
Anger, Love, and the Earth That Receives

On the missing container, the non-flinching witness, and the transpersonal heart

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A NOTE ON PROCESS AND ITS COST

AI was sparingly used to fuse the different strands of this article together. That usage carries a cost that is worth naming directly: every AI query quietly drinks from the Earth's land, water, minerals, and atmosphere — for this article, as for all that preceded it: a glass of water, a gram of carbon, a sliver of sacred ground — in a transaction the Earth was never asked to agree to. The author takes full responsibility for this usage, and recognises its weight, and the entailing responsibility.

The Problem Nobody Is Naming

There is a particular quality of anger that has nowhere to go. Not the quick flare of irritation, not the managed affect that therapy rooms know how to receive. Something older, more vertical. The kind that, when it surfaces, causes most people in the room to flinch, redirect, reframe, or quietly leave. The priest suggests prayer. The therapist invites reflection. The wellness practitioner recommends breathwork. And the anger, unmet, goes back where it came from.

This article is concerned with that flinch. With what it costs. And with what a genuinely non-flinching witness would require, not as a therapeutic technique, but as a developmental achievement and, in the end, as a form of love.

What the Scriptures Point Toward, and Cannot Deliver

The biblical tradition is not without wisdom on anger. James 1:19 counsels being “slow to speak, slow to become angry”, which is, in essence, somatic advice: slow the body's reactivity before the mouth opens. Ephesians 4:26 says “do not let the sun go down while you are still angry,” which implies that anger carried overnight hardens into something more dangerous. Psalm 4:4 uses the Hebrew *ragaz*, to tremble, to shake, and does not counsel against it. It says: tremble, and do not sin. The body's response is acknowledged, even assumed.

The Psalms of Lament go further. Psalm 22, Psalm 44, Psalm 88: raw, unmediated anguish addressed directly to God, voiced aloud, without resolution. These are not poems about having processed one's feelings. They are the sound of someone in the middle of it, shouting into the open. The voice itself, physical, embodied, un-prettyed, is the prayer.

And yet the text alone cannot do what it points toward. The most significant theological claim in the Christian tradition is not a proposition but an event: the Word became flesh. God, finding that written transmission was insufficient, showed up in a body. The

Incarnation is the acknowledgement that some things can only be transmitted through presence. Through eyes that do not look away.

Jesus did not hand his disciples a scroll and tell them to study it. He walked with them for three years. The rabbi–disciple relationship was always a transmission of presence, not merely of content.¹

The Flinch in the Institution

Most mainstream clergy today are trained in theology, pastoral care, and institutional management. They are almost never trained in sitting with someone's raw, unmediated anger without activating their own defensive organisation. This is not primarily a character flaw. It is a developmental and physiological reality. What the institution selects for, subtly and consistently, is emotional compliance. Someone who has genuinely metabolised their own interior darkness tends to be too unruly for a denomination. The result is clergy who can manage affect, but cannot hold it. Who can name the emotion, but not remain present inside it.²

The same dynamic appears in holistic health practitioners. A practitioner who works with the body all day, who knows every framework of somatic intelligence, who is never visibly angry, and who carries chronic stress, inflammation, a nervous system in a state of constant low-grade mobilisation. This is not a contradiction. It is a coherent picture of what happens when anger has nowhere to go. The frameworks become a way of staying in the head, even when the head is full of body-language. The professional identity, calm, nurturing, safe, makes anger feel like a betrayal. So it goes into the connective tissue instead.

Never angry is not a sign of health. Genuine regulation looks like someone who can feel anger, express it cleanly, and return to baseline. Never angry usually means the anger is dissociated, suppressed, or leaking sideways into inflammation and hypervigilance.

The Catharsis Problem, and the Earth's Answer

The older body-based traditions, Lowen's bioenergetics and Reich's character analysis, understood that anger needed to move physically.³ Emotion-Focused Therapy, by contrast, tends to stay verbal and relational, treating cathartic discharge as too crude an instrument.

¹Rønnestad, M.H. & Skovholt, T.M. (2003). 'The journey of the counselor and therapist.' *Journal of Career Development*, 30(1), 5–44.

³Lowen, A. (1975). *Bioenergetics*. Coward, McCann & Geoghegan. Reich, W. (1945). *Character Analysis*. Orgone Institute Press.

It is right that catharsis alone is insufficient. But its solution, staying in the room, in words, in the relational dyad, misses the other half of what is needed.

Pure discharge into a void does not resolve anger. The research on this is relatively clear: repetitive cathartic expression without a receiving context can reinforce rather than metabolise the pattern. What changes things is not discharge alone, but discharge into something that can receive it.

John P. Milton's Way of Nature work offers a different answer. The earth is not a void. It has been receiving death, decay, grief, violence, and rage since long before the first human drew breath. Its intelligence is specifically that of transformation: what arrives as rot becomes fertility. What arrives as storm becomes rain. The earth makes compost of everything.⁴

To bring anger into the wilderness, with full presence and intention, is not to scream into nothing. It is to return something to what can genuinely hold it. The relational element is present. It is simply not human. And in many cases, it is more reliable than the human version, because the earth does not have developmental stages to get stuck in. It does not flinch. It does not need you to be manageable. Indigenous traditions understood this without requiring it to be named. Grief rituals, anger rituals, these happened outside, in the elements.⁵ The therapy room, with its climate control and its measured relational dyad, is a very recent and quite narrow invention.

Strength, Sound, and What Training Actually Does

Strength training activates the sympathetic nervous system, the same system anger lives in. It raises testosterone and adrenaline. It builds a felt sense of physical capacity and gives the body a legitimate arena to push, strain, and resist. There is real mobilisation happening.⁶

But most strength training is goal-oriented and controlled. The anger gets used as fuel rather than actually met. After a hard session the body may feel calmer, through fatigue, through endorphins, through a nervous system temporarily exhausted. This is not the same as resolution. The anger may return, identical, once the body recovers.

What distinguishes genuine mobilisation from managed expenditure is, again, presence and sound. An involuntary grunt, a growl, something unplanned. Eyes that go somewhere fierce and unself-conscious. Something that cracks open mid-effort without being invited.

⁴Milton, J.P. (2006). *Sky Above, Earth Below: Spiritual Practice in Nature*. Sentient Publications.

⁵Plotkin, B. (2008). *Nature and the Human Soul: Cultivating Wholeness and Community in a Fragmented World*. New World Library.

⁶Levine, P.A. (1997). *Waking the Tiger: Healing Trauma*. North Atlantic Books; Levine, P.A. (2010). *In an Unspoken Voice*. North Atlantic Books.

Gyms culturally suppress this. The headphones go in. The mirror goes up. The movement becomes dissociative. Which means the anger is being used, not met.

The Developmental Rarity of the Non-Flinching Witness

Fowler's stages of faith development found very few people reaching the later stages, what he called Conjunctive and Universalising faith, where paradox is genuinely held, shadow is integrated, and love becomes structurally impersonal.⁷ Cook-Greuter's ego development research found that post-conventional stages, where the self becomes genuinely permeable to something larger, represent perhaps five to eight percent of the adult population.⁸ Maslow, late in his life, estimated that self-transcendence, beyond self-actualisation, was rarer still.⁹

What this means practically is that most people offering to hold anger, priests, therapists, friends, teachers, are operating from personal love at best. Personal love has an unconscious ceiling: I will stay present until this touches my own unresolved material. At that point, technique increases and presence decreases. The intervention serves, at least in part, to regulate the practitioner rather than accompany the person in front of them.

Only someone with genuine transpersonal access, and who has gone through descent, can hold anger without that ceiling. Not because they are without their own wounds, but because they are not holding the anger with their personal self. They are holding it with something that moves through them and extends beyond them. Porges' polyvagal framework gives this precision: the social engagement system is activated by cues of genuine safety in another's face, voice, and physical presence, cues that cannot be produced through technique, only through actual regulation.¹⁰ Lewis, Amini, and Lannon name the mechanism: limbic revision, the slow reorganisation of one nervous system through sustained contact with a differently organised one.¹¹

You are not looking for a qualification or a method. You are looking for a particular stage of human development that most people have not yet reached.

The Transpersonal Heart: A Felt Location

There is a felt, anatomical, energetic event that can open in the chest when two dimensions are simultaneously present: the personal, I care about you specifically, this

⁷Fowler, J.W. (1981). *Stages of Faith: The Psychology of Human Development and the Quest for Meaning*. Harper & Row.

⁸Cook-Greuter, S.R. (2004). 'Making the case for a developmental perspective.' *Industrial and Commercial Training*, 36(7), 275–281.

⁹Maslow, A.H. (1971). *The Farther Reaches of Human Nature*. Viking Press.

¹⁰Porges, S.W. (2011). *The Polyvagal Theory: Neurophysiological Foundations of Emotions, Attachment, Communication, and Self-Regulation*. W.W. Norton.

¹¹Lewis, T., Amini, F. & Lannon, R. (2001). *A General Theory of Love*. Vintage Books.

particular being, and the impersonal, something vast that holds us both, that belongs to neither of us. When these two meet, something opens rather than being constructed. You do not make it happen. It appears in the space between them.

Various traditions have mapped this. The heart chakra in the Tantric system carries both the relational and the spacious. Ramana Maharshi pointed to the right side of the chest as the seat of the Self, the impersonal, the hridayam, while the left carries the personal heart that everyone recognises. The bridge between them is what genuine compassion actually is: not sympathy, not warmth, but a space that is simultaneously moved and unshakeable. Anger held in that space is neither indulged nor suppressed. The personal heart says: this matters, I see you. The impersonal heart says: this is allowed, nothing is threatened at the deepest level. Together they create the container that has been missing everywhere else, the non-flinching witness, the earth that receives, the love that does not contract.¹²

This is also what the earth embodies structurally and permanently. Its personal dimension is the specific soil, the particular wind, this hillside. Its impersonal dimension is geological time, the composting of everything that has ever lived. When you bring anger to it with full presence, both are available at once.

Love as the Actual Container

Not love as sentiment. Not love as a practised attitude of warmth. Love as the capacity to remain present with what is, including what is fierce, broken, excessive, unresolved. This is what makes the earth a valid witness. Not that it is soft, but that it does not contract away from anything. That non-contraction is a form of love.

The anger is not the opposite of love. It may be love that has nowhere to go yet. Rilke, in his *Letters to a Young Poet*, wrote: "Perhaps all the dragons in our lives are princesses who are only waiting to see us act, just once, with beauty and courage."¹³ The rage that has not been witnessed is still waiting. The question is not how to eliminate it but how to create conditions worthy of its arrival.

The transpersonal space, what opens between the personal and impersonal dimensions of the heart, is where anger can finally move. Not because it is resolved there, but because it is received. The personal says it matters. The impersonal says nothing is ultimately threatened. In that double holding, anger does what it always wanted to do: it completes. Most Western therapeutic and spiritual modalities choose one dimension or the other, the somatic without the transpersonal, the spiritual without the body, nature without the relational, the relational without the impersonal. What is being described here insists that

¹²Maharshi, R. (1972). *The Collected Works of Ramana Maharshi*. Ed. Arthur Osborne. Rider. On the right-side heart (hridayam), see Osborne, A. (1954). *Ramana Maharshi and the Path of Self-Knowledge*. Rider.

¹³Rilke, R.M. (1934). *Letters to a Young Poet*. Trans. M.D. Herter Norton. W.W. Norton. Letter Eight.

all of it is required simultaneously. The absence of any one ingredient is precisely why everything else falls short.¹⁴

What Becomes Possible

Living systems carry the intelligence of their own next movement. What allows that movement to emerge is not direction but conditions, specifically, the removal of what prevents the system's own process from completing.

The anger that has been met, received, witnessed without flinching, and returned to something vast enough to hold it does not simply dissipate. It transforms. It becomes available as clarity, as boundary, as force that serves rather than damages. The same energy that was stuck sideways in inflammation or silence becomes directional. This is not catharsis. It is composting.

The container for this is rare. It requires a human being, or a landscape, in whom the transpersonal dimension is genuinely open and stable. Not performing openness. Not managing affect from behind a professional role. Actually present, actually undefended, in a body that has itself been somewhere and found ground on the other side.

That ground is transmissible. It cannot be taught, but it can be met. And its absence is equally detectable, below the threshold of words, by any nervous system that is trying to find it.

A NOTE ON THIS ARTICLE

This piece grew out of a sustained inquiry into what is genuinely missing in the way contemporary culture handles anger, across religious, therapeutic, somatic, and spiritual modalities. It is informed by thirty years of somatic practice, twenty years of organisational and nature-based work in Norway, an MSc in organisational and leadership psychology, and the slower education of having moved through territory that had no clinical framework for it. AI was used sparingly to help fuse its different strands. The author works with individuals at genuine thresholds, with practitioners seeking supervision at depth, and with leaders and organisations for whom presence, not technique, is what the moment actually requires.

¹⁴Wilber, K. (2000). *Integral Psychology: Consciousness, Spirit, Psychology, Therapy*. Shambhala.