

Lao Tzu and Others on Why You Must Fix Your Anger Before Trying to Fix the World

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"The best fighter is never angry." ~Lao Tzu

There are so many different social movements coming into the media spotlight every year, each of them working towards a different agenda, and each of them working against other social movements. It is chaos. But in this chaos there is one commonality they all share: they are motivated first and foremost by anger.

While it is certainly noble to wish to change the world for the better, the vast majority of would-be-change-makers are acting out of anger. And while it can be argued that anger is a natural response to the dire conditions of the day, it is important to understand that acting out of anger is most often highly counter-productive to the aim of improving one's condition and position in life.

The great Chinese philosopher Lao Tzu understood this, and he knew that actions born of anger lead to further muddling of circumstances. He also understood that a truly effective warrior comes from a place of radical acceptance of what is, for this is the central message of Taoism.

In chapter 68 of the Tao Te Ching, Lao Tzu notes:

*A good soldier is not violent.
A good fighter is not angry.
A good winner is not vengeful.
A good employer is humble.
This is known as the Virtue of not striving.
This is known as ability to deal with others.
This since ancient times has been known
as the ultimate unity with heaven.*

~Lao Tzu, the Tao Te Ching chapter 68

From the Taoist perspective anger is seen as an expression of a conflict between the ego's perception of the way things are and reality. It is resistance to embracing all things in whatever state they may appear to be in, which is a trap of self-absorption. It is the result of a failure to accept what is.

The following passage from Lao Tzu's Hua Hu Ching explains this 'departure' from the way.

"Those who wish to embody the Tao should embrace all things. To embrace all things means first that one holds no anger or resistance toward any idea or thing, living or dead, formed or formless. Acceptance is the very essence of the Tao. To embrace all things means also that one rids oneself of any concept of separation; male and female, self and other, life and death. Division is contrary to the nature of the Tao. Foregoing antagonism and separation, one enters in the harmonious oneness of all things.

Every departure from the Tao contaminates one's spirit. Anger is a departure, resistance a departure, self-absorption a departure." ~Lao Tzu in the Hua Hu Ching

Speaking to journalist Bill Moyers in the following passage, the great American mythologist and author Joseph Campbell

tells a story about a Samurai warrior and anger:

“JOSEPH CAMPBELL: I will participate in the game. It’s a wonderful, wonderful opera, except that it hurts. And that wonderful Irish saying, you know, “Is this a private fight, or can anybody get into it?” This is the way life is, and the hero is the one who can participate in it decently, in the way of nature, not in the way of personal rancor, revenge or anything of the kind.

Let me tell you one story here, of a samurai warrior, a Japanese warrior, who had the duty to avenge the murder of his overlord. And he actually, after some time, found and cornered the man who had murdered his overlord. And he was about to deal with him with his samurai sword, when this man in the corner, in the passion of terror, spat in his face. And the samurai sheathed the sword and walked away. Why did he do that?

BILL MOYERS: Why?

JOSEPH CAMPBELL: Because he was made angry, and if he had killed that man then, it would have been a personal act, of another kind of act, that’s not what he had come to do.”
[Source]

You see, the world is an impersonal place inhabited by persons. None of us see eye-to-eye on everything, but all of us have the capacity to influence and shape our shared reality. When people, divided by ideas and propaganda, join forces in anger and lash out against the world, it only stokes chaos and resentment, pushing things further out of balance.

Therefore, it is essential to resolve the anger within yourself before attempting to resolve some external circumstance which brings out the angry version of you, which is the version of you least capable of improving anything, as

psychologist and scholar Jordan Peterson describes:

“There’s the angry you, and you know, you all come in contact with the angry you. It’s rather rigid. That’s the first thing you might say about it. It’s impulsive and short-term. It doesn’t think much about the past, unless it’s bad things about whoever you’re angry at, in which case it thinks about them a lot. It’s not too concerned with long-term future consequences, and mostly it wants to be right.” ~Jordan Peterson

The simple but powerful notion of overcoming your anger in order to be a true change-maker is also elucidated by the Dalai Lama in a short quote:

*“The true hero is one who conquers his own anger and hatred.”
~The Dalai Lama*

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