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CALMING THE TIDE

The world is inflamed. Chronic inflammation becomes disease and death. These are the laws of not only the human body but also of the collective organism that is humankind. Even the tide needs to rest. Even the shore needs respite from the battering of the tide. And where then does human well-being reside? In the calming of the tide.

We were given anger as a trigger for the flood of adrenaline through our system in precise, acute instances when our survival is threatened. Anger is a useful tool in certain concentrated moments. But our rage has grown so unabated and relentless that it has paralyzed in the release position the valve that would contain it. The floodgates are stuck open. Social change has often visited us in periods of years, pronounced of fury and frustration. Perhaps our current season is but the build up toward an explosive thrust forward. But this does not feel like anger born on the wings of justice and dignity. It feels more like an anger brewed in the fester of self-destruction. It does not appear to be leading us to emancipation or liberation but simply toward more anger.

Chronic inflammation causes disease and death because all of life is designed to exist in a state of balance, whether within organisms or between organisms. Anger is not a state of balance but a state of excitement or exaggeration. It strains our natural systems and their capacities. It scars the arteries and organs of our individual bodies and does the same to the unseen spirit-arteries that connect us in the social world. Chronic inflammation hardens arteries and hearts and exacts the same toll on societies. We lose compassion, patience, understanding, respect, regard, and the ability to communicate because we suffer a hardening of our cultural organism. Compassion requires pliability in order to flow just as arteries do to optimally channel the flow of what keeps us living. Our culture itself is losing its compassion as anger rages against its walls.

The way we treat each other is a reflection of how we treat our inner selves. How we regard each other tells a story about how we regard ourselves. If we are constantly attacking others with our anger, there must be a preceding act. We must have already been attacking our own internal being with that same anger—first the cup must fill itself before it overflows its boundaries and floods another.

Our own national leaders too often practice a campaign of spite and denigration against domestic “adversaries” and foreign “enemies”, rather than practicing the art of communication; the transmission of ideas; and the crafting of harmony. Our cultural father in this sense was a scowling bully. And what does this wrath gain the soul? Lacing our words and actions with the intent to cause hurt to others does not render their opinion mute or void; does not elevate our own opinion; does not make us superior; does not impress the wisdom of generations; does not ingratiate us to some mythical court where the titles of courage and righteousness are bestowed upon the most hurtful souls.

Even our democracy was born not of a democratic process but of the violent supernova of war. As children of this violent birthing mother we are responsible for reckoning with the violence that was born into us. This befalls our young society as we grow toward a national adulthood. The tone and tenor into which we are born and raised seeps deeply into our marrow, is born again in the way we live out our days. Now our human children suffer from the generational amplitude of an angry cultural rain.

We absolutely denounce our youth for shooting each other over a pair of shoes, a fashionable jacket, or for neighborhood territory. But who are their models for this behavior? We are their models. We who fly into a rage when we suffer a perceived transgression while driving; we who imagine slaying the other driver with the dagger of an extended middle finger, our faces exploding into bright red pumpkins over the slightest traffic imposition; we of spit and fury who attack each other with fists and furniture on national television—all because we have been invited to make a spectacle of ourselves (what state of being is this when we would embarrass ourselves simply because we have been invited?); we whose default mode for solving any conflict or perceived threat is hateful verbal assault and violence; we who kill to show our children that killing is wrong.

We are the teacher, the mentor, the master, the preacher when it comes to our children and their ways of relating to this world. Their behavior is but a billion newborn spiders bursting from the egg sack of our behavior. Connections all around us—between our inflammation and theirs—but we strain to see the link because of our huff, bluster, and blur. We are all wound up and spinning. We are the hurricane. Hurricanes cannot see clearly that which they destroy because they are too busy spinning. The panorama in front of them is truly blurred. There is no clarity of vision while whipped into a storm of anger. And so we miss the connections between ourselves and our children. The connections appear to us as spider webs—we only see them if the light catches the webs just right; or if we race through the web and it sticks to our face (another child dies). Because we encounter the connections in this uncomfortable way—as a nuisance—we brush the connections away, just as we brush the webs from our face. We are in too much of a hurry and in too much anger to spend time with connections and webs.

Our children are growing up angrier than we are. This escalation will continue until the boiling pot erupts and all things are destroyed. Then, in the sudden, chilling, silence of nothingness, we will finally pause to realize just how angry we all are. And that the growing roar of our yelling, screaming, stabbing, shooting, bombing, killing was not in fact a sign of progress but rather was a signpost along the way to our own demise.

When a family is suffering from the dysfunction within it, intervention has always been a tried and tested mode of resolve. We need now what elder cultures always turned to. As a societal family, we need an intervention. We need to gather around the circle and speak light onto what we have become; speak life into our walking of the healing path.

Transforming anger is a process that largely eludes this national culture. But much older cultures bring us lessons of the possibility. There is a catch. In order for children to actually learn something from their grandparents, they must first sit still long enough to listen to the story. They will not sit in the first place if they do not respect their grandparents as having something meaningful to offer. It often conflicts our national culture to respect such grandparent cultures enough to submit to them as teachers. But our stressed-soaked desperation has forced us now to turn more than ever in this direction for relief. This is a metaphor of cultural humility and opening ourselves up to the truth of our own dying.

If we realize our dying, is this enough to get us to stop running madly around the yard, and to finally stop and sit at the foot of our grandparent cultures? What they have to tell us involves transforming the energy of anger. Some people wish to label this concept New Age. Such an attitude is not only incorrect but completely the opposite of the truth. Transforming the energy of anger is a wisdom descended from the oldest ages of all. These ways of healing are not built upon self-centered relationships with external sources and pharmaceutical bandages. Their foundation is centered in the whole—the whole body of life and humanity of which we are a part. The mechanism and source are internal—of spirit, mind, and body. And the transforming process is constructed of good old-fashioned practice, practice, practice. These truths populate the core of most faiths. Whatever our religious or spiritual manner, we may incorporate the science and wisdom of transformation in such a way that our faith becomes *even more* effective and meaningful in our lives.

We need shepherds who will show us the way from the valleys of rage out into the meadows of compassion. When we perceive all around us to be menacing, who will teach us to recognize a smile? We need storytellers whose yarns and fables spill out truth that floods us and our children with daily milk of humanism: the art of existing in a way that nurtures humans *being*. But to stand for this today is to attract flame throwers who shriek that compassion is for weaker nations and wispier people. Every where we turn in seeking peace, there is a flame thrower waiting to scald us back into anger, back in inflammation. We audition shyly even before our young for the role of peaceful models. But because we have not invested sufficiently in our internal transformation, the first flame thrown from the threatened anger-monger blows us back. We leave the stage having never fully become the character of peace.

And surely peace is a character. We must learn her motivations. We must rehearse her lines. We must forget our rash-erupted selves and dive completely into this new being, this shepherd that waits within us all. She is an elusive habit to which we must trek. She is a place so high we are required to scale her slopes until our blood runs. Transformation is not supposed to come in easily through the window. We must chase it. Repetition of certain thoughts and the un-learning of other thoughts will cause a wonderful morphing in our very

consciousness. This change will open us up to our festering woundedness, from which feeds our roach-like prejudice. And what is prejudice but the act of molding anger and fear into a fireball for throwing at the monsters we believe chase us? All we manage to hit, for the most part, is people who happen to be in the way, people who have nothing to do with the monsters of our minds.

So now, who among us will be courageous enough to take internal steps forward toward changing the channel, transforming the frequency, calming the private clamor of inflammation? No pharmaceuticals exist for this. What ails the collective body human is what ails the personal body of human beings—an inflammation born of wounds unattended. There is a great healing to be done. This is the final frontier of our kind. Here, in the internal space that itself goes on forever, not out there in the external space beyond this Earth. There is this inner world, and that is all. And this world is ailing not of ideas and opinions but of a hostile wind. In this hostility our ideas and opinions become not seeds scattered for fertility but daggers blown with hurricane force through human hearts.

Let us go about finding our shepherds, the ones who will teach us something of the calming of the tide. In the silence of daily contemplation is a promising hint about where we may find these sage guides. Old cultures whisper to us in every moment:

The shepherds live within.

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