Workout 1 ▪ Managing Anger

Prompt, Exercise & Practice for Homer's *Iliad*

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All the best as you train with this workout.

Homer begins the Iliad *by saying*—"Wrath! Sing goddess, about the destructive wrath of Achilles, the son of Peleus—the anger that caused so much pain and suffering among the Achaeans. Who could possibly measure it all? His anger sent many strong souls—the breath-like phantoms of men—down to the dark halls of Hades, while above, their fallen bodies became food for wild dogs and scavenging birds."

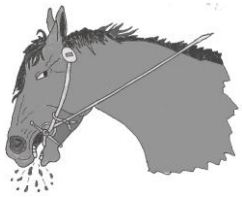
GIVEN WHAT THE *Iliad* is about, Workout 1 centers on anger management. We'll consider anger itself before looking into how we can manage or deal with it both directly and indirectly.

Greek & English ▪ The Greek words for "anger" and "wrath" are *cholos* and *mēnis*.

First, a word on management. To manage something is, quite literally, to take it in hand.* Like a child. We might take a small child in hand when the child is wandering, or going too slow, or wanting to run off, or misbehaving. We love the child, of course, but the child needs handling, direction, training. Similarly, we like our emotions, but they all require management—at least a little.

So, let's get to it. Specifically, let's figure out how we can better handle anger when it comes.

*Besides the Latin word for hand (*manus*—compare the Latin to the Spanish word, *mano*), the word "manage" comes from "manege," a word that signifies the art of horsemanship or training horses—or the place where this occurs. It's an intriguing connection because ancient Greeks often compare our emotions or passions, including anger, to wild and runaway horses that require bridling.



PROMPT ▪ COUNTING THE COST OF ANGER ▪ To manage anger—or any emotion, really—it's useful first to consider what happens when we let the anger go without any management or control. To the point, we must be convinced of anger's negative effects. And so it is useful to identify and count its cost.

First, then, **identify** and **describe** the **cost** of **Achilles' anger** in Homer's *Iliad*. Second, **recall** a time you let **your anger** go unmanaged in the past. **Describe what happened** in detail. What was **the cost** (the negative results) of your anger? If you cannot identify any cost, then ask yourself what the cost might have been if things had ended differently? Third, **identify** and **describe** what the **general costs** of anger are—your own and others' anger.

The Cost of Achilles' Anger

"It is hard to fight against anger. Whatever it wants, it buys at the expense of the soul."—Heraclitus of Ephesus

The Cost of My Anger

My past anger—what happened (in detail) _____

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The cost of my anger _____

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The General Costs of Anger (My Own and Others' Anger)

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EXERCISE ▪ REPLACE THE NEGATIVE WITH THE POSITIVE

As we learn from the hero Odysseus in Book 9 of Homer's *Iliad*, we can replace anger with a variety of positive emotions or actions. In doing so, we restrain what is harmful with what is beneficial. Speaking to Achilles, here's what Odysseus says:

> "Good friend, on the day when your father Peleus sent you to Agamemnon, he gave this command, saying, 'My son, . . . restrain the proud temper in your chest, for friendliness, kindness, and gentle mindedness are better. And let go of mischief-

plotting strife so that the Argives . . . may honor you all the more.' . . . Even now I call on you to put away from you your bitter wrath. Agamemnon is offering many worthy gifts, so let go of your anger."

Notice how Odysseus explains that replacing anger (the negative) with positives (friendliness, etc.) will get for Achilles what he truly desires—namely, honor or to be counted "somebody" rather than "a worthless nobody." The point is that anger is not the only strategy we can employ to defend what is ours and get what we want.* Rather, there are far more positive ways to go about it—positive in that they cause benefit rather than harm.

The point is illustrated with Hephaestus' words to Hera in Book 1: "If you lay hold of Zeus with soft and conciliatory words, then the Olympian will be appeased, and at once he will be gracious to us." In fact, even Achilles recognizes this strategy of behaving with positive instead of negative emotion. "Know this," he says to Patroclus in Book 16, "if only king Agamemnon had been gentle and kind with me" instead of angry, I would have fought hard for him and pushed the Trojans back.

*It goes without saying, perhaps, that the goal is *to be genuine* in replacing the negative with the positive. We're not out to manipulate others!

WRITE A POSTCARD ▪ Remember a time you were angry with someone. Recall the **harm** it caused (that is, count the cost). Briefly **explain** the **desire** that was lurking behind the anger. What did you want that made you so angry? Finally, **identify** and **describe one** positive emotion, thought, or action you could have substituted in place of the anger.

Dear _____ ,

Sincerely, _____

PRACTICE ▪ PARALLEL PRACTICING anger by embracing the opposite of what you desire.

We've seen, while reading Homer's *Iliad*, that a desire for something is often behind our emotions, including anger. For example, Achilles desperately wants to be honored by Agamemnon and the other Achaeans. When he's not, he becomes murderously angry, and many suffer. The big question for us, then, is this: What is behind our anger?—or any other emotion we may want to manage?

Generally speaking, we *desire* things to happen the way we *want* them to happen. When they don't, when we don't get our way and thus what we want, we can feel impatience, irritation, indignation, resentment, or other feelings that are parallel to anger.

The good news is these parallel feelings point to a way we can choose to practice anger even when we are not actually angry. The way is what we might call "parallel practice."

Parallel practice is indirect practice. Rather than directly practicing or managing anger when anger is present—say by deep breathing or replacing the negative with the positive—with parallel practice we voluntarily and regularly embrace undesirable things, things we don't want, things that would usually cause us to feel impatient, irritated, indignant, resentful, unpleasant, and the like.

The basic model for parallel practice comes from the ancient Greek Cynics, who practiced being rejected to get used to not getting what they wanted, which was, presumably, the same thing Achilles desired—recognition, honor, being somebody. We're told that the Cynic "Diogenes once begged alms from a statue." A strange thing to do, no? Why would he do such a thing? "When asked why he did this, he said, 'To practice being rejected.'" To get over his desire to be someone, Diogenes voluntarily embraced the opposite.

How, then, can we *parallel practice* anger?—and impatience, irritation, indignation, resentment, and all the emotions that are tied to anger? Asked in positive terms, how can we practice patience, toleration, calmness, acceptance, contentment, and the like?

The answer: we can seek out and actively embrace things, situations, and people that are contrary to what we desire—things that usually cause us to feel all the negative emotions we don't usually want to feel.

PARALLEL PRACTICE ▪ EMBRACING WHAT YOU *DON'T* WANT ▪ First, **identify** and **describe** an **emotion** you'd like to get better at managing. In this case, we're practicing **anger** (or, if you prefer, choose another emotion).

Second, **figure out** and **describe** what **desire** is **behind** the anger (or other emotion)—the desire that reveals what you truly want, even as Achilles' desire for honor or to be somebody, which is behind his anger, reveals what he truly desires.

Third, practice. **Choose two** specific, concrete **ways** you can parallel practice anger, that is, two ways to **embrace what you don't want**—the opposite of what you really desire. Ideally, your ways won't be extraordinary. What you want is something ordinary you can easily and regularly practice. For a few ideas and what emotions or feelings they might help with, see below. You'll notice that practicing things you don't want will help with many emotions.

Finally, **evaluate** whether and how your ongoing practices are helping you manage the emotion or feeling.

PRACTICE IDEAS ▪ The following are practice ideas. In parenthesis, you'll find the emotions or feelings they might help with. Each one embraces something undesirable, whether related to anger or impatience or any desire-based emotion.

- Rather than the quick, fast line, choose the long line at the grocery store (impatience or anger).
- Take a cold shower (pain, dissatisfaction, and thus any desire-based emotion, including anger).
- Travel in the slow lane, or behind a slow driver, while driving (impatience or anger).

- Eat a bite of food you don't like (disgust, dissatisfaction, pain, and thus any desire-based emotion).
- Listen to someone blather on about something when you'd rather not or you disagree (impatience or irritation).
- Follow something/someone on social media that will annoy you—but embrace it with a smile (irritation or anger).

Anger (or another emotion) I'd like to better manage _____

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Desire behind the emotion _____

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Way 1 to embrace what I don't want _____

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Way 2 to embrace what I don't want _____

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After Parallel Practicing Anger (or Another Emotion)

Evaluation of Way 1 _____

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Evaluation of Way 2 _____

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"Friendliness, kindness, and gentle mindedness are better than a proud temper."

Extra Space for Answers and Journaling