



PSYCHOENERGETICS

A BODY-MIND APPROACH TO DEPTH WORK AND PROCESS FACILITATION

The Anatomy of Emotion

~ Anger ~

*From the Lectures Notes by Michael Mervosh
For the PSEN Training Program*

Understanding the Function of Aggression

*Anger ----- Love
Protect ----- Venture*

What does one person truly have to give, that is worth giving to another?

He gives of himself, of the most precious he has, he gives of his life. This does not necessarily mean that he sacrifices his life for the other - but that he gives him of that which is alive in him; he gives him of his joy, of his interest, of his understanding, of his knowledge, of his humor, of his sadness - of all expressions and manifestations of that which is alive in him.

In thus giving of his life, he enriches the other person, he enhances the other's sense of aliveness by enhancing his own sense of aliveness. He does not give in order to receive; giving is in itself exquisite joy. But in giving he cannot help bringing something to life in the other person, and this which is brought to life is reflected back to him; in truly giving, he cannot help receiving that which is given back to him. Giving implies to make the other person a giver also and they both share in the joy of what they have brought to life. In the act of giving something is born, and both persons involved are grateful for the life that is born for both of them.

- Erich Fromm



Key Points

- The capacity for aggression is a fundamentally vital and healthy process. A healthy individual both gives love and goes after love.
- Venturing and loving is about the capacity to SECURE the object of our desire.
- We will tend to DESTROY what we cannot secure.

Working with Anger

- *The heart of an anger defense is to control of the other person:*

By becoming angry in order to be a threat through heightened expression or activity.

Using aggressive anger by acting it out onto others, because it tends to be effective in controlling others.

When *control* doesn't work, we try to *hurt* the other.

Utilizes the attack/blame posture, projecting one's own unfinished business onto the other, to move the bad feeling from inside one's self into the other.



Reich worked traditionally with anger defenses; it was intense, active and physical, and it was focused on discharging the anger through physical and verbal expression.

The basic premise was when in doubt, do it. Get the anger mobilized, because people need some capacity to be effective in handling their environment. This way working supported moving the anger “out” of the self.

More subtle work involves building a foundation for moving the feeling through and out of the body: this includes acknowledging its existence and owning the feeling as being inside one's self.

Anger is always a defensive function initially, which is often used destructively, *and is always related to a significant environmental failure, at some crucial point in development, in the person's past.*

There is often great difficulty in accepting the feeling of anger as living inside one's self.

There has to be room for the destructive urge and intention to exist, without acting it out as a self-destructive pattern against the self or another.

Frequently this activation has to be initially encouraged by the practitioner, who acts on behalf of the client's best interest – mobilizing their life force energy.

It is through the support of the practitioner that the client can own the experience of anger within and bring it into a relational field with another. This is where the aggressive instinct can develop into a healthier desire to secure or desire another, to then go towards (or against) the other in a positive and life affirming way.

The acceptance of one's anger by the practitioner, and the acknowledgement that one's destructive element is almost always there within us is essential. This has to be at some point actively addressed and allowed to live.

- *One of our greatest fears is experiencing out of control and destructive anger, both from ourselves and from another.*

We need to educate people that anger expression is more than just mechanically hitting something with a bataka bat in order to discharge pent up energy. There are other impulses to explore and follow, such as to kick, strangle, bite, scratch, pinch, tear, twist – primitive, hurtful instincts that live within all of us.

It is also essential for the practitioner to have the client make the anger about *experiencing themselves*, and not losing themselves by focusing on the badness in the object of their anger.

We can support the client by bringing it into an interactive field, and into a contactful exchange with us by saying, *“Yes, this anger is in you. It is yours. Feel it, show it to me, bring it to me, let me have it.”*

The practitioner has to watch for the client's tendency to keep “looping” with their anger - by keeping it separate from the other and locked into their own energy field.



Slowing Down, Grounding Down, and Staying with the Process

For explosive, split off anger – the practitioner must slow the process down, and then break the process down, segment by segment – grounding it – by engaging their eyes, their voice, their hands, their belly, etc, - which integrates the anger internally and allows it to come into a coherent form of expression.

Step by step, we develop the client's capacity for contact with their own feeling, while helping them to ground the feeling, and while learning to express the feeling. Groundedness in both the receiver and giver of anger is absolutely essential for the expression to be safe, manageable, and potentially meaningful and transformational.

By going slowly with the process, the client will become both more vulnerable and more empowered by their expression at the same time as one's anger expression is very likely to elicit fears of the other retaliating, collapsing, etc, in response to the expression. In other words, they will deeply fear that their anger cannot be withstood by another.

- *The KEY to transforming unprocessed anger is to stay with it long enough to find a way into the transition from wanting to destroy or hurt the other - to now desiring or needing the other – to wanting somebody there!*

- *This happens once both parties involved can experience the felt sense of aggression shift from a contained, pent up negative feeling to a shared, positive flow of feeling.*

When someone is consumed by their own anger, it is also essential to begin pointing towards what else may also be there inside, underneath the anger. Remember that anger is almost always used defensively, to protect other more vulnerable or more complex feelings.

As the client ventures forward with expressions of their anger, in response, you will need to be able to reflect some of their goodness back to them, letting them know you see them as more than their anger.

Don't allow clients to foreclose the process of bringing their anger forward and collapse into their reflexive tendency to turn their anger back at themselves; your job is to get it to keep moving out, again and again, towards a safe target, and ultimately - towards you.

- *Lying underneath all of the anger will be an incredibly impoverished part of the self. Grief, emptiness, regret will often emerge after the block has been cleared.*



Withstanding the Force Of Our Client's Anger

The therapeutic process of working through anger requires it to evolve to the point where we as practitioners can withstand, outlast, and eventually embrace our client's destructive thoughts, feelings and impulses. It is essential for us to keep in mind that *destructiveness is a part of aliveness*.

Winnicott felt that it was crucial for the infant to have a sense that their mother could take and could handle their aliveness. When the destructiveness that is built into aliveness and is a vital part of self comes flying out towards the mother, can the mother be solid enough to not retaliate?

Then there comes a moment in the therapeutic process when embracing and receiving the aggressive energy of the client is no longer the point, but not retaliating is. At such moments, the practitioner who participates in the 'give-and-take' of expression is not injured nor suffering, and is not wanting to striking back, and doesn't become resentful.

In these encounters, everything hinges on recognizing the destructive impulse, 'attack' or outburst for what it is, a spontaneous part of aliveness. The destructive element of aliveness is met with a spontaneous act of recognition of that aliveness, and we as practitioners are to respond to this recognition with our own expressions of positive aliveness, which is likely to be delight and joy.

This does not mean that we as practitioners subjects ourselves to being hurt, mistreated or harmfully used. We do not ever offer ourselves up as sacrificial lambs on the altar of anyone's growth or transformation. But it does mean that we don't emotionally over-react, and we don't respond in moralistic or rejecting ways.

We cannot under-estimate the powerful impact we can have with our clients when we can participate with them as human beings who are evolving. They get to the point where they can make room for the destructive element that is part of the background of their character make up, and in the background of any meaningful relationships they have. It means making room for disturbing feelings that are worth the trouble they bring.

If we at last make room for our client's aggressive and embodied expressions, then perhaps they won't have to hold onto the hostilities that have been locked away in the isolation chamber of their minds – and maybe their destructiveness will no longer be lethal to themselves, or to their relationships.

We can reduce the effects of hostile and self-destructive feelings by making room for them in the therapeutic process. We make room for ourselves as the practitioner to receive them without needed to be targets, and in doing so, we allow our clients to gradually learn that their darkest impulses will not be fatal to their lives.

If we get engaged in the depths of the process in a useful way, just the opposite will happen. The aggressive impulse itself can bring aliveness and feed one another through the living through of the expression, and through a rich flow of feelings that can add complexity and color to life. Being received at our self-perceived worst is a significant part of the way we grow as human beings.



Establishing A New Relational Orientation to Aggression

An ideal or optimal processing of aggression might be supporting the client's ability to lash out with their anger, in an all-out striving, perhaps in fury - a full blast explosion, using all their might in the process - and the practitioner is able to meet this force with their own aliveness, relaxing and delighting in the client's energy, and emerging capacity.

This can happen if the client's anxiety or distress doesn't dominate the arriving pleasure, and if they can clearly see that the practitioner isn't getting hurt, and in fact, their joy outweighs any concerns to be had, or any anger they might feel.

The crucial exchange is in the client's ability to burst forth with all his or her might, and the practitioner does not shut down, collapse, or retaliate. The client feels his or her own growing presence and aliveness; there is room for them now, and for their energized existence.

And as well, there is also room for the practitioner's presence to join with them. Neither the client nor other gets hurt or destroyed. The other survives the life force of the client, and now seemingly delights in the encounter.

Michael Eigen says, *"The result of the other's survival is the birth or renewal of a sense of otherness. The other's essential self does not undergo alteration for the worse as a result of my attacks. The result may be expressed something like the following: 'I do not damage the other by my energetic display. My energy does not warp or stain or poison or mar or spoil the other. The other can manage or take or survive me without collapse or loss of integrity. My life and might and all-out destructiveness does not destroy. The other is more than the sum of my destructiveness. The other can take my joy'."*

The development of the type of practitioner that can handle and withstand their client's hostility and aggression makes it possible for their clients to make use of them for meaningful growth in their fundamental relational capacities.

When our clients can at last no longer have to spend so much time and energy worrying about how they are affecting us, they begin to use our differentiated and embodied presence for psychological and emotional maturing. In his book *Ecstasy*, Michael Eigen reflects on these important aspects of existence, that get 'launched and validated':

- *We use each other for mutual growth.*
- *We survive each other's mutual use.*
- *We ruthlessly take what we need from each other's insides.*
- *We all gain from the taking.*

