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THE



ANGRY

BOOK



THEODORE I. RUBIN, M.D.

AUTHOR OF *COMPASSION AND SELF-HATE*

THE ANGRY BOOK

The Angry Book

Theodore Isaac Rubin, M.D.

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To four of my friends and colleagues:

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I am grateful to my former teachers, at the American Institute for Psychoanalysis, for my training in Karen Horney's theory.

Dr. Horney's theory lives on in her books and in the work we do. Without it, this book would not be possible.

T. I. R.

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THE ANGRY BOOK

Introduction

This book is about a basic human emotion—*anger*. Too often anger is not seen as basic or human. Anger is easily the most maligned and perverted of feelings and responses. Although there is an enormous range of "angry problems," nearly all people have some difficulty handling anger. The price paid for the distortion of a basic emotion is incalculable. Poor mental health, poor physical health, damage to relationships—especially to parent-child relationships—and even that most malignant of human diseases—*war*—are the wages of distorted anger.

Therefore it behooves us to understand and to work through our feelings about anger. As you read, you will see that insight into these feelings can free and make available many other feelings, talents, and potentials. A healthier *angry* outlook must lead to greater health, to improved parent-child relating, to a fuller life, and to success and happiness. Indeed, it can even be lifesaving.

T. I. R.

THE ANGRY BOOK

THE ANGRY BOOK

There is no rest for
a messenger 'til
the message is delivered.

Joseph Conrad—*The Rescue*

1 / *Beginnings*

In this section I want to describe some general considerations as well as some of the beginnings or origins of angry troubles.

THE ANGRY BOOK

Even the Saints

I assume the saints were human. I assume you are not a saint. All human beings get angry—and I'm sure the saints did, too. Feeling angry is a universal human phenomenon. It is as basic as feeling hungry, lonely, loving, or tired. The capacity to feel angry and to respond in some way to that feeling is in us from birth. Have you ever seen a newborn baby cry and scream and get red with rage? He does so usually in response to some increase in bodily tension or discomfort or frustration—the need for food or relief from the stick of a diaper pin, for example. Of course adults have their "tensions," and these are often born of very intricate, labyrinthlike dynamics. Sometimes the routes leading to feelings of anger are so convoluted and circuitous that it takes enormous skill to discern their original source, or fountainhead. *But* regardless

of the reason for or the source of the anger or the relative ease or complexity in perceiving either the anger or its source—everybody, *but everybody*, gets angry. As you will see later on, this may not always be apparent. But it is so. The only exceptions are those poor unfortunate people who suffer from one or another form of severe brain damage.

Learning

Those of us who are physiologically whole are born with the potential to feel and to express anger. *But* the things that make us angry and the ways we feel and the things we do when we are angry are not the same for all of us. The particular, individual ways in which we respond are learned. Generally, no one sits down and gives us lessons. We learn in more effective ways—starting from the moment we are born. Children are extremely perceptive and absorb what goes on around them long before they can talk or even comprehend language. They are like finely tuned receivers that pick up much more than is merely said. They are receptive and attuned to every mood, feeling, and change that goes on in people around them. They are particularly affected by the way their parents, sisters, and brothers feel and act. Many young

children respond to a mother's "mood" long before she herself is consciously aware of its existence. This applies particularly to her approval and disapproval of how the child feels and acts.

Children do in fact "receive" and "record" what goes on around them, and they learn. They learn by doing over and over again—by repetition—and this doing is often initiated by imitation. They also learn by identification with a parent or relative. They learn by experimenting and testing, that is, by doing and then observing parental response to their actions. Of course all this applies to emotions and how the parents emote and respond to the child's feelings, especially the feeling—and expression—of anger.

Let Freedom Ring

Health is relative. There is no such thing as an absolute state of health or sickness. Everyone's physical, mental, and emotional condition is a combination of both. When health is preponderant, we are fortunate indeed—as we are when the emotional climate in which we were brought up, in which we live, and which we provide for our children promotes health.

A healthy emotional climate is first one in which all the emotions—especially anger—are given ample play and freedom. This is an atmosphere in which there is no dearth of emotional output or exchange. There is no emotional vacuum, nor does one kind of emotional display exist to the exclusion of others. In this atmosphere emotional output is appropriate and consistent. In this atmosphere it is *easy* to know what people feel. It is especially easy to know

when they are angry. This is so because feelings—all kinds—are accepted and the conveying of how one feels is accepted openly and freely without threat of dire reprisal. In this environment no feeling or its expression is labeled "good" or "bad" This climate is not designed for the manufacture of saints or sinners. It is meant for human beings who have ordinary emotional responses and the need to express them freely. In this climate a child readily picks up the prevalence of consistency, openness, and warmth regarding all feelings. In effect, this atmosphere says to the child: "It is all right to feel love, and it is all right to feel anger. It is all right to express love, and it is all right to express anger. Your feelings are welcome here, and we would like to know what they are. You are loved and accepted and safe with all your feelings. You needn't stifle any of them to *please*

Victims of Victims

So many of *us* are afraid to feel, afraid to express feelings, and afraid to have other people *feel toward us*. This is especially true when the feeling is anger. There are many of us in whom much emotional crippling has taken place. We can allow only so-called acceptable feelings to come through and then only with great care, constriction, and trepidation. For many of us the potential amplitude of feelings—the vitality, depth, richness, and intensity—is poor. For many of us our emotional displays are either very shallow (or utterly flat) or inappropriate or both. Those of us who suffer in this way are almost certainly former (and present) inhabitants of "sick" emotional climates. Blaming parents or relatives will not help. We are the victims of victims, and we, too, shall produce victims unless we choose to change ourselves

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