit saying, “it's ok” when you have been hurt, disappointed, angered. Remember, “no pain, no gain”. Let go the vagueness about yourself, your values, your principles, your ethics. Let go of the very situation. You will become aware of the false self you have nurtured thus far. Do not grieve the death of this false you.

Be prepared to both laugh and weep.

If you were to survive a car crash, you would walk away from the wreck and flames, would you not. You would consider yourself lucky. Now, leave your old

life of insecurity behind you and never nurture doubts about the process, no matter how slow it may be.

When they come, the changes will be unsettling. Like a snake, shed your old self/skin and give yourself over to the process of transformation and healing.

Lastly, but certainly not least, learn to listen.

LAST TIPS

Remember that perfectionism is not getting things right; it is like a handbrake, which prevents you from moving forward.

Jealousy is a normal but stingy human emotion. It is in fact a mask for fear. Fear of not getting what you want, fear that someone else has taken what is ours, fear of rejection. Fear blocks us and prevents us from reaching out and enjoying what is ours.

Change your weaknesses into your strengths and NEVER revert to viewing them as your weaknesses, for this would just catapult you back into the damaging and negative behaviour you conquered and abandoned in the first place.

Whatever you do, do not undermine your Destiny! Keep safe, keep motivated, stay happy!

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Asatru, Anger and Angantyr by Wotanwulf

“Anger is an emotional state that varies in intensity from mild irritation to intense fury and rage”(Dr. Spielberg, PhD)

Everybody knows what anger is. We experience it on a daily basis. From those little frustrations such as finding bird droppings on a freshly washed car, to the total unpleasantness of experiencing sugar on the floor with your bare feet, to the full fury you experience when a taxi driver overtakes you at full speed, just to hit brakes in front of you to drop off a commuter.

Basically, anger means that you are not getting your way, and you feel that you are entitled to getting your way. Anger appears in different forms to different people, and psychologists have done doctorates on the subject. Now, the question is, what good does this do for us Asatruar, who follow our Nine Noble Virtues, and basically do our own “thing”, but want to deal with anger in this context?

Let us first look at our Virtues, which, for us is the logical place to start. Yes, right under the virtues of courage and truth, we find honor. So, you say honor is usually seen in a

different light, well, there is not much honor in losing your temper, is there? It also reflects badly on your self discipline (another virtue) when you carry the burden of anger around, and at the wrong moment, you explode in a violent rage.

This makes me feel a bit like Angantyr, a pawn enmeshed in the Tyrping Cycle. He possesses this powerful weapon, the magical sword Tyrping, which cuts through anything and never misses a stroke. The problem with Tyrping is, that it is cursed. Whenever the sword leaves its scabbard, someone will die. Anger compares very well with Tyrping. It is an important tool of survival. We all need it from time to time, but it is a cursed weapon. Once unleashed from its scabbard, it wreaks havoc and destruction. Now, as the Angantyr of latter-day cannot go about unarmed, what is the secret? Would it be to only unleash the Tyrping from within at the right moment, when facing one's adversary? It would be well to remember that Tyrping was the cause of Angantyr's demise. With anger, the comparison is again unequalled, for is anger not the downfall of many a great man or woman?

Many Pagans feel that Asatruar usually need more anger management than others (Yes, I have heard this from different sources, and no, I did not knock their teeth out). I think one of the main reasons for this is the fact that Asatruar usually try to live up to the old Viking spirit, and according to the Viking Answer Lady, the Vikings were the rednecks of yesteryear. A good way to find out how well the local healthcare facility operates, would have been to insult one of them. We must remember that they lived in a different time, and nowadays we do not usually go pub-crawling with a battle axe strapped to our backs, if you get my drift. For them it was not about anger, but defending their honor. So let's face it, fighting duels are just not smiled upon nowadays.

For those who still think they can play the 'berserker card', (there are quite a few of you out there) forget it! In the Old Norse communities, going berserk in public was the surest way of getting yourself declared outlawed and exiled.

That type of violent behavior was most definitely not tolerated, and the Sagas are testimony to that. Using this as an excuse for your poor self discipline is unbecoming of our religion. We must remember that our faith is based on the principles of taking responsibility for our actions. This simply means that: when you unleash Tyrping, you are responsible for the sappy details. Plain and simple! Now, how do we deal with this?

Most psychologists agree, that anger is an essential part of being human. It is necessary. They all agree that to rid yourself of anger, "if it could be possible", would be dangerous to your physical and mental health. This is of utmost importance for us Pagans to know, for where psychologists believe that it is not possible, we know differently. For us it is most definitely possible, since many of us practice Magick. On this, I would caution all not to try something like this. Especially with Rune magic. (Though we are working at it, Rune magick still holds a lot of dark, misinterpreted corners, and banishing an essential human emotion could turn catastrophic. That way lies psychosis!)

The answer, rather lies in knowing the type of anger that one is afflicted with. I will not deal with hate, for hate is a hardened form of anger, when it is allowed to fester and to grow. At this stage we all know better than to let that happen, don't we? So apart from hate and complete avoidance of anger, the following types have been identified:

1. Hidden anger

This is the anger one feels, but fails to communicate. This is a very consuming type of emotion. Many times a person would not realize that he is suffering from this type of anger. It makes one vindictive, spiteful and untrustworthy. A typical symptom would be that a person agrees to do something, and then does not do it. He sabotages plans and projects through his lack of action. He often does not realize this, and starts to live in a sick little world of his own.

2. Paranoid anger

The typical archetype of paranoid anger is a person who feels constantly that others are out to “get him”. Usually this would be irrational. The slightest remark or argument could set him off. He mistrusts everyone, and that is the cause of his anger. These are the guys who invent conspiracy theories. Needless to say, they do not have a lot of money to spend on R&R, since they spend most of it on upgrading their security systems.

3. Volatile anger

This is the real smash and burn anger that comes like a tsunami and leaves only destruction and mayhem in its wake. Guys, this might work for Thor when he takes on the Etins, but this will NOT do when the wifey maxes out the credit card on those new designer shoes.

4. Deliberate anger

This is the cold, calculated anger of the High School bully, or that *Baaad Mutha* at work, who uses anger as a tool to manipulate and intimidate. It gives them the illusion of power. Yes, it is an illusion, because not before long someone comes along who is REALLY angry, and that is usually the end of the power trip.

5. Habitual anger

You have been angry for a very long time. When you are not angry, you feel like something is missing. Something is...wrong with the world. Yup, you became an anger-junkie. You need to get angry to get your “fix” for the day, and it controls your life.

Recognize any of these symptoms? Yes, me too. It does not matter how you swing Tyrfing, it is still a cursed blade. It still demands its toll.

When we look at the Eddas and Sagas, we can see a distinct line of anger running through it. However, this struggle for control over the emotions is never as clear as in Grettir’s Saga.

Grettir was a great fighter, stronger than most, and could have been one of the greatest heroes ever. He even managed to hold off an enraged bear with his bare hands, but failed miserably at holding off the Bear Within. Because of his temper, he was banned and exiled, to roam as an outlaw, to die treacherously at the hands of his enemies.

Let us look a bit closer at this phenomenal man.

Early on in the Saga, we can see that Grettir displays the typical pattern of hidden anger, directed at his father, Asmund. Typically, when his father gives him tasks to perform, he displays deliberate negligence which is a trademark of hidden anger. Later on as his anger manifests properly, he turns to not-so-innocent pranks to rile his father. At times he is plainly vindictive. During an argument with his father, he almost prophetically, says:

“tis ill to rouse a hasty temper” It is easy to assume that these words came back to haunt him.

Further, we see the first real outburst of volatile anger, during a ball game against Audun, who was by all accounts a stand-up sort of guy, though he was still very young. Grettir lost his temper and attacked Audun, who himself was a very strong young man. Audun won the wrestling match, and the other kids pulled them apart. It was then that Grettir spoke those famous words:” The thrall alone takes instant vengeance, the coward never” (Grett15.44)

At this stage, we can see that Grettir realizes his need to control himself, but it gets more and more difficult to contain the Tyrfinng inside of him. Even later on in the saga he thought better of attacking a foe who clearly outmatched him:

*“oh, skilled in war! When thee are before me
I yet endeavor to fight with them all
But more than four I dare not encounter
In the clashing of arms, if choice
Is with me”*

So far our hero is not doing all that bad, although he got himself banned from Iceland because of a killing. However, he steadily loses control over his temper as the saga continues, until that fateful day that changed his life forever.

Here it is important to note how his orlog, his past and present actions, came together to cast his wyrd, and he doomed himself to a life of outlawry. All of this because he could not control his anger. Many believe that he was tempted by an evil spirit that day, but I feel that this is just another footnote of Christian influence on the saga.(to the Erulians, what follow might look more like a signature from Odin himself, who is well known for causing strife and sowing discord)

According to the saga, Grettir was accused of burning a house down with men still inside. He appeared before King Olaf, a Christian king. The king determined that if Grettir could “bare iron” he would be absolved. Grettir started fasting according to the procedures, until the day of his purgation.

On the day of his purgation, he was provoked by a foul smelling, dirty looking boy who shouted at him:

*“Wondrous are now the ways in a land
Where men call themselves Christians,
Where evildoers and robbers and thieves walk
In peace to purge themselves”*

Grettir lost his temper, hitting the boy, and lost his chance of purgation. No matter how much he pleaded with the king, there was no mercy for him in this matter. Had he controlled his temper, things would have looked a lot different. (This looks more and more like Odinic intervention doesn't it?)

Now, Grettir goes forth, being an outlaw, accomplishing many brave and daring feats of his own, and this is where I shall leave him for now. But where does this leave us?

Many experts in the field of anger believes that anger is genetically inherited. (Dr. Deffenbacher, PhD) This joins in nicely with the concept of orlog. We might have inherited a violent temper, but we still have the power to change our wyrd. Diana L.

Paxson, in her book *Essential Asatru*, makes it clear that orlog is the restraints and aids one receives in life. What you do with these 'layers' is what will determine your wyrd. Orlog is given, wyrd is earned. You may use that violent temper positively and become a great businessman, or you may end up in prison. Here one may wish to remember what Guido von List had to say on the subject: "Nütse dein schicksal-wederstrebe ihm nicht" *use your destiny- do not strive against it*' (G.von List, *Das geheimeniss der Runen*, 1912)

We always have the choice of how to use our orlog.

According to Dr. Spielberger, PhD, there are basically three ways to deal with anger, namely;

1. Expression

When you state your anger in an assertive, respectful way.

2. Suppression

When you convert your anger into a more positive way

3. Calming

When you force yourself to calm down.

As Spielberger notes," When none of these three techniques work, that's when someone or something is going to get hurt"

Maybe you are an Asatruer, following the NNV, but struggle with control over your anger. You have decided that you want to do something about it, and to consult the Gods. Now, you ask the Gods to change you...guess what? Wrong religion. If this is your point of view, you should rather explore charismatic Christianity, which would be more suitable to your point of view. We have already received the gifts. By all means, consult the Gods. They are, after all, our great-great ancestors, who are always willing to guide us. In this regard it would be wise to consult Heimdallr, who is patient and has a great love for the human race. When you feel that things are just becoming too much, you can talk to Lady Fricca. Just remember to mind your manners. If she would tolerate almost anything from you, poor manners will definitely not be one of them. But remember, it is up to us to make the change. We do not sit back and wait for the 'experts' to do it for us.

In the *Voluspa* we read:

*Until the Aesir,
Mighty and loving
Came from the host
To the coast,*

*On the land they found
Of little might
Askr and Embla,
As yet unfated*

*They had not ond (Spark of life, similar to ki; chi; and prana)
They had not othr (power of inspiration)
Neither la nor laeti (movement and appearance)*

Nor good litr (health)

*Odin gave ond
Hoenir gave othr
Lodur gave la
And good litr*

These are the gifts we received from our loving Gods. These are the tools that we need. And if this is not enough, we read in the *Havamal* how Odin gave us the runes through self sacrifice.

While I warned against using the runes to banish anger, one may employ them successfully to aid one in controlling anger. While others use meditation and relaxation techniques, we might employ 'Isa', 'Ingwaz' and 'Dagaz' successfully in our meditations. If you are not that experienced, stay away from 'Hagalaz' for this one. Also, refrain from using 'Ansuz' for combating anger. Remember, Odin is a powerful, but duplicitous God, with his own agenda, so beware of him. His gifts can just as soon bite as lick your wounds, and he is not the God of the Berserker gang by accident! (For more info on Runes, see Edred Thorsson's "*Rune Lore*" or books by Freya Aswynn. If you can get hold of any stuff by Kveldulfr H. Gundarsson, guard it with your life, and do yourself a favor and stay away from Ralph Blum)

As an Asatruer, you should not feel any lessened if you realize that you have anger issues and that you need help. That would not be a display of weakness, the true display of weakness would be refusal to accept that you have a problem, and make your family, children and loved ones suffer for it. Speaking of which, if you quarrel with your wife, you have a normal relationship. If you feed her a 'right proper knuckle sandwich to keep her trap shut', you are NOT in a normal relationship, and you need help. Work it out for yourself. This is why we are Asatruar, to take responsibility for our own actions, for the freedom to be our own men and women, not to be enslaved by anything, be they spirits, people, gods or our own emotions. There are no shackles as strong as those that come from within.

Cultivate a healthy anger. Unhealthy anger is a negative vibration, and the primate of negative vibration is negative thought, which emanates from, and ultimately exerts control over the protagonist.

I hope that this article may be of use to the Pagan community in general, and may the Gods light your ways.

Ars ok frithar,

HW

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CHRISTIAN WINTER, NORDIC SUMMER by Charles van Bergen Rebuilding the Innermost Circle



My journey into depression started when I was very young. I remember quite clearly the feelings of futility and frustration I experienced even before I started school, which would periodically lead to extended periods in which everything was useless, nothing was worthwhile, and nobody else ever really understood me – for no apparent reason. Of course, with hindsight and the benefit of experience garnered from years of introspection and even professional counselling, it's easy to point fingers and identify causes – but this isn't about causes, this is about dealing with depression, dealing with anger, and growing through experience and meditation to a completely drug-free, counsellor-free lifestyle such as I currently enjoy.

Before we go any further, let me state categorically that modern medication, prescribed by a competent and caring professional, and taken precisely according to instructions, is indispensable to a full and proper recovery. And recovery most certainly can be achieved if you are prepared to make certain fundamental changes to your lifestyle.

Herbal remedies most certainly have their place, but it appears to be the current ‘wisdom’ to pin all your hopes to herbal remedies, at the expense of proper, efficacious, and proven ‘chemical’ remedies. If you have the time to devote to an extended, probably life-long process of coping with depression, then herbal remedies are for you. But if you want to live a life, a normal life, free of the always hovering spectre of a full-blown depressive episode, then I would suggest you either discard herbal remedies until you are able to cope with the minor setbacks of life WITHOUT a chemical crutch, or you discuss concurrent therapies (chemical and herbal) with your healthcare professional. Your choice, your pain.

And a final caveat – until you have put in the required years of formal study at a recognised institution for the study of medicine, and have at least a concomitant number of years experience to your name, DO NOT self-medicate. Reducing or increasing your dose, stopping medication, mixing medication, trying new medication without the blessing of your healthcare professional – these have all the makings of disaster, the potential to hurl you headlong into the worst chemically-induced depressive episode of your life. And as they say of lawyers (a lawyer who represents himself in court has a fool for a client), any aspirations you might have of declaring yourself medically competent should be squashed mercilessly and immediately.

Depression and anger are bed mates, the most intimate of companions. Depression manifests most often in anger at everything, at the world, at yourself, and at all around you. And Anger’s most vivid after-effects is depression – so your life becomes an endless cycle of anger and depression, sometimes together, sometimes apart, feeding on each other, causing each other, and seemingly inseparable. Which is why some people, the most loving and friendly individuals imaginable, when drunk on alcohol or other chemical depressants, become violent – and morose and regretful in the grips of a hangover, until they drink again, and the cycle perpetuates itself.

Social drinking is apparently possible. I say this because there appear to be many people who can imbibe alcohol occasionally, who enjoy the effects, but who don’t feel driven to escalate their drinking habits. However, denial is such a strong feature of the human animal that many people, in the grips of a full-blown addiction to alcohol, deny their addiction, deny that they have a problem with alcohol, and deny that it is affecting their lives – their view is that other people are jealous of them, other people resent them, other people don’t wish to see them happy, and these other people are pointing fingers at their alcohol consumption just out of pettiness and spite. Truth is, by the time other people have started to notice an over-fondness for the effects of alcohol, it’s probably too late to break the downward spiral into alcohol addiction and, eventually, to madness and death – without professional help. And the numbers of people who willingly and honestly admit to alcoholism (or addiction) are tiny in comparison to the real numbers of alcoholics and addicts in our society. Further, the ages at which alcohol abuse (and addiction) are commencing, are steadily declining – it’s no longer unusual to hear of 12-year-olds abusing alcohol on a regular basis, and from that, the progression to other, more sinister substances, is virtually assured.

Alcohol is not only one of the most common substances of abuse for people suffering from depression; it causes depression when it wears off. Which is offset by more consumption of alcohol, when feelings of elation and happiness present, and then (inevitably) by depression. This seemingly simple and demonstrably almost universal cycle of substance abuse is almost impossible to break by yourself, and necessitates professional help, coupled with what has become universally recognised as the only

effective path to recovery from the madness of addiction, depression, anger, and eventually death – the Twelve Steps as formulated by the founders of Alcoholics Anonymous, and adopted (and sometimes very slightly modified) by virtually every professional and group of professionals and peers who deal with addictions of every sort – from sexual addictions through to gambling addictions, soapy addictions, and obviously drug addictions of every type.

My own story, as I said, started way back when I was young. In common with others with whom I came to discuss my situation, it appeared to me that I was somehow ‘different’, that I didn’t fit in, that the world was an exceedingly rough place and I was cursed with an exceedingly thin skin. So whilst I felt alone, in reality my situation was exactly the same as many others, people who also progressed to the situation where they self-medicated with substances such as alcohol, to somehow defeat their depression, to somehow, some time, in some way, effect a lasting end to the twin diseases of anger and depression. And that knowledge in itself is the source of much courage and understanding for we unfortunates who suffered so badly, for so long, and without any instant cure for our condition.

I progressed, through the fullness of time, to where I was not unhappy with life in general, but where I still occasionally battled depression. I experienced it as a huge, pendulous, dark cloud hovering just over the horizon, moving slowly and inexorably towards my world, and when it reached this world of mine I would descend into the madness of a full-blown depression, alone, beyond help, and with no apparent hope. Then, for seemingly no reason, the darkness would begin to lift, and sanity return. This process seemed to be ameliorated by the use of alcohol, and so I became an expert (or so I thought) in self-medicating with alcohol, to fight my lingering depression, and to restore some semblance of sanity and balance to my life. The process was endless, palliative, and completely and utterly insane – but it was all I had. Nothing else had ever worked.

Antidepressant drugs didn’t seem to help me – they dulled my intellect, and left me feeling woolly-headed. Exercise helped – but like any drug, the dosage needed to increase periodically – and any failure to get my ‘fix’ of exercise led to severe depression and feelings of guilt and anger. And so the process continued. Remedy after remedy was tried, but never with any permanent positive effect, and they all had their drawbacks.

Alcohol was easy to abuse and disguise, though – almost everybody seems to drink alcohol and even overindulge occasionally. However, following a serious motor vehicle collision over a decade ago, my subsequent addiction to morphine (mother’s milk, let me tell you), and my final religious awakening to Paganism brought matters to a head. Whilst I could justify and even explain away all the problems prior to my MVA, the fact was that as a result of the MVA I actually died and was brought back to life by the skilled personnel at the Unitas Hospital. And what followed was a prolonged period of rehabilitation – learning to walk again, learning to work again, and learning (eventually) to live again. Except that I now had the additional burden of an addiction to morphine riding on my back.

And so began my most serious battle in life, ever. Dealing with depression was no longer an option – I just wasn’t dealing with it. I was barely managing to live with it, and it started to affect everything in my life. It affected my relationships with people – workmates, relatives, loved ones. It affected my judgement. And it affected my spirituality – which even then, pursuant to my ‘near-death’ experience, was reawakening.

When I finally realised I had to either deal with the depression or face death, it was almost too late. My wife was about to leave me, and take my son. My family had basically written me off because of my continued relapses into addictive behaviour, and the only part of my life that was anywhere near stability was my work – which, due to the specialised nature of my abilities, was prepared to put up with quite a fair degree of eccentricity. But even that had its limits.

When I finally took stock of my life, I saw that I had very little left between my life as it stood then, and the gutter and then finally death. My after-hours second job as a professional musician, the greatest passion of my life, was not contributing to my recovery or any sort of sustainably clean lifestyle, and the socialising with friends over beers (or any kind of alcohol for that matter) merely contributed to the problem.

I had started seeing a very good psychiatrist (they're the ones who can prescribe medication – psychologists cannot), and together we decided upon a course of medication. In the beginning I saw him very regularly for feedback on dosages and side-effects – the most difficult of which was unreasonably high levels of anxiety – and we eventually managed to find a medication and dosage thereof that agreed with me. However, I had not managed to stop drinking completely, and that was almost my undoing – the positive effects of the medication were continually negated by the effects of alcohol.

At the same time as I realised my personal life was about to self-destruct, I found a group of Alcoholics Anonymous that really suited me – all the groups are different, each with its own 'personality', even though they all follow the same rules, guidelines, and the now-famous Twelve Steps. And I managed to stop drinking and started attending meetings regularly, at first twice a week, eventually tapering down to only once a week. Some weeks I needed, and attended, four or five meetings. What was important was to ascertain when I needed help and support, and then to act upon that need.

Spousal support is important – but not essential – but the support of the members of your group is indispensable. They are the ones who can understand how you are really feeling, whether you are truly being honest, and when you are lying to yourself. Without the members of your group, and their support, your recovery is virtually impossible. Which is why everybody who fights addiction always has a group somewhere that they call 'home'.

The depression and associated angers didn't miraculously disappear, though. It was a gradual process of learning to cope with the feelings of depression and anger, with the help of the medication which really just blunted the most painful parts of the depression, and allowed me to recognise the causes and reasons that triggered my bouts of depression. The process wasn't painless, either – in the grips of depression it becomes easy to alienate others, to hurt them deeply, for while you experience great pain, you disregard the pain of others, and reject all overtures that are meant to help – mostly out of fear and paranoia at their motives. After all, if you despise yourself, how can you reasonably expect others to like you and be concerned about you, or even ever believe that they could?

The most vivid effect, and instantaneous to boot, was the loss of all my drinking 'friends'. Now if you ever frequent bars, you'll know exactly the kind of companions I describe here – the people who sit and drink, often seemingly happy and carefree, but whose common refrain is the mantra "If it wasn't for bad luck, I wouldn't have any luck

at all". Bars and clubs are filled with these people, drinking their way to what they feel is their only source of happiness, their only escape from the dark prison of depression: drunkenness. Now THERE is a huge, untapped market for psychiatrists – if only they were allowed to tout for business – the regular patrons of pubs and clubs.

In the beginning, the loneliness is probably the most difficult part of living life to bear – which is why it is so important to have a support group with members who've succeeded at what you're trying to do – climb out from under that huge mountain of depression. And the more honest you are with yourself as well as them, the better your chances of effecting recovery.

So, apart from the loneliness, and the lingering depression of now much-missed hangovers, blunted slightly by the euphoric effect of antidepressants, my life was very slightly strange, but focussed upon my recovery. My visits to my 'shrink' became less frequent as time passed, and all of a sudden I realised that I was about to celebrate my first year without alcohol. It may not seem like much cause for celebration, but the fact was that, for 12 months, I had managed to hang on to what was now a reasonably normal lifestyle, without the crutch of alcohol to help me deal with my depression. And it was starting to feel good.

Around about that time I also realised that my work with the band was only endangering my mental health and stability – whilst I will never deny that music was my greatest passion in life, performing music is particularly fraught with danger for those of us who battle depression and the concomitant addictions used to help us feel better about ourselves. And I came to the decision that, when it comes to my personal mental health and sanity, there are certain things which I can never again do, never again allow myself to feel, never again enjoy. And one of those things is performing on stage, playing my music, for an audience. In order for me to survive, I had to remove that facet of my life, however much it hurt. And so I stopped performing in my band.

This was one of the most difficult decisions I have ever had to make in my life. No matter what had ever happened, my music had always been there. No matter how down I got, I had always been able to go on stage, perform, and enjoy the applause. But I also realised that the periods between performing were not peaceful periods of calm and serenity – they were nothing more than an impatient and frenzied longing for the next performance, when I could once again elicit the applause and immerse myself in that pleasure. Music, in other words, had become yet another addiction for me. And the only way, I knew for a fact, to deal with an addiction, was to avoid the object of the addiction completely. I had to stop performing for the sake of my sanity, but even MORE importantly, for the sake of my family. My little family which had been standing by me patiently, trying to help me in my recovery from depression, but unable to do much more than wait and provide me with the greatest possible reason to recover: my family itself.

Once this decision had been reached and implemented, I set myself another goal. I wanted most of all to live life without chemical help, and so spoke to my 'shrink' about reducing the dosage of my medication. We decided to slowly (and I mean SLOWLY) reduce the dosage, and so finally end my dependence upon chemical helpers. But I had one more huge battle to fight.

My father had died of emphysema some 5 years before, and I spoke to my shrink about the latest medications that apparently helped people give up smoking. At this stage I was on only a nominal dosage of my original medication, and he agreed to prescribe the new

anti-smoking ‘wonder-drug’ (in its clinical form, as an antidepressant) for me, and at the same time finally stopping my original medication.

This was the moment of truth for me – I was about to celebrate my second year of freedom from alcohol, and I was now about to lose my only remaining crutch, which I KNEW worked, in order to give up my last physical addiction (apart from prescription medication). I looked, gasped, and leapt.

I kept smoking for another 20-odd days, while dealing with the effects of what was now a huge dosage of antidepressants, and then stopped smoking. In another 10 days I started, as agreed with my psychiatrist, to taper my dosage of the new anti-depressant medication, watching all the while for side-effects, especially returning depression. The tapering was gradual, and eventually after about 6 months I finally stopped taking any medication at all.

At last count, I am heading for 5 years free from alcohol, 3 years free from smoking, and over 2 years without antidepressant medication of any kind.

What aided my recovery from depression?

Well, firstly, a very competent, compassionate, and patient doctor. And an honest and open relationship with him, wherein all aspects of my treatment were discussed and acted upon.

Secondly, a sincere desire to live a life free of depression and it’s twin emotion of anger. This sincerity translated into a willingness to change my life and activities completely to such an extent that I completely gave up an activity that had been my most important and non-negotiable activity for well over three-quarters of my life.

Thirdly, a family (spouse and children) who loved me, and whom I loved in return. A family for whom I wanted to recover, and who wanted me to recover.

Above and beyond all of this, my religious beliefs facilitated my recovery. My delivery from the Christian beliefs foisted upon my in my childhood started the process – no longer was I a helpless sinner, doomed to the eternal fires and torments of a mythical place called ‘hell’ unless I put all my faith in the church and its officers and begged their forgiveness, knowing that I would only sin again. In my Nordic beliefs, I found the Nine Noble Virtues (Courage, Truth, Honor, Fidelity, Discipline, Hospitality, Industriousness, Self-Reliance, and Perseverance) and I found the code of honour and behaviour I had sought all my life. Above all else, I found a religion that didn’t depend on the fear and terror of its followers to force obedience and subjugation – I found an adult religion that not only treated me as an adult, but celebrated that fact. And from those beliefs sprang my understanding of priorities in my life – in a very simple way, I describe my life as a series of concentric circles. In the innermost circle stand my Gods and I, alone. The very next circle is my immediate family, my spouse and children. And then the next circle contains my closest friends and allies – my helpmates, my fellow believers, my supporters. And so on and so forth.

These helped me to achieve a perspective on my life and the people therein, and to see that, unless I took care of myself first, I would be unable to take care of anybody else, no matter how hard I tried. And that unless I took care of my family before all others, I

would be failing in my self-appointed and God-given duties. The very logical and certain nature of the progression from my innermost to my outer circles helped me to remove the frustrations and angers that resulted from trying to always control everything around me, to always be the master of the situation.

I now sit in a place of comfort and security, where I know that my highest priorities are purely to do with those closest to me, and that nothing outside my innermost circles must be allowed to interfere with my duties, my beliefs, and my responsibilities within those innermost circles. It gives me an order, a purpose, and a sense of belonging. And it removes from me the darkness of depression which, in hindsight, was merely an acknowledgement that I, as a single human being, could never hope to control and protect everything I used to believe was my duty to control and protect.

I urge anybody who struggle with depression and/or anger to firstly examine why they are happy to spend the rest of their lives in a fruitless struggle – for once the decision to win the battle against these twin specters is made and really acted upon, it is but a matter of time until victory is secured. If you want to recover, you must really, honestly, truly WANT to recover, regardless of the cost. And then the healing will finally and irrevocably start.

I am fond of telling people who bend my ear with stories of ‘trying’ to deal with their depression and anger to, please, touch their nose. They invariably look puzzled and touch their nose. To which I comment, “See, you cannot TRY to do anything. You either do it, or you don’t”.

In the case of depression and anger, you either recover (and along the way make HUGE changes in your life because they don’t facilitate your recovery), or you just stay depressed and most probably progress to a terminal stage of this very real and very dangerous disease. The choice is yours to make. You have the power to make that choice.

The only question is whether you believe, as the Christians do, that you are but a sinful, flawed pawn of no account and with no real power, forever doomed to live a life pre-ordained by the God/Goddess of your understanding, or if you believe, as a true Pagan does, that you are a powerful being with a strong relationship with the God/Goddess of your understanding, whose higher power rejoices in your successes, and who has the power to understand their own limitations and act in accordance therewith – in other words, to become a truly Godlike human being. Only if you truly believe the latter and act in accordance with that, will you ever, as I have, recover from depression, anger, and the associated addictions, and go on to create and nurture a real and dynamic relationship with the occupants of the innermost circles in your life.

I wish you strength in your endeavors, good fortune in your dealings with others, and true fulfillment in your own life and priorities.

Odin’s Blessings upon you!