

# Breakthroughs in healing

with Dr. Simon Sheh

Healthcare Edition

Winter 2005

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## How to Stop *excessive* Anger from Taking Control of Your Life

**Excessive, unbridled, and abusive anger** do not happen “out of the blue” with no antecedents or build up. A good understanding of the unique function of the Fight or Flight response would provide useful insights and practice on how to better manage anger, particularly unjustified and excessive anger that violate trust and safety in marriage and family relationships.

**The Fight or Flight response**, a natural physiological reaction in our body, is specially designed to protect us from physical danger. For instance, when we hear the fire alarm and see black smoke in our office building, our heart beat and our breathing will increase, there will be more blood flow going into our arms and legs, our pupils will dilate, our muscles will tense up, and our thinking will be very much restricted to nothing else but thoughts of survival only. All these mental and physiological responses prepare us to combat the clear and present danger in our environment.

Our brain and our mind are very quick to detect threats and danger, but they are not very accurate in terms of differentiating between physical and psychological threats and danger, and in turn, push the same “panic button” and engage us in a combat mode.

### What are psychological threats and danger?

We could feel psychologically threatened when:

- We don't feel recognized, appreciated, or accepted
- We feel abandoned or disapproved by a loved one
- We are not respected or valued by someone
- We feel insecure
- We feel pushed into a corner
- We feel we are not important
- We feel that we are unjustly wronged
- We feel we don't have a say in a relationship

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Under psychological threats, as if they were of physical nature, our brain will progressively mobilize the body into a combat or defensive mode. The following three colour zones represent the progressive physiological changes in our mind and body to deal with clear and present danger of psychological nature:

### The Blue-Yellow-Red Zone of Physiological Changes and Anger Management

#### The Blue Zone – The “We Can Get Along” Zone

- The mind and body are in peace
- There is no outward or internal agitation and turmoil
- You are able to discuss, reason, share, and rationalize
- You are able to agree or disagree

#### The Yellow Zone – The “Getting Ready to Combat” Zone

- You are sensing physiological changes in your body and mind (e.g., your muscles are tensing up; you can't stand your wife's voice)
- You are losing your peace of mind
- You are feeling agitated, pressured, and uncomfortable
- You are noticing the physiological signs of tensions and internal agitation are growing
- Your body and mind are getting ready to fight or flight

#### The Red Zone – The “No Return” Zone

- Your mission is to destroy the “enemy”
- You are on a mission called **MAD**,  
**Mission of Abusive Destruction**
- Literally no one can stop you from completing the mission
- In this zone, you act more like a beast than a human being
- Your mind is focusing on “I am right, you are wrong”
- You will not return to the Blue Zone until you have completed MAD, either through abusive words, excessive temper outbursts, withdrawal/dissociation physically and emotionally, or violent actions that destroy safety in relationships

A better understanding and conscious awareness of the physiological changes in our body will help control our reactions before they get out of hands. In healthy anger management, by all means take up the responsibility and do not allow yourself entering the Red Zone. The Red Zone is a dangerous zone to your health, the health of your loved ones, and it will destroy relationships.

*continued on back*

*continued from front*

You can avoid entering the Red Zone by short-circuiting the Yellow Zone. You can intervene within the Yellow Zone by:

- Consciously aware of and specially pay attention to your own unique Yellow Zone physiological signs, such as, muscle tension, feeling overwhelmed
- Talk to yourself whether you want to repeat your previous Red Zone episodes and bear the consequences again. If not, stand down and distract yourself from going to Red
- Create actions and distractions to short-circuit the Yellow Zone, e.g., exit the situation, ask for a time-out
- Slow down your speech. Talk slowly
- Take longer and deeper breaths
- Get a drink of water. Avoid caffeine which may stimulate your arousal level
- Sit down if you are standing. Sitting down allows you to get more comfortable and quash your anger arousal
- If you are sitting down, lean back. Leaning forward is part of the fighting/ combat posture
- Keeping your hands by your sides. Waving your arms, pointing your finger, and shaking your fists will increase circulation and hasten entry into the Red Zone
- Quiet yourself. Use prayer and breathing to calm yourself down

#### **When you are facing an adult who is reacting in the Red Zone:**

- Do not reason or exchange heated discussion with the person. Remember, the Red Zone person is acting more like a beast than a human being whose mission is to destroy you emotionally or physically
- Maintain a good physical distance from the person
- Look at the person's eyes and say, "I am not here to hurt you, I want you to calm down" and repeat the same until the person restores his or her anger control
- Get ready to exit the situation if necessary. Your own safety is #1.

#### **Fighting the psychological battles – 10,000 soldiers vs. 3 naval seals**

Our brain and mind not only fail to differentiate between physical and psychological battles, they are also not accurate at times on how many resources we need to fight the threats and dangers. In many cases, we call up 10,000 soldiers to fight a psychological battle that 3 specially trained naval seals would do the job.

The differences between 10,000 soldiers and 3 naval seals:

##### **10,000 Soldiers:**

- The belief is to handle the battle by enormous number of foot soldiers, ammunition, and artillery power
- The size of the man power and operation unavoidably create a lot of noise and commotion
- Without a doubt, a battle involving 10,000 soldiers attract tremendous attention
- The knowledge of 10,000 soldiers coming to town frighten many people
- The fire power of 10,000 soldiers create many collateral damages
- It will take a long time to retreat or withdraw 10,000 soldiers from the battle field

##### **3 Naval Seals:**

- The belief is to handle the battle by wisdom, discipline, accurate information, and training
- The goal is to engage the battle with minimum noise, attention, and commotion
- The objective is to keep collateral damages to the minimum
- With only 3 specially trained soldiers involved, the benefits in regard to cost effectiveness is enormous
- In order to win battles, the naval seals are trained to know themselves as well as the enemies very well

**Are you often miscalculating on how many soldiers and what kind of soldiers you need to fight battles of psychological nature?** Ask yourself the following questions:

- Does this situation require me to call up 10,000 soldiers? (**At times our psychological battles are so huge that we call up 10,000 soldiers every time we go to war, especially when we have been fighting the same battles most of our lives**)
- If I call up 10,000 soldiers, what would happen to the situation?
- Does this situation worth the effort to call up 10,000 soldiers?
- If not, tell yourself to stand down, and short-circuit the Yellow Zone.
- Identify and label the psychological battles. Is it about respect? Is it about approval? Is it about responsibility? What is it about?
- Am I engaging in huge and long-term/ chronic psychological battles? If the answer is yes, you may benefit from professional help to resolve unfinished business in your life.

#### **The Battle for Respect**

Many clients in my counselling practice are fighting for respect, acceptance, and approval from loved ones in their lives. A man came to see me recently because of his excessive anger toward his teenage son. This client told me that he and his son often involved in verbal fights, and on one occasion, a physical fight, especially when he felt his son showed disrespect by talking back loudly or challenging his opinions. This man also fights for respect and approval from his own father for most of his life. I told my client that not every time his teenage son raising his voice and talking back are amount to disrespect. It is more about his son wanting to grow up, and he is very passionate about his own ideas, and wanting his dad to believe in him. The more my client understands that his son's behaviour is not about respect, the more my client is able to stand down and short-circuit his Yellow Zone, and in turn, abort another Red Zone episode, and pave the way to restore father-son relationship.

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