Let All . . . Anger . . . Be Put Away From You . . . "" or The Case Against Anger

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Burton C. Kelly, Ph.D.*

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*Brother Kelly, outgoing president of AMCAP, is Professor of Guidance and Counseling and head of Program Evaluation for Student Life at BYU.

President Dallin Oaks of BYU, in our BYU pre-school conference, offered an analogy that I think has relevance to us. He spoke of the BYU faculty in terms of the three degrees of glory. He suggested that those of the celestial kingdom were in active opposition to the leadership of the Church and destructive of faith—and indicated that there were very few, if any, faculty members who fit that category. Those comparable to the terrestrial kingdom were described as having no opposition to the Church, having loving devotion and a good family, but were just "not valiant in the testimony of Jesus." His opinion was that most of the faculty were on the upper rim of the terrestrial level. Those comparable with the celestial level he described as using the insights of the gospel in an affirmative way. They live by the Spirit, but, he cautioned, not instead of being professional but in addition to being very professional. He went on to say that just teaching by the Spirit without preparation was not being better than the terrestrial level. We were challenged to "overcome by faith" and to have an added spiritual dimension.

I'm not going to suggest where we as AMCAP members are. I trust that we are at least striving for the celestial level; that is, using the gospel as our basic framework and still being conversant with the best professional insights; or as Elder Neal Maxwell put it, "we have our citizenship in the kingdom of God and our passport into the professional world rather than the other way around.

In discussing physical healing, Brigham Young expressed a related view: "If we are sick, and ask the Lord to heal us, and to do all for us that is necessary to be done, according to my understanding of the gospel of salvation, I might as well ask the Lord to cause my wheat and corn to grow without my plowing the ground and casting in the seed. It appears consistent to me to apply every remedy that comes within the range of my knowledge, and to ask my Father in Heaven, in the name of Jesus Christ, to sanctify that application to the healing of my body." (J of D, 1966, Vol. 4, p. 24.)

Yes, we need to obtain learning by study and by faith, and this I have attempted to do in the preparation of these thoughts. I hope and trust the thoughts I will share with you will be meaningful to you and, furthermore, will be a blessing in the life of each of you and the lives of those with whom you interact. They have been a blessing to me and to those with whom I have interacted. Further, I view the ideas I will present as being in harmony with the counsel and request of President Kimball. "... we must be willing to break with the educational establishment (not foolishly or cavalierly, but thoughtfully and for good reason) in order to find gospel ways to help mankind. Gospel methodology, concepts, and insights can help us to do what the world cannot do in its own frame of reference." (President Spencer W. Kimball, "2nd Century Address," Brigham Young University, Provo, Utah, Oct. 10, 1975, p. 9.)

The late George Kelley (no, not a relative of mine) in a most intriguing article entitled, "Sin and Psychotherapy," in discussing the enterprise of determining what is good and what is evil, stated, "The psychologist who attempts to assist his fellowman should keep this truth central to his system of practice. The task is to assist the individual man in what is singularly the most important undertaking in his life, the fullest possible understanding of the nature of good and evil." The apostle Paul, in speaking to the Romans (Chapter 1:16), stated, "I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ for it is the power of God unto salvation unto everyone that believeth ..." and I suggest the power by which we might ascertain truly the difference between good and evil and the most important dimensions of the helping relationship.

Most would agree that there are at least three basic steps in all established therapeutic relationships. The first is to determine what the problem is: the second, to determine the therapeutic goal; and the third, to determine and implement the therapeutic or behavioral change process to achieve the desired therapeutic goal. In each of these steps of therapy the gospel is basic, and especially in the determination of the therapeutic goal. A very superficial analysis immediately indicates that goals are based on values. While scientific findings may support given values, science really does not discover nor posit them. Thus, in goal selection, the gospel is critical.

I've been asked to speak on our theme from Ephesians 4:29, 31-32. I've chosen an emotional response cited in the theme and will focus my comments on a gospel-based goal for helping people cope with that response. To pique your curiosity a bit, this emotional response is probably the most frequent of emotional disturbances; it is a symptom of and/or a determinant of virtually all, if not all, diagnosed emotional
disorders. For some of them, for example passive-aggressive, it lies at the heart of the disorder. In depression, it is one of two major dynamics. If this particular emotional disturbance were to be eliminated, there would be few, if any, divorces, a virtual absence of family conflicts, as well as neighborhood, community, national, and international conflicts. Physical health would be enhanced—the incidence of hypertension, certain types of headaches and backaches, etc., would likely be reduced significantly. (Novaco, Raymond W. Anger Control, Lexington, Mass. D. C. Heath & Co., 1975, pp. 60-64, and McMillen, S. E. None of These Diseases, Spire Books, 1968, pp. 69-72.)

Some of the confusion that exists regarding this emotional response is portrayed in the following clipping from the Provo Daily Herald dated the 15th of January, 1978. It’s entitled, “Mass Slayings Create Fear, Questions in Illinois City.”

ROCKFORD, III. (UPI) The phone rings constantly at the Winnebago County coroner’s office.

It has been ringing since Saturday, when the mutilated bodies of six children were found in their West Side home. Their father, Simon Peter Nelson, 46, was charged with murder.

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Ruth Anderson, chief deputy coroner, said children have been asking teachers, parents, and even the coroner’s office how they can be sure their parents won’t kill them in a fit of rage.

And parents are wondering just how far they could be driven by anger, she said.

So, Mrs. Anderson is setting up a seminar to deal with the community’s questions and fears.

She said parents and children have bombarded schools and the coroner’s office with telephone calls, asking how they can be sure that what happened to the Nelson children won’t happen again—in their families.

Dr. P. John Seward, the coroner, said he has received numerous calls at his private medical practice from people asking how to cope with the fear triggered by the Nelson slayings.

“They are asking ‘How do I know my daddy won’t get that mad,’ and parents are asking themselves, ‘Could I do something like that if I got really angry?’” Mrs. Anderson said.

“It’s really a soul-searching experience. People are frightened—frightened most probably by the knowledge of what anger can bring a person to do. They’re asking for help in dealing with this, and I hope we can provide it.”

(Please Note:)

The answer, she said, is the one-night seminar, entitled “Helping You and Your Children Cope with Major Tragedies.” The seminar will feature comments from a panel of experts, headed by Seward.

“What we want to do is help people deal with death, with tragedy, but not be brought down by it,” Mrs. Anderson said. “Dr. Seward feels very strongly that if we have to deal with death every day, we should do something positive for the living—something that will help them deal with themselves and with tragedy.

“People have legitimate questions about death and life and we’re going to try to deal with those questions and those feelings. This is the first seminar of its kind anywhere.”

This illustration is instructive. I think the developers of the seminar completely missed the point. This incident illustrates how easily people may focus on tangential issues only to miss central issues.

Yes, the emotional response I am referring to is anger. Specifically, I’ll be dealing with the case against anger. First, let’s look at the anatomy of an emotional response. For an emotional response to occur, there must first be an awareness of some event, some thought, memory, some perceived stimulus. In addition to the receipt of certain sensations, there must also be an interpretation made of those sensations, and it is really out of these interpretations that the emotional response arises. Generally speaking, there are three types of evaluation: relatively positive, relatively neutral, or relatively negative. The emotional response that occurs is accordingly relatively positive, neutral, or negative. That the emotional response arises out of the interpretation rather than from the stimulus per se is well evidenced by the experiences of each of us; i.e., we have all experienced many situations where different people have received the same stimulus sensations and yet have responded very differently emotionally. For example, a couple of our missionaries in Germany were standing on the porch talking to the woman of the house when her husband came up. When he found out they were Mormon missionaries and were attempting to interest his wife in the gospel, he became very angry. After inviting the elders off the porch, he slapped the one elder in the jaw and knocked him down. The elder calmly got up, brushed off his pants, picked up his hat, put it on, and said “Thank you,” and turned and walked away with his companion. The man was so impressed by the elder’s response that, after recovering from his amazement and astonishment, he ran after the elders, invited them to return and had them teach him the Gospel. (Yes, he joined the Church.) Obviously this is a bit different response.

“As he [a man] thinketh in his heart, so is he.” (Prov. 23:7) or as Ellis, Maultsby, basic stoic philosophy, and others have well stated, it is not experiences and events that determine our feelings and response but what we think about those events. Since each of us is responsible for our own thoughts, we then are responsible for our emotional responses. Brigham Young colorfully stated (U of D, 1966, Vol. 2, pp. 134-135).

Suppose, when you arrive at home from this meeting, you find your neighbors have killed your horses and destroyed
your property, how would you feel? You would feel like taking instant vengeance on the perpetrator of the deed. But it would be wrong for you to encourage the least particle of feeling to arise in your bosom like anger, or revenge, or like taking judgment into your own hands, until the Lord Almighty shall say, ‘Judgment is yours, and for you to execute.’

Thought originated with our individual being, which is organized to be as independent as any being in eternity. When you go home, and learn that your neighbors have committed some depredation on your property, or in your family, and anger arises in your bosom, then consider, and know that it arises in yourselves.

On the other hand, suppose some person has blessed you when you return home, brought you a bag of flour, for instance, in a time of great scarcity, and some butter, milk, and vegetables, thought would at once spring up to bless the giver. The origin of thought and reflection is in ourselves. We think, because we are, and are made susceptible of external influences, and to feel our relationship to external objects. Thus thoughts of revenge, and thoughts of blessing will arise in the same mind, as it is influenced by external circumstances.

If you are injured by a neighbor, the first thought of the unregenerate heart is for God to damn the person who has hurt you. But if a person blesses you, the first thought that arises in you is, God bless that man: and this is the disposition to which we ought to cleave. But dismiss any spirit that would prompt you to injure any creature that the Lord has made, give it no place, encourage it not, and it will not stay where you are.

Most people usually do not assume responsibility for their anger. Instead, what we typically hear is, "You made me angry." "They made me upset," etc. I trust it is evident that these types of statements are not true. No one else can “make” us angry. We have to make ourselves angry. What others say and do is, yes, a part of the equation, but without our contribution to the equation, anger cannot arise nor exist. This can be a very threatening conception of anger, and yet it is also very freeing, for as long as we do determine our own emotional responses, we are free to change and to control them. If other people or events were, in fact, responsible for our emotional responses, then we would not have the freedom nor ability to change them—unless we could control other people and events, which is much more challenging and usually impossible. Thus, principle 1 in the case against anger is, we are ultimately responsible for our own anger.

The substance of my next points may be even more threatening or challenging. I trust that you will not make yourselves angry over them.

What types of thoughts create our interpersonal anger? Please note that the remainder of my comments are limited to interpersonal, psychogenically determined anger.

In order to get angry at a person, one must have first judged that individual. There are two typical meanings of the term “to judge.” One is to discern the nature of our experiences, and the other is to condemn. All of us, hopefully, are continually discerning, but not condemning. In Matthew 7:1-2 the Savior says, “Judge not that ye be not judged.” In the Inspired Version, the same verse is rendered “Judge not unrighteously that you be not judged, but judge righteous judgment.” I suggest that discerning between the rightness and wrongness, the nature, etc., of a given act and discerning under the inspiration of the Spirit are appropriate, or righteous judgments. Condemnation is the unrighteous judgment referred to. In the act of discerning we do not get angry. It’s only when we judge to condemn another that we get angry, when we make the judgment that he/she is bad because of what was said or done. We have to have sinned, condemned another, to make ourselves angry.

Secondly, anger is a selfish response. We have three types of “shoulds” in our lives. There is the scientific “should,” the past tense of shall, which does not get us into trouble in terms of anger; that is, if I drop this pencil, it should fall because I’ve done everything necessary to make it do so. Or, if we have judged and condemned an individual, we should be angry at that person because we’ve done what’s necessary in order to be angry. Another “should” that typically does not get us into trouble with our fellow human beings, although it may, is the “shoulds” of eternal truths. We believe that we should be kind to one another, considerate of each other, courteous, open and receptive to truth, etc. These “shoulds” refer to laws and principles that we think people should typically follow because it is best for them. These “shoulds” usually don’t lead to anger. It’s the third kind of “shoulds” that gets us into difficulty. These are the “shoulds” wherein we think another person should or should not do something because we did or don’t want them to, or, more associated with anger, is our demand that they gratify our wishes and desires. You should and ought to do such and such because I want/demand that you do. President Kimball stated in one of his Conference addresses last April that there were three major things we needed to do in order to truly become Zion, and one of them was to overcome our selfishness.

Third, a major function of anger is to control others. Some people have learned this art very well. They get what they want by becoming loud and angry. The recipients of the anger tend to do what the angry individual wants in order to placate. Thus, a major function of anger is to attempt to take away the freedom of another person.

In summary, then, I am suggesting for principle number 2 that interpersonal anger is a result of sin; that is, judging in the sense of condemning another person, selfishly demanding that another gratify our desires, and attempting through inappropriate means to control another’s behavior.

Having concluded that interpersonal anger can result only after having committed sin, is there anything in the nature of anger and its personal consequences that is also sinful? Yes, when sin is defined as anything that retards the growth or progress of an individual. For purposes of this analysis, I’ll assume that the anger is suppressed and not outwardly expressed in a destructive manner. Note, however, that anger

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will inevitably be expressed some way; that is, it may be expressed openly and outwardly in either a destructive, neutral, or constructive manner, or may be covertly expressed in terms of passive/aggressive responses such as tardiness, not keeping commitments, etc., or be entirely suppressed and manifest itself only in psychosomatic problems. As mentioned, I'll assume that the anger is suppressed. The act of getting angry at another leads one to focus one's attention on that other person in a negative, critical way. The focusing of one's attention on another individual deprives one of that time, that energy, and that attention to devote to constructive, progressive thoughts or actions, and, hence, retards one's growth and progress. When we become obsessed and controlled with these negative thoughts of another, that person has become our god, that is, the center of our attention and devotion. He has conquered us, has for the period of our anger gained control over us. The focus of bitterness prohibits a focus of love. Further, we do become like the thoughts we harbor.

Anger is also considered to be physically destructive—to the angry person. The exact results of anger are not really well-known. The following, however, are accepted. There is an excessive secretion of acid in the stomach, an engorgement and inflaming of the blood vessels of the stomach, and increased stomach motility (Wolf & Wolf, 1947). Accordingly, suppressed anger and rage have often been cited as a major cause of ulcers. Also, it is known that anger elevates both the systolic and diastolic blood pressure (Hokansan, J.D., Burgess, M., and Cohen, M.F., 1963, Affects of Displaced Aggression on Systolic Blood Pressure, Journal of Abnormal and Social Psychology, Vol. 67, pp. 214-218; and Hokansan, J.E. and Shelter, S., 1961, The Effect of Overt Aggression on Physiological Arousal Level, Journal of Abnormal and Social Psychology, Vol. 63, pp. 446-448), and it has been, hence, hypothesized that anger is a significant determinant in hypertension. At present the missing link is how temporary elevations of blood pressure become persistent elevations. (Novaco, op. cit., pp. 60.) Some headaches are also associated with anger. The term, “He gives me a pain in the neck,” is appropriately transformed to “He gives me a pain in the head.”

A couple of weeks ago while I was waiting with my daughter in the doctor's office, I noted a pamphlet entitled, “A Doctor Discusses Care of the Back.” Having a long waiting period, I decided to skim through it. Knowing this address was coming up, I was most intrigued by the following statement therein: “If I were to postulate one general rule when it comes to back trouble—and there would be exceptions of course—the rule would be this: Angry people get back trouble—unless they have a constructive way of expressing their anger.” (Neimark, Paul G. in consultation with Milton Glickstein, M.D. A Doctor Discusses Care of the Back, Chicago: Budlong Press Co., 1975, pp. 95-96.)

Thus, in consideration of the retardation of progress and the destructiveness to one's health, I submit principle number 3 that anger is not only a result of sin, but in terms of personal consequences is also a sin in itself. Numerous scriptures support this concept, a few of which I will cite later.

Principle number 4, the interpersonal consequences of anger are often, as we are all well aware, sin in the form of conflicts, contention, injuring the self-esteem, and denial of full dignity and respect for another, for example. There are, of course, ways to express anger neutrally and even constructively—an example of constructively being where one is led to confront another and to rationally and constructively discuss a solution to a problem. An improved relationship may well result. For a neutral illustration, I am reminded of the supposedly true story of an aged individual who was noted for his spriteness and his vigor. Upon being asked as to what he attributed his vigor and vitality, he responded, “When my wife and I were first married, we agreed that if I were to get angry, she would go in the other room until I had calmed down so we could discuss things rationally and meaningfully. If she were to get angry, I agreed that I would go outside until she calmed down. This outdoor living has really been health promoting.”

Now you may well be thinking, “Are you saying that we shouldn't ever get angry, using 'should' in the sense of a general principle?” Yes, I am saying that virtually all, if not all, interpersonal anger is destructive and as our scriptural theme states, “Let all bitterness, and wrath, and anger, and clamor, and evil speaking be put away from you, with all malice.” (Eph. 4:31) I cite additional scriptural and prophetic support. Matt. 5:21-22 states, “Whosoever is angry with his brother without a cause shall be in danger of the judgment....” Ah, it seems like we've got a loophole; as long as we have a cause, then we are not in danger of the judgment. However, as we read those same verses from 3rd Nephi, we find, “But I say unto you that whosoever is angry with his brother shall be in danger of his judgment.” (3rd Nephi 12:22) According to E. Cecil McGavin (Cumorah's Gold Bible, 2nd Ed. Salt Lake City: Sun Litho Co., 1948, pp. 63-64) “None of the modern translations contain the words [without a cause] since they're absent from the oldest and most genuine manuscripts. The conservative translators of the revised version were loyal enough to ancient sources to omit these doubtful words. Authorities insist that they contradict the teachings of Jesus and were likely added by some sensitive person who thought the Master would surely make allowances where one had a good cause for anger.” Many scriptures decry anger. To cite a few—“...be slow to wrath for the wrath of man worketh not the righteousness of God.” (James 1:19-20) “Wrath is cruel and anger is outrageous.” (Prov. 27:3-4) “Cease from anger, and forsake wrath: fret not thyself anywise to do evil.” (Psalms 37:8) “...anger resteth in the bosom of fools.” (Ecc. 7:9) In a positive vein, from the Doctrine and Covenants, 38:27, “I say unto you, be one; and if ye are not one ye are not mine.” Also, note the message of the angels to the shepherds regarding the birth of the Savior (Luke 2:13-14), “Peace, good will toward men,” a fundamental message of the gospel and purpose of the mission of the Savior.
From many statements by the brethren, I cite: "Anger that leads a man mildly to condemn his brother is crime." (President David O. McKay, *Pathways to Happiness* by Lewellen R. McKay, Bookcraft, Inc., Salt Lake City, Utah, pp. 321) From President Wilford Woodruff, "The moment a man or woman becomes angry, they show a great weakness, and so it is with any of us when we do anything wrong." (*J of D*, 1966, Vol. 4, pp. 98) From Brigham Young, "Do not be angry. I will permit you to be as angry as I am. Do not get so angry that you cannot pray; do not allow yourself to become so angry that you cannot feed an enemy—even your worst enemy, if an opportunity should present itself." (*J of D*, 1966, Vol. 5, pp. 228) "Never suffer anger to arise in your bosom; for, if you do, you may be overcome by evil." (Ibid., Vol. 6, pp. 290) "If you see anybody angry tell him never to be angry again." (Ibid., Vol. 10, pp. 295) "Never encourage malice or hatred in your heart; that does not belong to a saint. I can say in truth, that with all the abuse I have ever met, driven from my home, robbed of my substance, I do not know that a spirit of malice has ever rested in my heart." (Ibid., Vol. 10, pp. 197) In speaking personally about his life up to 23 years of age, he said, "I do not know that I had ever committed any crime, except it were in giving way to anger, and that I had not done more than two or three times." From Amasa M. Lyman, "Let rising anger be suppressed; let the place where it had its incipient being become its grave. Never let the mouth utter the word that should not be spoken." (Ibid., Vol. 10, pp. 87) And from Elder Boyd K. Packer, "But now, to both of you, as you enter the marriage covenant, never a cross word. It is neither necessary nor desirable. There are many who teach that it is normal and expected for domestic difficulties and bickering and strife to be a part of that marriage relationship. That is false doctrine. It's neither necessary nor desirable. And I know it is possible to live together in love with never the first cross word ever passing between you." (*Eternal Marriage*, BYU Devotional Address, 14 April 1970.) That anger is inevitable and thus okay is a philosophy of the world, not of the gospel, and, hence, from a gospel framework, principle number 5, the goal in therapy is not just constructive release of anger but the elimination of anger.

Some of you may be thinking, "Well, how can it be that we are not supposed to get angry and it is a sin for us when God Himself gets angry?" There are repeated references, as probably you are all aware, in the scriptures to God's wrath, God's anger, etc. Would God command us not to get angry and yet be a God of anger Himself? I submit to you that God does not get angry, that it is contrary to the nature of God, who is a God of love, to get angry. All right, how does one then interpret the scriptures in this regard? From Mark 3:5, after the Savior healed the man with the withered hand on the sabbath day, the people sought to accuse him. "And when he had looked round about on them with anger, being grieved at the hardness of their hearts, he said unto the man, stretch forth thine hand." Note that it says, "When he had looked round about on them with anger, being grieved for the hardness of their hearts." There are a couple of critical phrases in that statement. First of all, the Savior was grieved because of the hardness of their hearts. He was concerned about them, caring, compassionate. His professed anger did not arise, as does ours, out of a judgmental condemning of others, selfishness to get His own ends met, nor of the desire to control people and deny them their freedom. In the first part of the statement, "He looked about on them with anger," that statement is, of course, an inference. Anger as an inner feeling of hostility, resentment, wrath, ire, etc., was not present and, I believe, never is present with God. I believe God's actions are interpreted at times as arising out of anger because he applies consequences, including punishment, for violation of His laws. As we examine the purpose of His application of consequences and punishments, they are entirely to bless His children, to help them to change their behavior and obtain greater happiness. In this sense, God is not a God of punishment but only a God of blessing. He gives that to His children which they inwardly most desire and/or that which they most need to help them improve their behavior. Parents, when functioning appropriately, also apply consequences to their children's behavior to help them learn the truth. There are numberless scriptures stating that the chastisement from the Lord and the associated suffering that occurs are for the benefit of His children and arise out of compassion. For example, in Moses 7:37, in speaking to Enoch of the misery that would befall the wicked, the Lord says, "...wherefore should not the heavens weep, seeing these shall suffer?" From Acts 3:26, God sent His son, Jesus, "to bless you, in turning away every one of you from his iniquities." In Hebrews 5:8-9 we find that Christ himself became perfect through suffering, and from Hebrews 12:28, "Whom the Lord loveth he chasteneth." In other words, even God's punishments are manifestations of love—hardly a sign of human anger.

Another point; we read from the Doctrine and Covenants 1:24, "Behold, I am God and have spoken it; these commandments are of me, and were given unto my servants in their weakness, after the manner of their language, that they might come to understanding." In D&C 19:6-7, the Lord indicates that He has spoken of His punishment as eternal punishment and endless punishment, not that there shall be no end to the torment but "wherefore it is more express than other scriptures that it might work upon the hearts of the children of men altogether for my name's glory." In other words, the word anger in the scriptures as applied to the Lord, in my conviction, is so applied because we understand that language and for the statements to have a more significant, positive impact upon us.

I used to think that the term "righteous indignation" as applied to the Savior, such as when he cast the money changers out of the temple, was merely a euphemism. I no longer believe that. His application of punishment and consequences is righteous and a manifestation of love rather than "our" type of anger.

Some of you may be thinking, "Well, it says in the *Doctrine & Covenants*, Section 121:43, that we are to reprove betimes with sharpness." I suggest that sharpness in
this instance means pointedly, in a very direct, confronting way, in a manner that will not be misunderstood nor misinterpreted. "... then showing forth afterwards an increase of love toward him whom thou hast reproved lest he esteem thee to be his enemy." I suggest that the only way we can really show that increase in love, unless it be some time afterwards, is to have not been angry in the first place, but to truly have been moved upon by the Holy Ghost. For example, Elder Orson Hyde, speaking of the prophet Joseph Smith after he had severely chastised the brethren while on his journey from Kirtland to Missouri, says, "Did he turn to be their enemy because he had spoken hard things against them? No! His heart was melted with sympathy--his bosom glowed with love, compassion, and kindess... Every act of his, during that severe trial, gave additional assurances to the camp that, with all their faults, he loved them still." (J of D, 1966, Vol. 7, pp. 110)

Well, then, how do I keep from getting angry? There are some relatively sound approaches taught in the profession such as rational behavior therapy, elimination of self-defeating behavior, and an experimental treatment of anger control by Raymond Novaco, (Anger Control, Lexington, Mass.: D.C. Heath & Co., 1975) -- which to my knowledge is the most conclusive and best experimental treatment of the subject. Parenthetically, of the three major steps in therapeutic relationships cited at the beginning (problems, goals, process), my experience thus far indicates that it is in the area of therapeutic or behavior change process that the profession has the most to offer. However, I'm committed to the fact, principle number 6, that the gospel has the answer to eliminating anger. In a general sense, the entirety of the gospel is addressed to this goal. Some of the selective principles, as I see them, are:

1. Believe and commit. The first is to really believe that we are expected to get to the point where we do not get angry and that such is a possible goal, or in the words of Nephi, "I know that the Lord giveth no commandments unto the children of men, save he shall prepare a way for them that they may accomplish the thing which he commandeth them." (1 Nephi 3:7.)

2. Knowledge of true principles. As in the first step of repentance, there must be an awareness or recognition not only of the anger but of the dynamics of anger. There must be a knowledge of true principles, "The truth shall make you free." (John 8:32) We must be aware that it is we ourselves who make us angry. We must recognize that our anger arises out of not what others say or do but our condemnation of them for what they say or do, our shoulds and selfish demands on their behavior, our desire to control their behavior. From Brigham Young, "Much instruction has to be given to enable us to overcome our passions, and to govern and control our feelings and disposition." (J of D, 1966, Vol. 3, pp. 52) We must modify our perceptual templates--through knowledge.

3. We are stewards. Suppose all of us not only knew but always really believed that "the earth is the Lord's and the fullness thereof," (Psalms 24:1), that everything we have, all of our possessions including our body, is a gift of God and that we are stewards over our body and our possessions; that is, at this point we do not own them but are responsible for their care and keeping. Destruction or injury to, or theft of our possessions would be seen in a different light. If we recognized that they were in fact God's with ours the responsibility to look after them the best we could and His responsibility as the owner to assist us, we would be able to view such maltreatment differently.

4. Trials, afflictions for growth. We need to really believe that this world is a testing place for us, a place to experience life in its various ramifications with its vicissitudes and trials that we might grow and develop and perfect ourselves. As stated in the scriptures, Romans 5:3-5, "... we glory in tribulations also: knowing that tribulation worketh patience; and patience, experience; and experience, hope. ..." From the D&C 90:24, "Search diligently, pray always, and be believing, and all things shall work together for your good, if ye walk uprightly and remember the covenant wherewith you have covenanted one with another." Further, D&C 58:2-4, "... ye cannot behold with your natural eyes, for the present time, the design of your God concerning those things which shall come hereafter, and the glory which shall follow after much tribulation. For after much tribulation cometh the blessings." Again, from Paul (Romans 8:28), "All things work together for good to those who love God." Or suppose we were to recall that Christ became the captain of our salvation and perfect through suffering (Heb. 2:10, Heb. 5:8-9). In the words of two of our modern-day prophets: from John Taylor, "What if we have to suffer affliction? We came here for that purpose: we came in order that we might be purified, and this is intended to give us a knowledge of God, of our weakness and strength, of our corruptions, ... to give us a knowledge of eternal life, that we may be enabled to overcome all evil and be exalted to thrones of power and glory." From Brigham Young, "Every vicissitude we pass through is necessary for experience and example, and for preparation to enjoy that reward which is for the faithful. ... There is not a single condition of life that is entirely unnecessary; there is not one hour's experience but what is beneficial to all those who make it their study, and aim to improve upon the experience they gain." If we were to, yes, really believe and ponder these thoughts, then we would be able to and would thank God for even the irritations, difficulties, and provocations which come into our lives, and in a state of thankfulness could, of course, not be angry. We would take our irritations as stimuli for self-analysis, for needed growth, for possible derived benefit. Our ultimate objective in a provocative experience would be growth, not vengeance--which is the Lord's.

5. The beam in our eyes. Recognizing that anger arises out of our own selves, we would examine our own behavior to see to what degree we had contributed to the professedly inappropriate behavior of the other person(s). With the focus on how we could improve our behavior or remediate a negative influence of our own (or first casting the beam out of our own eye), (Matt. 7:3-5) we, of course, would not be focusing on the faults and failings of another.
6. **Forgive.** Suppose we are truly and purposely slighted. The counsel of the gospel is to truly forgive; "... ye ought to forgive one another; for he that forgiveth not his brother his trespasses standeth condemned before the Lord; for there remaineth in him the greater sin." (D&C 64:9) From our theme, for example, note that after the giving of the commandment, "Let all bitterness, and wrath, and anger, and clamor, and evil speaking be put away from you, with all malice, ..." the key to doing such is given. "And be ye kind one to another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, even as God for Christ's sake has forgiven you." (Eph. 4:31-32) Suppose we would say like the Savior (Luke 23:34) "Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do." Or, like Stephen (Acts 7:60) as he was being stoned to death, "'Lord, lay not this sin to their charge." Or as Paul, (II Timothy 4:16) even though all men had forsook him, "'I pray God that it may not be laid to their charge.'" Yes, if our hearts really were imbued with the gospel spirit of forgiveness, it would be difficult to get angry in the first place and impossible to retain anger.

7. **Help the offender.** Our focus needs to be on helping the needy and specifically a true or professed offender of ourselves: From Paul to the Romans (Romans 15:1-3), "'We then that are strong ought to bear the infirmities of the weak, and not to please ourselves,'" or from Paul's teachings to the Galatians (Gal. 6:1-2), 'Brethren, if a man be overtaken in a fault, ye which are spiritual, restore such an one in the spirit of meekness; considering thyself, lest thou also be tempted. Bear ye one another's burdens, and so fulfill the law of Christ.' If we were to ask ourselves, "What can I do differently?" or "What could I have done differently that would have helped the other individual to respond differently?" it would be difficult for us to get angry in the first place and impossible to retain anger.

8. **Self-discipline.** Self-discipline is another needed key principle from the gospel. In the words of two of our prophets: Brigham Young, ''How easy we get out of patience! We get a little hasty, and do a little wrong, because we do not train ourselves--do not conquer ourselves, and subject ourselves to the law of Christ." From Elder Packer, "I've had to evict some thoughts a hundred times before they would stay out. I have never been successful until I have put something edifying in their place." (Cf. The Parable of the Swept House, Matt. 12:43-45 and Luke 11:24-26.)

9. **Identity--a child of God.** We are aware that high self-esteem is positively related to a lower incidence of anger. A conception of and pondering of oneself as a child of God, as a person of infinite worth, as one who is always loved by our Heavenly Father and our Savior is most productive of this needed self-esteem.

10. **True charity.** An obvious key to not getting angry is genuine love as spoken of by Paul (I Cor. 13:4-5, 7), "Charity (or the pure love of Christ, Moroni 7:47) suffereth long, and is kind;... doth not behave itself unseemly, seeketh not her own, is not easily provoked, thinketh no evil;... beareth all things ..." or from the Doctrine & Covenants. 88:125, "The bond of charity ... is the bond of peace and perfectness." But how do we love everyone with whom we interact, and more particularly those whom we find difficult to love? Again, the Savior in giving the commandment also gives the way to fulfill the commandment; that is, (Matt. 5:40-44), "And if any man will sue thee at the law, and take away thy coat, let him have thy cloak also. And whosoever shall compel thee to go a mile, go with him twain." And following the statement, "Love your enemies," in the same verse he gives the key, "Bless them that curse you, do good to them that hate you, and pray for them who despitefully use you, and persecute you ..." Peter gives similar counsel, "Finally, be ye all of one mind, having compassion one of another, love as brethren, be pitiful, be courteous: not rendering evil for evil, or railing for railing: but contrariwise blessing; knowing that ye are thereunto called, that ye should inherit a blessing." (I Peter 3:8-9)

11. **Living with the Spirit.** We need the Spirit of the Lord, the companionship and influence of the Holy Ghost. From John Taylor, "What will enable you, brethren and sisters, to govern yourselves? The Spirit of God dwelling in you--you must have the light of revelation, or else you cannot do it. If you get the gift of the Holy Ghost and walk in the light of the countenance of the Lord, you can govern yourselves and families, that is, if you retain it by your good works." From Heber C. Kimball, "And how can you keep the celestial law without the Holy Ghost? You cannot ... How long will it be before the celestial law will be put into force?" Never, until you put it into force and execute it on yourselves."

12. **A Perfect Model Needed--The Savior.** And finally each of us needs a model that we can look to with complete and unquestionable faith. That model is the Savior. If we think upon Him, think upon His responses to provocative situations, think upon His compassion, His tenderness, His always evidenced caring, and if He becomes the focus of our pondering and of our thoughts, we will eventually become as He is. We need to remember Him in all things as we covenant each Sunday in partaking of the sacrament. If we are to represent the Savior, we need to attain to His character. (III Ne. 27:27) I love the scripture, Matt. 11:28-30. Note the keys to lightened burdens and rest. "Come unto me all ye that labor and are heavy laden and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you and learn of me for I am meek and lowly in heart and ye shall find rest unto your souls. For my yoke is easy and my burden is light." In order for our burdens to be light and to enjoy rest, we must take His yoke upon us and truly and deeply learn of Him.

I firmly believe that if we follow these scriptural and gospel guides regarding anger, we will not need to worry
about controlling it because we will eventually come to the point where we are living the celestial law and do not have any anger to control.

You may be wondering with my awareness of these points and having explicated these principles, do I still get angry? Unfortunately, yes, but not as often, not as intensely, nor for as long. When I stop and consider these principles, my anger fades away.

Until we achieve that goal of no anger, does the gospel contain explicit guides to the constructive expression of anger? Yes, it does. Time does not allow discussing them, but since one of them comes from the 4th chapter of Ephesians just preceding our theme, (verse 26) I'll cite it: “Be ye angry, and sin not: let not the sun go down upon your wrath . . .” Translation: deal with the expression of anger as it arises rather than allowing it to fester.

Are there not any positive functions of anger? With qualifications, yes. Anger does tend to mobilize our energy and increase the amplitude of our responses, and perhaps in some situations may be self-protective. Unfortunately, the responses made in anger tend to be more disorganized and non-functional. It may help us to take a sometimes needed corrective action with a person/situation that otherwise we would undesirably pass by. We may be led to confront a person where otherwise we wouldn’t, and if properly done, may lead to helping the individual and improved relationships with that person. Anger helps eliminate vulnerability by preempting anxiety and externalizing conflict. (Good or bad?) Principle number 7: with an understanding of the dynamics and functions of anger, probably the greatest positive value it has is similar to that of pain. As you know, pain is often a blessing in that it signals a problem that needs correcting. Likewise, my anger is a signal to me that I need to correct some of my thoughts, those which induced it, and a reminder of weaknesses to overcome.

As I conclude, I realize that the goal of elimination of anger is a tremendous challenge--that some may not think the goal is even an appropriate one. I suggest that we ponder some thoughts from Isaiah (55:8-9), “For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways, saith the Lord, for as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways, and my thoughts than your thoughts.” To use the three degrees of glory analogy once again, I suggest to you that the philosophy of “let it all hang out,” say what you think and what you feel, when, where, and to the degree that you experience it is the law of the celestial kingdom. For a very informative and interesting review of the evidence regarding the effects of ventilating violent emotions or vicariously gratifying them (it is negative), I refer you to Leonard Berkowitz’s article in the July 1973 issue of Psychology Today. For a similarly intriguing study of the relationship of venting anger to physical violence in families, I refer you to Straus, Murray A. “Leveling, Civility, and Violence in the Family,” Journal of Marriage and the Family, Feb., 1974, pp. 13-19. I suggest that just learning to constructively release anger is the law of the terrestrial kingdom, but that the law of the celestial kingdom is to eliminate anger entirely from our lives. While we are in the process of developing to that point, the counsel of Paul (Romans 14:22) may be helpful: “Happy is he that condemneth not himself in that thing which he alloweth.”

So I leave each of us, including myself, the challenge of living what I believe to be the celestial law pertaining to anger. In so doing we will not only improve markedly our own interpersonal relationships, increase our personal joy and happiness, but also enjoy better health, more energy, more vitality. Further, as we do this we will become really prepared to help those whom we serve eliminate the destructiveness of anger from their lives. The more experience I have in therapy and counseling, the more convinced I am that until we have really met a challenge ourselves, we have little success in helping others to meet it.

Also, I believe that with this commandment, as well as with most, if not all, others, we are in the same position as Adam (Moses 5:6) when he responded to the angel’s inquiry as to why he was offering sacrifices unto the Lord, “I know not, save the Lord commanded me.” Meaning, we will not really know the blessings nor fully understand the purpose of living this commandment until we have lived it. The blessings and full understanding and meaning come after having lived the commandment, not before.

A concluding analogy, from a portrait photographer. “When I plan to make only a small portrait, I put the negative over a low-intensity light, but the larger I plan to make the portrait, the brighter I make the light so that I’m able to see all the imperfections and clear them before the final print is made.” (Gothard, Bill. “Forgiveness,” Institute in Basic Youth Conflicts Manual, Oak Brook, III., 1974, pp. 8.) The larger we want our service and contribution to become, the brighter must be God’s light to detect the flaws in our life and enable us to correct them.

May the Lord bless each of us to live this celestial law and reap the promised blessings, I ask in His name. Amen.