

The Age of Rage

Why do people these days seem so angry?

I was in two minds before writing on this subject, reasoning that it might cause a reader who has a tendency towards anger to be angrier still. I do find, however, that keeping quiet about things that puzzle and irk me increases my own stress levels; and the best solution to that is to just come out with it, talk to someone; and I guess that someone is you.

Anger isn't new; but in recent times, incidences of seemingly irrational outbursts of anger are, I'm sure, more prevalent and frequent than in the past. Rarely does a day go by when there isn't at least one media report of road rage or an unprovoked attack on a complete stranger. The perpetrators apparently just snapped; the cause of their aggression very often petty and certainly not justifiable; not to independent observers, anyway. So, why does it happen; what sparks it? I am convinced it is all to do with lifestyle and the pressures of modern society. We are having to endure an age of rage.

Technological advances make life easier, giving people more time outside of working hours to pursue whatever they might fancy. They take full advantage of this and soon enough that free time is spent, in many cases over-spent. Trying to juggle the schedule to fit in everything exerts more pressure and probably resentment, especially when it is obvious that four into three won't go. Unfortunately, that could mean missing out on something unless the pace to achieve it all is stepped up. Then the day becomes a rush from start to finish, and any periods of relaxation that were previously enjoyed have diminished or have vanished completely.

What happens as a consequence is a build-up of stress that inevitably kindles internal anger. At first it may only be noticed in small ways in the form of distraction and inattention. Simple tasks usually coped with on auto pilot need extra care and time or they go wrong. An initial reaction could be an irritated growl, maybe the gritting of teeth, turning a normally calm, pleasant person into an impatient grump. The next step is taking it out on inanimate objects: throwing an offending watch across the room because the new battery wouldn't fit, followed by storming out and slamming the door. Clearly, none of this was the fault of the watch, the battery, or the door; but the real culprit refuses to accept responsibility for his or her shortcomings. Anger is becoming harder to control, and woe betide anyone who happens to be there when it erupts.

There is hope, as long as these early signs are recognised and acted upon. Drugs are no answer. They should only be prescribed by a medical practitioner in genuine cases; and even then, they only work if the patient truly wants a return to normal and can accept what that is. Any psychiatrists worth their salt will tell patients that they have to cure themselves; no-one else can do it for them. For those who have not yet reached the point of no return, I have a few suggestions that have worked for me.

Sit back and assess where you are at and what it's doing to your life. If every day is an irritating grind, figure out the aspects that bring on a knot in the stomach at the mere thought and ditch them. Not possible? Of course it is; the choice is yours. Stop telling yourself you have to do this, and you can't do that. Win back control and decide what is best for you and yours. If the job is the problem, change it; if getting the kids to their various sports is a priority, accept it as totally necessary for their development; don't just drop them off so that you can do something else while they are playing. Stay there, watch them, and enjoy it with them. And definitely don't regard it as your time wasted – it isn't! As for those obligatory time-burners video games, especially the violent and blood-thirsty kind, don't let the kids play them; and don't you do either. Dragging this sort of aggressive spontaneity into the real world only makes for losers.

By re-organising your itinerary it is possible to create enough space to enjoy quality time for yourself and with your partner and family. Watch a feel-good movie, or a quiz game-show together. Simply be happy to share each other's company. These moments define happiness which is not merely a fanciful concept, but a really necessary inclusion in every life. Should happiness start to become overshadowed by anger, embrace the former and give the latter the flick. Then, take a deep breath, close your eyes and imagine your world as the peaceful, contented place it was always meant to be; and do everything in your power to make it so. Believe me: you'll be glad you did. I know I am.

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