

Chapter 2: The Practice of Acceptance

The Challenge of Anger

Anger is a powerful thing.

As we'll talk about in chapter 5, anger is a gift. It can help us hold our boundaries, defend ourselves from attack, and motivate ourselves to change. The positive power of anger shines forth in the desperate determination of a battered wife, who leaves her relationship with a cry of "*Never again!*" It can be seen in the eyes of a cornered animal, fighting for its life. And it was displayed in America's reaction to the bombing of Pearl Harbor.

However, anger is also one of our greatest challenges, because it's just that – a reaction. Anger is an automatic, instinctual response that energizes our body and shuts down our mind. **Anger is powerful, but it's not smart, wise or reasonable.** When we say that "*they're out of their mind with anger,*" we're speaking the literal truth. And because **like attracts like**, anger tends to bring forth more anger. Violence tends to bring forth more violence. And we can quickly find ourselves trapped in a conflict that's spiraling out of control.

From the outside, the fighting between Israel and Palestine seems completely unreasonable – and it is. Reason decrees that both sides would be better off with peace, but reason isn't in charge. Both sides are hurting, both are scared, both are angry – and because both believe that they are "in the right," both sides continue to be held hostage to their self-righteous anger.

For the challenge of anger is deeply tied to the challenge of beliefs. With animals, anger is an acute, transitory response. Something happens, this triggers an angry reaction, the situation gets

resolved – and the anger goes away. However, our human wars can last for generations, because our anger gets created, fueled, and locked in place by our beliefs – and by our need to be right about them.

The other day I was eating my lunch at a local beach. Within minutes, I found myself surrounded by large, beautiful, white and grey seagulls. They milled around peacefully, waiting

"Defense is the first act of war."
– Byron Katie

for me to throw them something, and I did. I'd throw out a piece of bread, and an angry free for all would erupt. Not only did the birds compete for each prize, they also defended it against all comers. A particularly strong or lucky seagull would intercept the throw, and then either eat it immediately, or else fly it to a safer place, while threatening off any birds that came too close.

In the midst of this commotion, I looked up and saw another flock of seagulls, flying across the blue sky in perfect harmony. Seeing this, I wondered *"how can these birds get so angry with each other, and then fly together with such peace?"*

And the answer is: they don't have beliefs. They don't harbor a grudge. Within seconds, each conflict is over and resolved. A conflict arises, the birds get upset, the conflict gets handled, and the upset is gone. Remarkable!

In contrast, we humans don't just go into *"I'm upset,"* we go into *"I'm upset because..."* And this makes anger much, much more difficult for us to deal with.

For example, as I write this, one of my biggest emotional challenges is with "Tom," a business partner I've invested much of my savings with.¹ A large piece of my financial security is at stake in this deal, he's repeatedly broken his promises to me, and rather than contact me to discuss how we can resolve the situation, he's avoiding my calls. This has been going on for months, and I'm upset with him. My story is that I'm upset because I need this money. I'm upset because he's not calling me back when he should. I'm upset because he keeps making mistakes that I could help him

avoid, if he'd let me. And I'm upset because it seems that I have to get angry with him in order for him to hear me.

I have lots of reasons for why I'm "right" to be upset at Tom. I have just as many reasons why I'm "right" to be upset at myself for how I got in to this situation. And when I believe these thoughts, I become angry. This anger keeps me from getting complacent, but it's seriously messing with my life. When I start dwelling on all my "because," I find myself getting more and more upset. I find myself up at four in the morning, unable to sleep because of how "right" I am. I find myself feeling stressed out, vindictive, miserable and furious. I find myself feeling out of control – and in those moments, I often am.

Yet while my judgments tell me that I need to hold on to my anger, in my saner moments I know that he's already doing the best he knows how; that he's already probably more upset at himself than I could ever be; and that my anger is clouding my judgment and making things worse. In my saner moments, I realize the truth behind the Buddha's words. *"Holding on to anger is like grasping a hot coal with the intent of throwing it at someone else; you are the one who gets burned."* And in my saner moments, I strive to practice acceptance.

Stepping Back from Our Anger

In overcoming our conflicts, the first step is to use acceptance to step back from our anger. When we're upset, either with ourselves or with others, we're at war. We're scared. We're mad. We're in judgment. We're playing the victim. We're running *"I'm upset because..."* And while this isn't wrong, it certainly does hurt.

Acceptance is the primary path out of anger and upset. It allows us to stop shooting; to stop fighting the situation we're in, by accepting it for what it is.

When we're running *"I'm upset because..."*, our self-righteous "because" keep us stuck in anger. We tend to stay caught in our upset for as long as we're convinced that our anger is justified.

However, when we accept where we're at, drop our "because" and just focus on "I'm upset," then our anger naturally tends to dissipate, and we can begin to deal with the situation as it is. When we're able to be okay with where we're at, life gets much more peaceful – fast.

Now, acceptance is not the same thing as detachment, denial or condoning abuse. As we'll talk about in the next two chapters, discipline is one half of Love. Love does not mean getting walked on – it means holding our boundaries, but from a place of love, rather than judgment, anger and fear.

So how do we do this?

We move from blame to acceptance by changing our attitude, and by changing the way we hold our beliefs. We move from the Question of Blame to the Question of Love. And as taught by the University of Santa Monica, we learn to let go of our anger and upset by adopting a **Learning Orientation to Life**. We learn to see our challenges as a set of learning opportunities to be embraced, rather than as a set of tragedies to be feared.

A Learning Orientation to Life

As M. Scott Peck explains in A Road Less Traveled, "*Life is difficult.*" To be human is to face challenges. To be human is to experience pain. We do not have a choice over whether or not our lives will include difficulties. Our choice is over the attitude we bring to them. **Happiness comes not from avoiding challenges, but from the meaning we bring to them.** Do we see our difficulties as punishments to be fought and feared, or can we see them as opportunities for learning and growth?

As I experienced in my wars with religion and in my challenges with Tom, the most common response to pain is to look for someone to blame. When we find ourselves in conflict, the default reaction is to ask "*who's right, and who's to blame?*" Blame and guilt are a

"Bad times have a scientific value. They are occasions a good learner would not miss."

– Ralph Waldo Emerson

normal part of growing up. They're essential to becoming an acceptable member of society. And at the same time, they're something we must learn to move past, in order to remember the Love that we Are.

Imagine two young children playing in a room. As they're running around, one of them knocks over an expensive vase. In horror, they watch it fall to the floor and shatter. Hearing the noise, their father comes bursting in to the room, and demands to know what happened.

What happens next?

"He did it!" "She did it!"

Fearful of what their father will say or do, the natural reaction is to "point fingers," hoping somehow to avoid the pain of punishment.

As children, we naturally learn to pair pain with punishment, and punishment with blame. We learn that "*when I'm to blame, I feel pain.*" We learn to **associate**, in a deeply physical way, our experiences of pain and blame. Our conscience then helps protect us from doing harmful things, by bringing up the fear of pain when we think of doing something wrong.

However, **associations make us see causality where it's not.** An association pairs two experiences together, and makes us think that one causes the other – even if they don't. Dr. Pavlov famously demonstrated this dynamic with his experiments on dogs. Every day, he would ring a bell just before feeding them. They learned to associate the bell with food, and would start salivating when the bell was rung – even if he didn't feed them. In a deeply physical way, Pavlov's dogs learned that "food means bells" and "bells mean food." Now, do bells really have anything to do with food? No, but try telling Pavlov's barking dogs that!

Similarly, as children, we may have experienced a pattern where we'd come home from a hard day, and our mother would give us ice cream, or cookies and milk, to "make it all better." Through this, many of us learned to associate love with sugary, fatty foods. And so as adults, if something goes wrong and we're craving love,

we may instinctively head right for that pint of Ben and Jerry's ice cream in the freezer. Now, does ice cream create love? Not really. (Although it certainly can create pleasure!) Associative learning isn't logical, but it's a very powerful, very deeply wired way of holding our beliefs about the world.

And so when we learn that "*blame comes with pain*" we also learn, in a very physical way, that "*when I feel pain, someone is to blame.*" We learn to ask the Question of Blame.

Again, there's nothing wrong with this choice – except that it's not accurate, and it hurts. For **while it is true that blame causes pain, it's not true that pain requires blame**. Just because we're hurting, this does not mean that someone is to blame for our pain.

I didn't get this when I left the Mormon Church. I assumed that since there was so much pain, someone had to be at fault. Someone needed to be punished. And I hoped to goodness it wasn't me. However, in doing this, I was getting things exactly backwards. I felt the pain and went searching for who to blame, rather than getting that my blame was causing my pain. As long as I kept searching for the right "because," I was stuck. Whether I was running from my fear of being wrong, or gloating about being right, I was creating perceived separation from Love – and I was hurting.

In contrast, when I was able to start moving from the Question of Blame to the Question of Love, I was able to start moving beyond a **punishment mentality**, and in to a **Learning Orientation to Life**. I was able to start accepting my pain for what it was, and in doing so, I was able to start my journey of healing.

The Two Sides to a Learning Orientation

A **Learning Orientation to Life** involves moving from an **attitude of punishment to an attitude of learning**. To do so means embracing two great truths at the same time.

First, at each moment, **everyone is doing the best they know how**. And second, at each moment, **we have the opportunity to learn how to do better**. In other words, a learning orientation means simultaneously practicing acceptance and loving self-

discipline – it means practicing the two sides of love (as we'll talk about in Chapter 3).

When we view life as a trial, we naturally fear that pain means punishment. We fear that we're going to have to "pay" for each mistake we make. And when we believe that someone has hurt us, an angry piece of our self naturally wants to make them pay.

However, when we view life as a school, then pain no longer has to mean that someone is to blame. Pain can simply be feedback that we have some new lessons to learn. And we can learn those lessons much more gracefully when we start with acceptance of where we're at.

A great example of this learning orientation was Toby, the three legged Lab. Toby was born happy, healthy, and with four great legs. If you've ever been around a young Yellow Labrador, you know that they are extremely loving – and extremely energetic. Toby **loved** to run. So much so that one day, he got out of his yard. He ran in to the street, got hit by a car, and in order to save his life, the vet had to amputate his right front leg.

When Toby woke up from his surgery, he was a bit shocked, but he rebounded quickly. Instead of moping about, playing the victim, or complaining about how unfair life is, he set about learning how to hop. Toby wasn't about to let a little injury get in the way of his love of life. Within weeks he was hopping around the yard, and he quickly got so good at it that his family started taking him on walks again. Every day, they would take him for a quarter mile hop – and he loved every minute of it.

When a challenge comes up in life, we can choose to fight it, judge it, avoid it, complain about it – or learn how to solve it. Toby chose learning. So can we.

Getting Off Our Position

This sounds simple, but a remarkable amount of suffering stems from how often we don't do this. Instead, in our anger, pride, fear, and just plain bull-headedness, we often choose to be right

rather than loving. We choose to hold on to our attachments to our beliefs, even though this causes us pain. As Ron Hulnick explains:

“There is one thing we have to give up in order to find Love. We have to be willing to get off our position.”²

The path to happiness leads through humility and acceptance. And it doesn't have to hurt! With a Learning Orientation to Life, we can learn to see our “failures” as learning opportunities, rather than as signs of our unworthiness, or as crimes we need to be punished for. We can stop beating ourselves up, and embrace life instead. As Byron Katie says, *“Reality is always kinder than the story we tell about it.”³*

Moving from pain to freedom involves **being willing to get off our position**. It means being willing to release our need to be right. It means accepting things as they are, rather than as we think they “should” be. And in particular, it means being willing to surrender our belief that pain means punishment.

Imagine that you're the parent of a beautiful baby girl who's just beginning to learn how to walk. She's dressed in a little pink outfit (with matching pink hair beret). She's standing up by holding on to a chair, and she's just about ready to take her first step towards you. You hold open your arms and say *“Come to Mommy!”* (or *“Come to Daddy!”*) while your partner attempts to keep the video camera steady. She takes her first two steps, falls down – and the crowd goes wild. You smother her in love and praise, and quickly check the camera to make sure you got it all on tape.

In contrast, can you imagine yelling at her instead? Can you conceive of screaming that she's a failure, that she should have taken many more steps, and that at this rate she'll never learn how to walk? I hope not!

“If we could read the secret history of our enemies, we should find in each man's life, sorrow and suffering enough to disarm all hostility.”

– Henry Wadsworth Longfellow

And yet, notice how often we do this with ourselves.

We don't need to develop a Learning Orientation to Life – our opportunity is to reconnect with the attitude we started out with, by embracing our role as perpetual students, rather than thinking that just because we're adults, we “should” have all the answers.

Again, this doesn't mean that we have to sacrifice our beliefs – it means surrendering the places inside us where we're self-righteous and fearful **about** our beliefs. It means letting go of our attachment, defensiveness and arrogance. In order to find Love, our opportunity is to stop pretending that we know better than Reality.

This does not mean that we “should” condone abuse, or that we're being given an excuse for laziness and sloth. Reality is a perfectly disciplined teacher, constantly supporting our learning by holding us accountable to the consequences of our choices. However, this process is utterly **for** us, and being **responsible** for our choices does not mean that we're to **blame** for our choices. If our baby gives up after her first fall and decides to take a break in her learning for a while, then her choices will keep her crawling rather than walking. Similarly, if she touches a hot stove then her choices will include pain. However, this doesn't mean that her choices were wrong, morally inferior, or unworthy of Love.

Life presents us with an endless stream of learning opportunities, and if we don't learn a lesson today, we'll get another chance tomorrow. Failure to learn often creates pain, but this does not mean we need to find someone to blame. **Pain is feedback that we have a lesson to learn**. And when we really get this, life suddenly gets much easier, as we become more able to accept our challenges for the learning opportunities they are.

Again – simple, but not always easy. So here are five top power tools for moving from anger to acceptance, and from war to peace.

Power Tool #1: Change Your State

It's one thing to adopt a Learning Orientation to Life when we're feeling peaceful and centered, and quite another to do so when

our vision is red with rage. When our animal brain goes into fight or flight, our primal emotions can easily overwhelm and overpower our sense of reason and discernment. So before we can “look for the lesson” in a situation, it’s often necessary to first get control of our emotions by Changing Your State.

There are two major ways to do this – by accessing the energy of your body and by connecting with the energy of your heart. Let’s start by talking about the body. Our emotions have a hard-wired effect on our physiological state. When we feel angry, our heart rate escalates, our breath gets faster, our voice gets louder, we lock eye contact, and we start making expansive gestures to make us look bigger. In contrast, when we feel shame, our face flushes, we look down at the floor, our posture shrinks, and we try to hide.

Our emotions determine our physical state. And this street goes both ways, because our physical state also determines our emotions. If you’re feeling depressed, **move**. Go for a walk, lift your arms up high, hold your head up to the heavens, smile, and shout repeatedly “I love this!” Few people can maintain this practice for more than a few minutes without feeling their mood lift. Similarly, if you’re feeling angry or scared, **breathe**. Take big, full, slow, deep breaths that fill your entire body. Do some yoga postures. Smile. Anger requires fear, and the only physiological difference between fear and excitement is breath. Breathe in to your upset and insecurity, and watch it melt away.

The other major way to Change Your State is by connecting with the energy of your heart. Our heart does not know upset. It only knows love. And one of the ways to “get in to our heart” is through the power of creative visualization.

As sports psychologists discovered a few decades ago, our mind can not tell the difference between reality and a clear visualization of reality. For top athletes, some of their most important practice often happens in their bed, where they imagine making that clutch free-throw, perfect drive down the fairway, or high speed slalom turn. Similarly, we can change our emotional

state through active meditations, where we visualize ourselves as being in a situation where we were connected with our heart.

As described in The HeartMath Solution, Doc Childre and the HeartMath organization have combined elements of both of these techniques into a simple process they call the Freeze-Frame. Through this exercise, you can quickly change your state – often in 60 seconds or less. And if you turn it into a new habit, within a period of a few months you can completely change your default reaction to upset.

“Here are the five steps of the Freeze-Frame technique:

- 1. Recognize the stressful feeling and FREEZE-FRAME it! Take a time-out.*
- 2. Make a sincere effort to shift your focus away from the racing mind or disturbed emotions to the area around your heart. Pretend you’re breathing through your heart to help focus your energy in this area. Keep your focus there for ten seconds or more.*
- 3. Recall a positive, fun feeling or time you’ve had in life and try to re-experience it.*
- 4. Now, using your intuition, common sense, and sincerity, ask your heart, ‘What would be a more efficient response to the situation, one that would minimize future stress?’*
- 5. Listen to what your heart says in answer to your question.”⁴*

Power Tool #2: Affirmations

As we’ll talk about in later chapters, our upset doesn’t come from reality, it comes from our thoughts **about** reality. And the thing about negative thoughts is that they feed on each other. We’ll be going along, life is good, and then a judgment pops in to our head. We’ll think “*I should be working harder*” and that thought calls to two more: “*my kids shouldn’t be so loud*” and “*my spouse doesn’t treat me right.*” Those thoughts call in their friends – and

before we know it, we're caught up in an angry cycle of "I'm upset because..." This pattern is so common that we usually don't even notice it. And over time, the voice of our "Inner Critic" can get so entrenched and pervasive that it can seem to run our life.

Like a record that's stuck in a groove, playing the same negative thoughts over and over, our minds get stuck in "mind frick" loops.⁵ These loops take our negativity and repeat it again and again. This then triggers our upset, which makes us even less rational – and before we know it, we're at war with others, and within ourselves.

The first step in working with these patterns is to Change Your State. This begins to bring us back to sanity, and can create a "gap" in the negative programming consuming our mind. Then, we want to replace this programming with more positive programming. And one of the most powerful ways to do so is through regular, clear, positively energized affirmations.

An affirmation is a positive statement, such as "I am loving myself every day and in every way" or "I am happy, healthy, wealthy and wise." It has the power to counteract our negative programming, and replace it with more positive patterns.

In doing so, there are two major keys to affirmations: making them **regular**, and giving them **positive energy**. When we repeat an affirmation regularly, such as 100 times a day for 30 days, it becomes a habit – it becomes a program that begins to run on its own, without our needing to consciously think about it.

"An affirmation is a positive state of (positive) belief, and if we can become one-tenth as good at positive self-talk as we are at negative self-talk, we will notice an enormous change."
– Julia Cameron

This habit becomes even more powerful when we energize it with enthusiasm and love. Instead of teaching affirmations, Anthony Robbins teaches what he calls "incantations," which are affirmations performed from a high-energy, active, enthusiastic

state. For example, yelling them out while running along a beach, or while power walking with head held high.

As another example, some programs teach the importance of creating affirmations that are sourced from our heart. When an affirmation resonates deep inside, it takes on the energy of our heart. Then as we turn it into a habit, it becomes a program that not only carries positive mental content, it carries a powerful loving energy as well.

Affirmations are also similar to intentions, in that they both work best when they are stated in the present, use only positive language, are at least 50% believable, focus on what rather than how, and include emotionally energizing words. (p. 25)

Power Tool #3: Ask a Different Question

Another way of replacing our negative programming is by learning to Ask a Different Question. The mind is like a computer, and it will happily create answers to whatever questions we ask it. When we're caught up in a punishment mentality, we tend to ask questions like:

"Who's to blame?"

"What's wrong with me?"

"What bad things happened to me today?"

"Why does life suck so bad?"

"What's wrong with [them, the world, politicians, teenagers, foreigners, etc.]?"

When we ask these types of "glass is half-empty" questions, our mind naturally comes up with lots of answers. It's easy to find reasons to put ourselves in the role of the victim, or to see things in a negative light. In fact, these questions often become so ingrained, we often don't even realize we're asking them.

Negative questions create negative answers. Negative answers create negative emotions. And negative emotions create negative results. One of the most powerful spiritual laws is the law of

attraction,⁶ which states that “*like attracts like.*” And so, as Anthony Robbins explains, “*where you focus is where you go.*”

However, it’s just as easy to ask positive questions, and it’s just as easy for our mind to come up with positive answers. So, particularly when we notice that we’re feeling upset, our opportunity is to ask a different question. For instance:

“It is not the answer that enlightens, but the question.”
– Ionesco

“*Can I be okay with this?*”⁷

“*Do I want to be right or loving?*”

“*Why would a reasonable, rational and decent human being do that?*”⁸

“*How are they doing the best they know how?*”

“*How am I doing the best I know how?*”

“*How can I use this for my learning, upliftment and growth?*”⁹

“*What’s beneath my upset? What do I love that I’m afraid is being threatened?*”

“*What is the spiritual opportunity in this situation?*”

“*What is the gift that’s paired with this challenge?*”

“*Who would I be without this thought?*”¹⁰

Power Tool #4: The Relationship Wheel

It can be one thing to be accepting on our own, and quite another to be accepting when we get emotionally “triggered” by someone – particularly when it’s with someone we love. We can only get upset about something we care about, and the more we care about someone, the easier it is to get hurt, scared, and angry about that relationship.

The Relationship Wheel is a power tool for helping two people work through their upset when it comes up in their relationship together. It works by bringing awareness to the beliefs and interpretations that sit between our experience and our emotional reactions. It helps us see how it isn’t reality that’s creating our

emotional pain, it’s our beliefs **about** reality that are creating our pain.

Each person takes turns completing the following sentence completion stubs, regarding something that is upsetting them. (It’s called the relationship wheel, because these steps are often drawn as five segments of a circle.)¹¹ As they’re doing so, the other person’s job is simply to listen compassionately and attentively, without interrupting. This is known as Heart Centered Listening (Power Tool #16).

“*I heard/saw...*”

“*I interpreted that to mean...*”

“*I felt...*”

“*I want...*”

“*For you, I want...*”

The first step is a statement of the microscopic truth (Power Tool #14). As defined by Gay and Kathlyn Hendricks, “*the microscopic truth is that which cannot be argued about.*”¹² It’s a statement of exactly what we observed, without interpretation or judgment. “*I saw you talking to Julie Anderson*” is an impartial observation. “*I saw you flirting with that tart*” is not.

The second step is where we take ownership for our interpretations. This is where we can state the meaning we placed on our observations. We do not need to justify, explain, or argue for our meaning. Simply state the beliefs and interpretations you’re aware of, while maintaining ownership for how you created them.

In the third step, we explain what feelings came up for us in the “triggering” situation. Again, there’s no need to justify our feelings. We all have a right to our feelings, and a major piece of this process is to practice accepting those feelings and being able to talk about them, rather than fighting them or judging them. Our feelings are perfectly valid. It’s just that they don’t mean we’re right and they’re wrong.

The goal of this step is to state what we’re feeling, without attaching it to any particular “because.” This step is particularly

effective when we're able to get to the emotions below the anger, such as fear, pain, and love (as discussed in Chapter 5). If you think about it, how do you tend to react when someone gets angry at you? Do you tend to go to vulnerability or defense? We typically respond to anger with defensiveness, and respond to vulnerability with care. So when we get below our upset and into our authentic vulnerability, it's much easier for those around us to move into acceptance and love.

In the fourth and fifth steps, we reconnect with our priorities and desires, and hopefully to a sense of shared purpose. What is it we care about? What do we want? In the fourth step, we state something we want. In the fifth, we state something that we want for the other person **that we believe they want for themselves**. This last step involves compassion, empathy and understanding. It involves putting ourselves in the other person's shoes, and seeing the world through their eyes.

Imagine that after being married for five years, Harry and Susan get in a fight, where Harry's "because" is that Susan keeps nagging him, and Susan's "because" is that Harry doesn't listen. Harry's Relationship Wheel might look like the following:

"I heard you ask me to take out the trash"

*"I interpreted that to mean that you are nagging me again,
and don't trust me"*

"I felt angry and defensive"

"I want some peace and quiet after a hard day at work"

*"For you, I want you to feel like I'm listening to your
requests, and that I care for you."*

Notice that as long as we're taking ownership for our experience, interpretations, feelings, and desires, there isn't a lot to argue about. This exercise lets us hold to our truth, without needing to impose it on others. It lets us express our feelings, without needing to blame them on anyone. In doing so, it lets us see where our beliefs are causing us pain, it makes it easier to get off our position, and it helps us move into a place of acceptance and love.

Power Tool #5: Free Form Writing

The first four power tools deal primarily with upset as it arises. They help us break the cycle of violence, start replacing our negative thinking with more positive patterns, and come back to our senses. This fifth tool then lets us release stored anger that we have buried in our shadow.

Free form writing¹³ is a highly effective process of getting our negativity out of our consciousness, by writing it out on paper. The steps are simple.

1. Set aside a block of time where you won't be interrupted, and go to a place that feels quiet and safe. The process is particularly effective when done for a set amount of time each day, over a number of days (i.e. 30 minutes a day for 10 days)
2. Take out a stack of scratch paper and something to write with. It's important to do this on paper, rather than at a computer.¹⁴
3. State your intentions for this process, such as "*I intend to release any upset and negativity that can be released at this time, for the highest good of all concerned.*" If it's in alignment for you, say a prayer or ask Spirit for assistance.
4. Start writing down whatever comes in to your mind, without trying to analyze or control it. There is no need for it to make sense, for it to be positive or negative, or for it to have any particular structure. Just let it flow. If nothing comes up, you can write "nothing, nothing, nothing..." If a feeling comes up, you can write that down. Just keep writing.
5. **Do not reread what you've written.** This process transfers thoughts from our mind to the paper, and if we reread it, the thoughts can go right back in. If something beautiful comes up that you want to save, copy that to another place, and then go back to the Free Form Writing.

6. When you are done, take what you have written and either burn it, or rip it up and put it in a dumpster that is outside of your house. The goal of this process is to transfer our negative energy to the paper – which we then want to get rid of as carefully and thoroughly as possible.

A Note on Anger Release Work

When it comes to dealing with anger, many of the available resources recommend exercises for getting it out in non-destructive ways. For example, screaming in our car rather than screaming at our children, or hitting a pillow rather than hitting our spouse. There are some great strengths to these approaches, and at the same time they can come with a significant risk. Anger comes with a “jolt” of energizing endorphins, and it’s easy to get addicted to the drugs anger provides. This is one reason why it can be so hard to get off our position, and why some people become “rage-aholics.”

If you are going to do anger release work, it’s extremely important not to stop at the anger. Anger catharsis just for the sake of anger catharsis can increase rather than decrease our addiction to upset. Instead, it’s crucial to continue dropping down through the anger and into the pain and judgment; and from this place, to heal the pain and forgive the judgment. These practices will be covered in subsequent chapters.

If you have serious issues with anger, please seek out licensed professionals to help you in your healing process – loving experts who in addition to anger release, are also trained in techniques for deep healing and self-forgiveness.