

THE CRUCIBLE OF AWAKENING

Issue 03 July 2005

(Note: Because my designer is away on an extended holiday, this newsletter will be one of pure and plain text. Hopefully the next issue will be less aesthetically challenged.)

SPECIAL ISSUE

TERRORISM

If we condemn or flee anything in ourselves, it will multiply and fester and eventually occupy every exit, enlarging itself so as to seize our attention, encoding its outcast will throughout the apparently healthier regions of ourselves.

What we suppress suppresses us

The depressed valley can be a cradle, the vile marsh a breeding ground, the filthy gutter a canal, the silly argument a springboard into depth. For some, dung is filth; for others, it is gold.

What matters is not getting down about being down. "Down" is not "up" having a bad day. "Down" is where seeds grow, where roots fly free.

REVISIONING TERRORISM

In the wake of the recent London suicide bombings, the specter of terrorism dramatically reasserted itself, leaving America (and its allies) not only with a decreased sense of safety, but also with the nagging question of whether the “war on terror” is really winnable.

Despite official rhetoric to the contrary, it seems that America’s effort to eradicate terrorism is only breeding more. This, as I’ll get to later, is intimately tied in with our efforts to get rid of undesirable aspects of ourselves — which are ultimately only reinforced by our efforts to trash them, however much they may be, for the time, beaten down, chained, muted, and kept in the dustier outposts of our psyche.

Terrorism, whatever its political motivation, is basically *virtuous violence* for those practicing it, operating under the banner of ideological necessity and, more often than not, religious righteousness.

One person’s “terrorist” is another person’s “freedom fighter.”

Islamic fundamentalists and their American Christian counterparts loudly profess to be very different from each other, but are actually quite similar. Both are stuck in black-and-white thinking. Both are convinced they are right. Both dehumanize the other side. Both rationalize using whatever means are necessary to achieve their ends. Both are devoted to an eye-for-an-eye morality. Both spiritualize their violence, acting as if they are doing God’s Will. And so the Crusades continue, as bloody and brutal as ever.

Terrorists...

It is both easy and convenient to thus label those who violently oppose American interests, but not so easy to acknowledge (1) that terrorism has for some time existed as part *of* America (both at home and abroad) and other “non-terrorist” states, and (2) that each of us possesses, at least to some degree, the capacity for a violence as darkly dehumanizing as that of terrorism, regardless of how nonviolent we may deem ourselves to be.

Before fleshing out these points, let’s briefly consider “the enemy.” Those who act out terrorist agendas, whether Islamic or Christian, are not the enemy. Those

who attack their attackers are not the enemy. Those who won't fight back are not the enemy. That is, other people are not the enemy. Furthermore, that in us which is uncaring, violent, and fanatical is not the enemy, regardless of our adversarial stance toward it and our efforts to get rid of it, whether through psychotherapy, medication, or thinking nice thoughts.

So *who* is the enemy? Better to ask, *what* is the enemy? A crucial part of the answer is: Ignorance of our true nature. Such ignorance, which permits our egoity to assume the throne of self, is a kind of sleep, devoid of clarity and balance. Without wakefulness, we are prone to a psychological (and spiritual) myopia that allows us to *dehumanize* our offending others — and also the unwanted or darker elements of our own psyche — to such an extent that we can rationalize doing them great harm.

Terrorism has at its root a concretized us-versus-them mentality that seems to be branded into the flesh of its advocates. Internal terrorism is really no different — we, for example, may treat a certain aspect of ourselves with such disdain, such heartlessness, that it is but an outcast “it” to us, a valueless something to be eliminated, bombed with rejection, or subjected to the missionary zeal of our “higher” aspects. Yet only when we cease turning away from the disowned, ostracized, and outcast in ourselves do we truly begin to heal, to become whole.

Until we are committed to such inner work — and the integration to which it leads — we won't be able to approach and deal with external terrorism with much skill. This is *not* about totally disarming ourselves and undefendedly opening ourselves to our adversaries — nor about any other form of misguided passivity — but rather about making a shift in context that allows us to see the “other side” with true clarity and, yes, compassion. Only then can the needed steps and healing begin.

External Terrorism

Regarding the presence of terrorism in America, we need look no further than that organization for which America has such an abiding affection: the Mafia. In Webster's Dictionary terrorism is defined as “the systematic use of terror, especially as a means of coercion” — which pretty well sums up how the Mafia operates. The United States government has failed to eradicate the Mafia, perhaps in part because of a no-nonsense, let's-take-the-law-into-our-own-hands affinity it has — at least in its more shadowy departments — with

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the spirit of the Mafia. Also, the Mafia's entrepreneurial flair and tough-guy "taking care of the family" ethical code has considerable appeal for the American imagination, as movie-makers know very well. We may claim to abhor the violence and cruelty of the Mafia, but we are also fascinated by it, particularly by its unambiguous focus on righteous retaliation and revenge.

There's also a pseudo-terrorist — the boundary between terrorist and criminal being quite fuzzy — undercurrent in the United States. For example, consider the ongoing threat of someone going "postal" or opening fire in a school. As uncommon as these and related activities — like gang attacks and drive-by shootings — are, they still leave an imprint in the psyche that repeatedly announces: I am not safe in my own land, I am threatened. This is amplified by the governmentally-legitimized paranoia — various colored alerts for supposedly potential upcoming terrorist attacks, and so on — that, now more than ever, infest America.

We do, of course, get used to perceived danger, mostly by numbing ourselves to it — such has been our historical reaction to being threatened (the price of this has included, among other things, an *enormous* increase in depression since the 1950s). After all, the odds are very low that *we* will be next. But we nonetheless still *feel* the danger — why else would so many Americans (as opposed to, say, Canadians) carry their own guns? Westerns and derivative action films have often featured terrorist-like gangs who shoot up the innocent, to only later face the vengeance of the hero, who is more often than not a lone gunman or outlaw (*outside* the law, like a terrorist, government-sanctioned or not) who may himself strike, and *knowingly* strike, terror in his targets. Sweet, sweet revenge, helping wash the popcorn down.

When terrorist activity is practiced — and perhaps also legitimized — by one's own country with regard to other countries, we get so used to it — that is, to the extent that we are able to know about it — that we don't apply, and probably don't even think about applying, labels like "terrorism" to it. Euphemisms along the lines of "national security precautions" or "protecting national interests" are easier. However, American "intelligence" operations in Central America and the Middle East have brought undeniable terror and devastation to many of the people of those places. How concerned were most Americans during the Gulf War that so many Iraqi civilians were killed, while the dictator under whom they had suffered was allowed to remain in power? Coverage by the American media of that war gave little or no air time to this killing, preferring to show the bombing with antiseptic precision, as

if those being slaughtered were undeserving of any significant focus. When any government incorporates, to any degree, what could be called “legalized terrorism” and pretends otherwise, we are all diminished.

And so on. My point, however, is not to put down America, but rather to emphasize that it is not an innocent under attack by evil terrorists from abroad. The United States needs to stop playing the good guy (and victim), and ask, genuinely and thoroughly ask, why so many in so many other countries view it as a bully and exploiter. Regardless of all the rhetoric about America’s valuing of freedom, it has not convincingly demonstrated this in its foreign policy, again and again supporting and arming regimes that are obviously totalitarian. If “national security” seems to necessitate measures that are terroristic, then the official attitude generally is along the lines of “we’re doing this for America.” Those who oppose this are typically labelled, directly or indirectly, as un-American.

Like someone too arrogant to openly admit any weakness, America has not yet admitted to the central role greed has played in its dealings with other countries — greed for control, greed for oil, greed for position, greed for cheap labor, greed for resources. Many of those in other lands intuit this, and hate the United States for it, despite the undeniable good it has done through various foreign aid programs. If such giving had not been tainted by so often being self-serving, America would be not be so hated abroad.

To make things worse, the United States has had, and still has, a compulsive tendency to project its own darkness and unsavory qualities onto others. For a while, the Soviet Union was the primary recipient of such projection; now it is Islamic “terrorism.” Not the Mafia, not the IRA, not even the drug lords of Colombia, receive such projection — for these are more like “us,” ultraviolent as they may be. They are Christian. They are Western. How much longer will it take America to look in the mirror? The Minotaur gazes back at us with our own eyes, but we can only see this when we rub the sleep out of our “I’s”.

America still won’t look at its shadow, indulging instead in the dramatics of a Western heading toward an apocalyptic sunset. And what a long shadow it is, going back to America’s beginnings.

America opposes terrorism? Not really. When it’s been in America’s interests to support terrorism, it often has, or at least has turned a blind eye to it. Saddam Hussein was allowed to run free long after it was obvious that he was, in

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Stalinistic fashion, grossly violating human rights, because it was in America's interests to leave him be (not to mention having supplied arms to him).

But let's not be too hard on America; if any other nation had America's power and talents, it would probably slide into the same imperialistic stance, which would of course be rationalized not as imperialism, but as necessary intervention and "help".

If the United States cannot get rid of the Mafia, how is it possibly going to eradicate Islamic terrorism? Crime appears to be part of every society; we can minimize it, but not eliminate it. What a crime it is when we react to criminal behavior with criminal behavior! And what an opportunity America now has to shift from an Old Testament, eye-for-an-eye morality to a New Testament, compassion-rooted morality.

We need to recognize, and recognize with our whole being, that what we do to another, both in action and intention, we do to ourselves. Such recognition does not necessarily mean that we should cease protecting ourselves, but that we cease overbudgeting for defence, stop dehumanizing others, and not leave our heart out of whatever measures we may need to take.

Internal Terrorism

Let's now turn to the terrorist-like propensity within each of us.

Instead of sanely relating to our less desirable qualities, we tend to disown them, to avoid them to such an extent that we forget that they are part of us. Thus do we divide and fragment ourselves, becoming an assembly of many that turns its lost unity of being into a religious carrot, a conceptual neverland.

Turning toward that in us which we "normally" turn away from does not mean that we take on the viewpoint and agendas of it, but rather that we approach it with awakened compassion. The lepers within are not really looking for handouts, but for genuine care. The longer we push away, mute, or try to exterminate the things we don't like about ourselves, the more likely it is that when they emerge, they will behave badly, much like animals that have been kept too long in darkly cramped cages.

So what does this have to do with terrorism? More than we might like to admit. Our worldly opposition receives much the same treatment as that in

us which seemingly opposes the “real” us — rejection, revulsion, disdain, colonization, muzzling, drugging, declawing, evisceration, relegation to the status of an outcast “it” at best getting do-gooder programs from the “real” us. If we do not recognize and have some degree of intimacy with that in us which is cold, cruel, and self-serving, we pose a danger not only to ourselves, but to others, no matter how nicely we generally behave.

What really matters here is not the presence of this inner darkness, but rather what kind of relationship we choose to have with it.

Do we pretend it's not there, or that it's safely jailed? Do we play vigilant zookeeper to it? Do we shun, reject, or ostracize it? Do we romanticize it? Do we get Freudian or Jungian or pharmacological with it? Do we look upon it as lower or ungodly or perhaps as an error in the System, a bad seed or evolutionary throwback with which we got stuck? Do we play victim to it?

Only when we ceasing turning away from our inner savagery do we begin liberating ourselves from its dark imperatives, and then only when we cease relating *from* it (as when we act it out) or *in reaction* to it (as when we try to get rid of it or project it onto others). Our work is to relate *to* it, keeping ourselves close enough to it to see it in considerable detail, but not so close that we can't keep it in focus. Then we are neither identified with what we don't like about ourselves, nor dissociated from it. Instead, we are *intimate* with it, tossing it neither meat nor religion, but a compassion that's both clear-hearted and disarmingly powerful.

Until we know our own capacity for violence well enough to be responsible for it — which means not letting our anger mutate into aggression — we will find ourselves involved in collective violence, however indirectly. A Holocaust survivor, who at 12 watched her entire family being murdered by the Gestapo, told me that her eventual healing from witnessing such horror included “embracing the Hitler within.” This was not about condoning or spiritually excusing what had happened, but rather about ceasing to hate, so that healing — including the heart's pardon and sacred closure that is the essence of forgiveness — could occur.

Conclusion

Terrorism is what politically-oriented fundamentalism ultimately resorts to when it doesn't get its way. Terrorism is not much more than tribal aggression with deadly weaponry in one hand, and not-to-be-questioned rationalizations

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in the other. It seeks power over, no matter what the cost, whether it comes across as pure savagery, or as the more “civilized” versions of terrorism (like the hero in a Western, who, having been humiliated or worse, now is sanctioned by us to go ahead and slaughter the bad guys). Bombing the London subway is but the ugliest savagery, but is the napalming of women and children, or the starving of Iraqi children through sanctions, really morally superior?

Anyone who is at war internally, and who is not actively seeking to work it through, is, however slightly, supporting terrorism.

Standing in the victim’s shoes is not difficult, but standing in the oppressor’s is. Yet if we won’t do *both* — after giving our grief and rage suitable expression — and do so fully, we are left incomplete, stuck, burdened with resentment. What we do to another we do to ourselves. Realizing this, and more than just intellectually, is a marker of spiritual awakening, and also the beginning of genuine healing between opposing factions.

Love that touches all who died in the 9/11 attacks except the hijackers is not love. Love that divides humanity into “us” and “them” is not love. Love that sees forgiveness as weakness is not love. Only that love that excludes none from its touch is deserving to be called love. May we all embody such love.

May our grief deepen our compassion for all.

May our anger not turn into hostility or aggression, but rather fuel our healing.

May we know our opposition — both outer and inner — so intimately that we cannot help but skillfully deal with it, recognizing that in taking care of our opposition, we are taking care of ourselves.

May we allow our shock and pain to awaken us. May we ride the waves of the enormous turning point we are now at into a deeper, wiser humanity.

May we realize that our shared heart is vast, strong, and durable enough to hold and care for all.

To Know Terrorism From the Inside Means

NO MORE TURNING AWAY

Do not be so misled by endarkened feeling that you asylum it. If you keep shuttering its rooms, keep sealing it off, keep rejecting or otherwise disowning it, such feeling will become even more desperate and badly behaved, seeking your attention in whatever way it can, however destructive or painful.

But reach into that subterranean cell, that limping darkness, that emotional ghetto, that despair crowded with loneliness, and reach in wholeheartedly, and what is in there will eventually start reaching out to you all unfisted and vulnerably atremble, fitting into your embrace, revealing itself to be not a problematic it, but rather reclaimed you.

There is no real escape from our hidden or orphaned or outcast selves. If we keep denying them the attention that they need, we remain crippled, partial, fragmented, overassociating ourselves with purity and cleanliness while we pollute ourselves with higher-than-thou moral pretensions.

For most of us, there's not much we have not thought — *thought* — of doing. It's all there, the good, the bad, and the ugly, morphing in and out of noticeability in the hermetic privacy of our own minds. The heavier or more bizarre stuff generally does its time in the less well-lit corners, feeding on backdoor hits of attention from us. We toss the beast — the smell and feel of which is never that far from our living quarters — a bit of meat, perhaps while simultaneously engaging in “higher” activities, such as keeping up appearances, or trying to be nonjudgmental or spiritual.

But what we're really up to is staying out of relationship — that is, avoiding intimacy — with what we find ugly, lowly, or embarrassing about ourselves. We might even rationalize this distancing as being essential to the meditative practice of witnessing or dispassionate observation, as if separating ourselves from our less-than-flattering inner workings were somehow a spiritual act.

So what do we do with our personal yuckiness and aberrations, our demons, our dirtier denizens? Do we house them, do we relocate them, do we try to bury or murder or disguise them? Do we play zookeeper to them — letting them out to do our dirty work — or pharmacological trough, or literary agent? To what degree do we reject them? Sure, they are not *really* monsters, but only

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shadowed leanings driven crazy by neglect and misguided handling, but if we truly saw them like this, how could we justify continuing to violate them?

A favored housing project — simultaneously orphanage, holding tank, and trash-bin — for our personal shadow-selves is the conceptual dropzone called Hell, though it could be argued that cultures (and lifestyles) quite unlike ours provide an even more convenient dumping ground for what we can't stand about ourselves.

But in depositing so much of ourselves in those dirty foreign lands, in those ungodly religions, in those smutty back-alleys, and in that unseemly behavior of uncivilized others, we are literally all over the place, Humpty-Dumptyed near and far. All the King's horses and all the King's men cannot put us back together again, because the pieces — each waving its own flag — cannot by themselves see enough value in a reunion.

The Real, however, is not asking for a piece of you, but for *all* of you, not delivered as a forced coalition or a pabulum of shepherded submission, but rather as a true togetherness, a totality, a dynamic wholeness willingly enriched by its factional frictions and difficulties and strange mixes, along with the intimacy cultivated between them. The point is not to convert the broken many into the Undying One, but rather is to recognize them *as* that One, without any prerequisite denial, annihilation, or homogenization of their diversity.

Turn not from the beggar, so that you might cease degrading yourself. Turn not from the lame, so that you might cease hobbling yourself. Turn not from those who have turned away from you, so that you might better know the you who would reject or dehumanize others. Turn not from your own dark impulses, not so as to yield to their imperatives, but so as to meet them with such commanding tenderness that they serve rather than oppose your seedling Awakening. Turn not from your own turning away, so that you might enter a truer intimacy with your every shadow-self, rather than just homesteading in — and making the best of — a divided selfhood.

Terrorism Cannot be Effectively Faced Without

GETTING *INTIMATE* WITH ANGER

Not only is anger perhaps our most misunderstood and misused emotion, but it may also be (with the possible exception of fear) the emotion for which we have the most aversion. Given the frequently harmful consequences of acted-out anger — epitomized by violent behavior — as well as the sometimes unpleasant, hotly compelling quality of the actual sensations of anger, it is not surprising that we might want to *distance* ourselves from anger, or at least from the actual feeling of anger.

We may find such distancing not only through mental strategies (like calm-inducing reinterpretations of inflammatory situations) and spiritual practices (like mindful meditation) but also through anger-releasing approaches (like all-out woodchopping, pillow-pounding, full-throttle yelling, cathartic boxing, or aggressive play).

These practices do not always necessarily distance us from our anger, but their usual intent is to reduce, defuse, or discharge anger, as though it were little more than just a noxious or otherwise undesirable substance for which there was no other suitable remedy — or use — than domestication, muzzling, neutering, or outright elimination.

Even the practice of trying to be mindful of our anger, neither suppressing nor openly expressing it — as recommended in particular by many teachers in the Buddhist tradition — may just indicate a subtler aversion to anger, particularly in the sharing or expressing of its more fiery or confrontative energies.

In fact, many spiritual seekers may be largely drawn to anger-negating practices simply because these practices make a spiritual virtue out of avoiding what they would *already* (perhaps because of past negative or traumatic associations with anger) like to avoid. Some may misconstrue “mindfulness of anger” — which in of itself is not an anger-negating practice — to mean little more than a rejection of anger, especially in its overt expression.

However, instead of getting beyond anger or removing ourselves from it, we could become more *intimate* with it — but how can we do this if we will only examine our anger from a distance, or insist on emptying ourselves of its energies (i.e., getting it “out of our system”) when it arises? Developing

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intimacy with our anger enhances self-knowledge, integrity, relational depth, and spiritual maturation, providing both heat and light for what needs to be done, helping us to embody a passion as potently alive as it is responsible. Anger is not necessarily a problem, a hindrance, a sign of negativity or spiritual slippage, an avoidance of something “deeper,” nor a demonstration of unlove. It is our use of our anger that is the real issue.

Do we blame our anger for clouding or befuddling our reason — playing victim to our passions being one of our oldest alibis — or do we assume responsibility for what we do with it?

Do we turn our anger into a weapon, hiding our hurt behind its righteous, fiery, “pumped-up” front, fueling and legitimizing our defensiveness with it, or do we instead keep it as transparent and permeable as possible, remaining non-blaming and vulnerable even as we allow it as full or penetrating a passion as fits the situation? Do we use our anger to get even, to score points, to overpower or outdebate, or do we use it to deepen or resuscitate intimacy, to compassionately underline or flame through pretense, emotional deadwood, and life-negating investments?

It’s so easy to trash anger. It is so easy, in the name of angerphobia, to reject, crush, nicely incarcerate, bad-mouth or otherwise violate our anger, allowing it so few life-enhancing outlets that it, like an animal kept too long in a cage, usually behaves badly when finally released, thereby confirming our suspicions that it is indeed in need of much the same treatment as a savage beast that has somehow found its way into our house.

It is also easy, though far less common, to glorify anger, with equally harmful results. Exhorting the inhibited to “get into their anger” may just lead to a forced anger, an anger of performance, an anger that leads not to healing insight, but rather to an overreliance on simplistic (and possibly aggression-reinforcing) cathartic procedures.

It is, however, not so easy to cultivate intimacy with our anger; getting close to its heat, its flames, its redly engorged intensity, without losing touch with our basic sanity, asks much of us. But if we do not ask — and ultimately demand — this of ourselves, we will surely miss knowing not only the heat of anger’s fire, but also its light. As much as anger can injuriously burn, it can also illuminate — it all depends on what kind of relationship with anger we choose to cultivate.

Violence and aggression remain the subject of debate regarding their reduction and cause. Seeming solutions abound — more love, more understanding and tolerance, better social programs, stricter controls, stronger deterrents, and so on — yet the problem persists. The idealism of solutions aside, there is a potentially very valuable step to take: Becoming more intimate with — rather than moving away from or rising above or acting out — our own violence, our own aggression and hatred, our own mean-spiritedness and hardheartedness, not just intellectually, not just in therapy chambers, but fully. And the very intention to take this step begins with investigating our own anger...

Anger is an aroused, often heated state combining (1) a compellingly felt sense of being wronged (hence the moral quality of anger), and (2) a counteracting, potentially energizing feeling of power, both of which are interconnected biologically, psychologically, and culturally.

Rather than being a single, clearly perimetered entity, anger is a complex, ever-fluxing interplay of many states of mind and feeling. Desire, frustration, aggression, self-pity, righteousness, confusion, hurt, pride, shame, calculation, blame, feelings of abandonment — all these and more may arise and pass or overlap in a very short time, during which we conceive of ourselves as “being angry.”

Can we identify anger — which is not a single emotion, but instead a family of related emotions, ranging from annoyance to rage — through the observed presence of particular behaviors? Not necessarily. I can display none of the behaviors supposedly characteristic of anger, and still be angry. Instead of banging the table, shouting, or cursing the idiot who has dared to impede my automotive progress, I may instead in my anger try even harder to please you, or I may calmly and smilingly withhold a piece of information that I know would help you. Can we recognize our anger through observing our behavior? Not necessarily.

Similarly, can we identify anger through the observed presence of particular sensations or feelings? Two emotions — like envy and resentment — may feel very similar, having much the same physiological characteristics, yet they do differ. This difference is rooted in subjectivity (and intersubjectivity). We discriminate between emotions by attuning, however unknowingly, to the *context* of the situation.

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Because bodily sensations are usually so obviously involved in emotion, we may confuse them with emotion. There is, however, more to emotion than just the feeling of it. Anger is an attitude, not just a feeling. We evaluate emotion, but not feeling — we may speak of our anger as “justified” or “unjustified,” but would we speak of our feeling like vomiting as “justified” or “unjustified”?

Also, we can cease being angry, and yet still feel the very same feelings that a moment ago we identified as anger. For example, I am angry at you, raging angry, for breaking my prized drinking mug, and suddenly I find out (through a mutual friend who’s just come into the room) that you are completely innocent of doing so, and I am no longer angry at you. My evaluation of the situation has radically and instantaneously changed, yet the feelings I was experiencing just a moment ago — pounding heart, facial flushing, adrenaline-charged torso, shoulders knotting — are still present, albeit diminishing slightly. Can I now call this anger? No, because its evaluative framework — or emotional basis — has changed.

Anger is not necessarily the same as aggression.

Aggression involves some form of attack, whereas anger may or may not. Aggression is devoid of compassion and vulnerability, but anger, however fiery its delivery might be or might have to be, can be part of an act of caring and vulnerability. Nevertheless, anger in general remains all but synonymous with aggression.

Aggression is not so much an outcome of anger, as an *avoidance* of it and its frequently interpersonal nature and underlying feelings of woundedness and vulnerability.

Viewing anger as aggression — or as the cause of aggression — gives us an excuse to classify it as a “lower” or “primitive” emotion. Or something far from spiritual. But anger is far from “primitive,” though what we do with it may be far from civilized. Rejected anger very easily mutates into aggression, whether active or passive, other-directed or inner-directed. Thus does a means of communication become a means of weaponry.

Anger assigned to do injury, however subtly, is not really anger, but hostility. Anger that masks its own hurt and vulnerability is not really anger, but hardheartedness or hatred in the making, seeking not power with, but power

over. There is, however, a potential healing here: to reverse the equation, to convert aggression, hostility, hatred, and every other diseased offspring of mishandled anger back into anger.

This conversion, however, does not mean eviscerating or drugging the energy of such negative states, but rather liberating it from its life-negating viewpoints, so that its intensity and passion can coexist with a caring, significantly awakened attention. In this sense, the world needs not less anger, but more. Especially anger coming from the heart.

Violence — the brass knuckles of neglected or abused wounds — tramples or dynamites boundaries, but anger in many cases protects or guards boundaries, at best resolutely exposing and illuminating (or perhaps even flaming through) barriers to intimacy or integrity, without abusing those who are maintaining such barriers. As such, anger is moral fire. Anger that burns cleanly leaves no smoldering pockets of resentment or ill-will.

Violence is not a result of anger, but rather is an abuse — or violation — of anger.

An integral approach to anger needs more than apt behavioral assignments, more than cogent analyses, more than expressive practices, more than meditative equipoise, and even more than a fitting blend of all these.

A *relational* element is also needed, so that “anger work” does not occur just for the benefit of an isolated self, but also for the benefit of a more *connected* (and therefore social) self, a self that thinks and *feels* “us” as easily as “me”. Then anger becomes not just an emotion to be analyzed or expressed, but also a force of potentially enormous value in furthering relationship, be it dyadic, social, or even global in scope.

Healthy anger seeks not separation from the world, but raw engagement, in which love and care, rather than negotiation, shines at the hub of relatedness. Such anger uses separation to generate connection. It is the swordplay of healthy criticism, the fierily firm yet receptive deliverer of needed intensity or forcefulness.

The exploration of anger ought not to be the occupation of a few. Not to explore anger, not to be intimate with it, is a dangerous choice, leaving us cut off

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from the very forcefulness, judgmentalness, and energetic underlining that may already be enlisted in the service of aggression, hatred, and mean-spiritedness. Not to know our anger — and also “the” anger — is to keep ourselves in the dark, and in danger of being violent instead of simply angry.

Bringing our anger into our heart is not only an act of love for ourselves, but for all beings, since such a practice greatly increases the odds that we will not let our anger mutate into aggressiveness, hostility, and hatred, but rather into compassion-centered activity.

In no longer abandoning nor destructively harnessing our anger, we move a step closer to being the very love that we most desire from others.

Anger *can* be love — may we permit it to be so.

*Life outlives us yet we are Life
Do not simply chew on this as mere metaphor
It is, and it's also something more
about which I'd surely speak
if my words were not already
sea-gossamer dying on the waiting shore
and if I was not already consumed
by What Cannot Be Said
While I rock in the cradle
of stories that cannot be told*

NEWS

Work

I'll be doing Radical Opening groups in Vancouver July 23rd-24th, September 24th-25th, and November 19th-20th; and in Calgary October 29th-30th and January 7th-8th (2006).

July 29th to 31st I'll be giving individual and couple sessions in Ojai, California (about an hour and a half from Los Angeles).

August 20th I'll be doing a one-day group in White Rock.

I'll be doing a one-day group in Edmonton August 28th, plus giving individual and couple sessions there August 26th and 27th.

My one-year Psychospiritual Counselling Practicum/Apprenticeship will begin in September; there are still a few spaces left.

Writing

Darkness Shining Wild: An Odyssey to the Heart of Hell & Beyond: Meditations on Sanity, Suffering, Spirituality, and Liberation — my new book — is finally out! It probably won't be in bookstores until mid-August, but will soon be available from amazon.com. I have copies available if you want one sooner. Stephen Levine calls it “an absolutely extraordinary book...long waited for.” It's similar to my other writings, but much more personal, as you probably can tell by the first subtitle!

The books keep coming...I have another one, entitled *Freedom Doesn't Mind Its Chains: Revisioning Sex, Body, Emotion, and Spirituality*, seriously flirting with publication. It should be available by early September.

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