

Unitarian Universalist Small Group Ministry Network Website  
SMALL GROUP MINISTRY

**Anger**

Main Line Unitarian Church, Devon, PA November 2003

Opening Words & Chalice Lighting:

May I be no one's enemy and may I be the friend of that which is eternal and Abides. May I wish for every person's happiness and envy none. May I never rejoice in the ill fortune of one who has wronged me. May I, to the extent of my power, give needful help to all who are in want. May I never fail a friend. May I respect myself. May I always keep tame that which rages within me. May I accustom myself to be gentle and never be angry with others because of circumstances. May I know good people and follow in their footsteps. (Eusebius)

Check in/Personal Sharing (approximately 30 minutes)

(The facilitator should briefly remind the group of confidentiality/anonymity, that this is not the time for cross conversation, etc.)

Focus Readings: Anger

Anger is a signal, and one worth listening to. Our anger may be a message that we are being hurt, that our rights are being violated, that our needs or wants are not being adequately met, or simply that something is not right. Our anger may tell us that we are not addressing an important emotional issue in our lives, or that too much of our self – our beliefs, values, desires, or ambitions – is being compromised in a relationship. Our anger may be a signal that we are doing more and giving more than we can comfortably do or give. Or our anger may warn us that others are doing too much for us, at the expense of our own competence and growth. Just as physical pain tells us to take our hand off the hot stove, the pain of our anger preserves the very integrity of our self. Our anger can motivate us to say "no" to the ways in which we are defined by others and "yes" to the dictates of our inner self. (Harriet Lerner, from The Dance of Anger)

When we become angry, we stop being compassionate, loving, generous, forgiving, tolerant, and patient altogether. We thus deprive ourselves of the very things that happiness consists in. And not only does anger immediately destroy our critical faculties, it tends toward rage, spite, hatred, and malice – each of which is always negative because it is a direct cause of harm for others. Anger causes suffering. At the very least, it causes the pain of

embarrassment. For example, I have always enjoyed repairing watches. But I can recall a number of occasions as a boy when, completely losing my patience with those tiny, intricate parts, I picked up the mechanism and smashed it down on the table. Of course, later I felt very sorry and ashamed of my behavior – especially when, as on one occasion, I had to return the watch to its owner in a condition worse than it was before.

This story, trivial in itself, also makes the point that though we may have an abundance of material wealth...when we become angry, we lose all inner peace. We no longer enjoy even our breakfast. And when it becomes habitual, we may be ever so learned, rich, or powerful, but others will simply avoid us. They will say, “Oh, yes, he is very clever, but he has such bad moods, you know,” and people will keep away. Or they will say, “Yes she is extraordinarily talented, but she gets upset so easily. You had better watch out.” Just as when a dog is always growling and showing its teeth, we are cautious of those whose hearts are disturbed by anger. We would rather forgo their company than risk an outburst.

I do not deny that...there is a kind of “raw” anger that we experience more as a rush of energy than as a cognitively enhanced emotion. Conceivably, this form of anger could have positive consequences. It is not impossible to imagine anger at the sight of injustice which causes someone to act altruistically. The anger that causes us to go to the assistance of someone who is being attacked in the street could be characterized as positive. But if this goes beyond meeting the injustice, if it becomes personal and turns into vengefulness or maliciousness, then danger arises. When we do something negative, we are capable of recognizing the difference between ourselves and the negative act. But we often fail to separate action and agent when it comes to others. This shows us how unreliable is even justified anger. (The Dalai Lama, from Ethics for the New Millennium)

Focus Questions: (45-60 minutes)

- How did you feel about the two readings on anger?
- What experiences do they bring to mind?
- What role has anger played in your life?
- Tell us of a time you were really angry.
- What makes you angry – the personal, political institutions, religion, society, God, the universe?
- How do you express your anger?
- Can you imagine ways that anger can be used for good?

Checkout/Likes and Wishes

(This is the time for facilitators to ask participants what they liked about this meeting and what they might wish for future meetings. This is also the time for any discussion of logistics.)

Closing Words & Extinguishing Chalice:

Anger and tenderness: my selves.  
And now I can believe they breathe in me  
As angels, not polarities.  
Anger and tenderness: the spider's genius  
To spin and weave in the same action  
From her own body, anywhere –  
Even from a broken web. (Adrienne Rich, from "Integrity")