

## **Violence - when we lose touch with our soul**

*"Speak when you are angry and you'll make the best speech you'll ever regret."* Ambrose Bierce

All violence - overt, subtle, verbal, physical, emotional, psychological, spiritual, etc. is about one issue, and one issue only power. Generally, violence manifests in three ways: our actions, our words and our thoughts.

At work, at home, at play and in relationship, people tend towards violence when they feel threatened and powerless. A threat can be real or perceived. Folks resort to violence as an inappropriate way to re-establish their own sense of power over someone or something they perceive as a threat.

There are three kinds of violence: one, through our deeds; two, through our words; and three, through our thoughts.

At the very heart of violence is a disconnect from one's soul. When we disconnect with our soul, it's due to an emotional disturbance. How so?

There are two parts of our brain that do not operate together: the prefrontal cortex and the limbic brain. The prefrontal cortex of our brain is the "executive" functioning part, where we engage in rational thought, decision-making and logical thinking. When we're connected to our soul, we are orienting to, and focusing on, our experience through this part of our brain. To maintain this connection and focus, we need to be in a place of peace where we're not being combative or defensive in thought, word or deed.

Our limbic brain engages when we sense a real or perceived threat and we experience fear. In a state of fear we move into a fight, flight or freeze reaction. Fear causes us to disconnect from our prefrontal cortex. When we're afraid, we cannot think logically, rationally, or compassionately. Being fearful blocks most people from contacting the prefrontal cortex. When people are afraid, they do not think creatively, compassionately or independently. This kind of thought requires the use of the higher brain.

Those who have a well-developed prefrontal cortex can most often cope with real or perceived threats. Those with a less developed prefrontal cortex (and note that incessant engaging in electronic interactions Twitter, FaceBook, IM, video-games, etc., - prevents us from developing our prefrontal cortex) react rather than respond.

Those who have developed their prefrontal cortex are often able to cope with threatening situations can be "cool under fire." These days, it seems that these folks are few and far between

When we encounter a threat, when our higher brain wants to engage and our primitive, limbic, defensive brain is activated through fear, we have a conflict which usually results in our experiencing a heightened state of stress, anxiety, chaos, confusion and depression. In this mental-emotional state, our natural tendency is to seek "relief." Violence is one way we attempt to seek relief. Violence helps us act on, and discharge, the tension.

The good news-bad news dynamic of violence is that violence can give us an immediate release of the tension but the underlying cause, the fear, remains. Until and unless we confront our fear, and deal with it consciously and directly, we will not experience inner peace or well-being. We'll remain disconnected from our soul, from our True and Authentic Self.

*"The root of all violence is in the world of thoughts, and that is why training the mind is so important."* - Eknath Easwaran

To deal with the root cause of our anger, the fear, there are two actions we can take:

First, we can look at the truth of what is causing us to feel afraid. We can explore why we feel threatened, and if the threat is real or perceived. Here, we need to engage our prefrontal cortex and intelligently and rationally examine the validity of the threat. Is it real or am I creating a "story" to make it real? What are the facts and what is the truth?

Second, we need to access our own inner authority, our Higher Self, to ascertain right knowing, right understanding and right action vis--vis next steps, choices and decisions. This step requires a great deal of honesty, sincerity and trust that we have the inner strength, courage, intelligence and ability to be at peace while we assess our immediate experience. We CANNOT take this step while being driven by our limbic, emotional brain.

What makes these two steps possible and builds our capacity to be "cool under fire" requires a "spiritual" practice. By consistently taking time for meditation, quietude, silence and self-reflection we condition our brain to reduce the frequency and intensity of beta brainwaves that are heightened when we experience fear and stress, while building the capacity to produce an abundance of alpha brainwaves that supports us to feel peaceful and facilitate soul connection.

It's impossible to experience fear while we are producing strong alpha waves. In a relaxed and meditative state our mind can be receptive to our soul's impulse - the source of inner strength, love and intelligence. By regularly practicing of this inner state of connection, we are more able to disconnect from both "internal" and "external" real or perceived threats and gradually learn to trust the inner, higher authority of our soul.

In this place, we are able to make more creative, compassionate and life enhancing choices and decisions for ourselves and others. In this place of empowerment (and not reactivity), we are often able to extricate ourselves from a place of "victimization" and feel less need to be "violent" in thought, word and deed. We can feel secure within ourselves. Violent thoughts, words and actions are replaced by loving and healing thoughts, words and actions.

**So, some questions for self-reflection are:**

- Who or what threatens you? Are these threats real or perceived? What is the truth of these threats?
- Do you create stories about others causing you problems and then acting as if these stories are true when they may be false?
- Are you too quick to anger? If so, why?
- How do you maintain balance and freedom from irrational fears?
- When do you most often lose connection with your soul? Do you see any habits or patterns here?
- How often do you think vicious thoughts?
- Do you tend to be silently violent?
- Are you guilty of abusing others verbally or emotionally (e.g., sarcasm, gossiping, bullying, demeaning one-liners and put-downs, etc.)?
- Do you believe you're being rationale and logical when operating from a place of fear or threat?
- What was your experience around trust and betrayal like when you were growing up?
- Can you envision a world where you consistently feel focused, "cool under fire" and empowered?

*"Never use violence of any kind. Never threaten violence in any way. Never even think violent thoughts. Never argue because it attacks anothers opinion. Never criticize because it attacks anothers ego. And your success is guaranteed."* - Mohandas Gandhi

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