

Week 23 – Volcanic Mountains

“The paradox of volcanoes was that they were symbols of destruction but also life. Once the lava slows and cools, it solidifies and then breaks down over time to become soil - rich, fertile soil.

She wasn't a black hole, she decided. She was a volcano. And like a volcano she couldn't run away from herself. She'd have to stay there and tend to that wasteland.

She could plant a forest inside herself.”

~Matt Haig, The Midnight Library

As a young person, every time I erupted in rage, I was filled with such a deep sense of utter despair and shame. I believed I had ruined myself, ruined relationships, ruined my life and that each time added up to an irreparable place of rejection from God. I counted them in my journal over the years. There are many reasons for me to have reached this conclusion in my childhood and it took many years to understand the complexity of issue of anger.

Most people are very confused by this emotion within themselves and struggle with the shame of ‘losing their temper.’ But just as volcanoes and mountains are formed by the shifting tectonic plates in the earth’s crust, so too are these emotional eruptions the result of shifting tectonic plates and fissures through which the molten magma can erupt.

In early childhood, anger is the instinctual emotional response to not having a need met. The more basic the need, the greater the rage. An infant will first feel instinctual fear as the physiology experiences the pain of lack of food, milk, warmth etc. This quickly turns to the raging and wailing to try to attract attention so that someone tend to the helpless and dependent little being. That rage is in the molten substrata of the instinct of our being. Despair and apathy will eventually set in if no-one responds to the rage, with the pre-cognitive understanding that the child’s life has no worth or value to others, and so to itself.

So, first the child feels fear, then rage, then despair and apathy of shame and worthlessness. The roots of our anger are in very early childhood.

And isn’t this rage perfect, pure and good. It is in service of survival and a deep demand for value from the physical world into which the child is born. If it is recognized, the need can be met, and the system returns to homeostasis. Gradually the child learns to meet its own needs through guidance by having it’s needs well met appropriately and in a developmentally timely and correct way – neither too much, nor too little is expected.

And yet childhood rage is not recognized for what it is. Parents are tired, overextended, unaware, do not know how to meet their own needs let alone the needs of an infant and so the child’s needs, to some extent, and in some way will not be adequately met, or they will be overindulged. Our rage will be “tamed” with punishment or over-indulgence, if not in infancy, certainly by the age of the “terrible twos.”

When the needs and rage are indulged it breeds manipulation, control, demand, dependency, entitlement, spoilt brats who rule the system with their anger to get everything they want (not need). Consider the beliefs of someone like this? The language they might use? The tactics they might employ to get others to meet their needs?

If the anger is punished and not recognized as a cry for a need to be met in some way, the child has to be grown up before it is developmentally appropriate for the demands placed on her and, on the surface,

becomes self-reliant, self-responsible, over perfectionistic, very reliable and unable to have relationships that are mutual and intimate. The rage is repressed, suppressed and denied until it starts erupting through cracks in adulthood. Consider the beliefs of someone like this? The language they might use? The tactics they might employ to get others to meet their needs?

Any combination of the above can happen with variations of response in the adult.

Pause and consider right now how you were parented? Were you over-indulged in your rage, or punished, or inconsistently got both? Did you get one response from one parent and one from the other? How have you parented, if you are a parent? Can you see how the patterns of dependency and co-dependency that were formed within and without?

The rage is now covered – just like a volcanic mountain is covered and seems outwardly beautiful – with trees and streams. The deep anguish and inner molten pressure builds up inside, while the outside looks perfectly lovely. And then one day someone walks on your mountain and trips over the trigger and the inner heat rises up and erupts all over them. It scorches them and burns away the external prettiness of your own mountain.

The good news is that the molten lava that erupts from the core is very rich in minerals and when it cools it is the richest soil that can lead to luscious, verdant new growth. But it takes time and it takes effort for the magma to cool enough and erode enough for new life to grow.

The work is to recognize the mechanisms at work. Scientists work around the clock monitoring the most dangerous volcanic mountains in the world, trying to understand the mechanisms, triggers and conditions under which they might erupt. And so, you too must become the scientist of your own life.

We are talking about very huge eruptions until now, but there are lesser, minor leaks and spills from the core. They are the judgments, criticisms, irritations, annoyances, anger, projections, blaming, frustrations of your life. If we examine each of them very carefully, we will see the mechanism very clearly.

Someone (anyone) can represent the original parent in how they did not meet your childhood needs. It could be a look, an attitude, a word, a way of moving, how they have the same color eyes. It could be a lack of responsiveness, being ignored, slighted, judged yourself, criticized, them being overly solicitous and trying to meet your needs.... It could be ANYTHING.

And this is completely dependent on your experience as a child.

The physiological core emotion of rage and shame is triggered externally and internally, and you are back in a memory state. Before you can even think, you are acting in the same way you did as a child – either attacking and demanding or acquiescing and appeasing. And then after all that you create the secondary shame of how you behaved, or you self-righteously justify the way you just behaved. Your behavior when you are triggered will, again, quite instinctually, be passive and appeasing, aggressive and attacking or passive aggressive – acquiescing in a stubborn and resistant way.

The trouble is that most people are hostile and angry, but they do not even recognize the feeling until it reaches volcanic proportions. It is generally acceptable to walk around expressing repressed rage in small ways of hatred, judgment, projection, criticism, superiority, attacking, gossiping, giving in, appeasing, caretaking, addictions, perfectionism etc. etc. If we find ourselves behaving in these ways, then you can at least know intellectually that you are angry. The work is now to feel the anger and to experience it as a memory state of childhood. Until you do you will continue to express it in self destructive ways. It might be terrifying to be aware of the molten rage boiling in your core. It is important to know that feeling it and being with it with

understanding and love, will lead to the internal limit of not erupting either internally or externally can happen. You are now the adult in charge of your own inner rage instead of others (parents and teachers) being ineffectually in charge of your anger.

Start working with your anger by recognizing it. See if you can name the degree of anger you are feeling on an internal thermometer from 1 – 10. If you do not recognize anger before 4, you will probably act it out, or in, in some way. It is compelling to discharge the pressure of it once the 4 level has been reached. It is, of course, still in your control and is your choice, it is just much harder which is why people say, “I couldn’t help it – it just happened.” Not true, but those inner forces are powerful.

When you can recognize the feeling, then contemplate these categories to gain more clarity:

1. What need is not being met?
2. What other feelings am I having (hurt, pain, jealousy, fear, shame, helplessness)
3. What automatic beliefs and self-talk am I saying to myself? It will be a variation of either I am bad, wrong and unlovable, or the other person is.
4. What is the situation and how is it replicating a childhood situation?
5. What images am I having of hurting myself or the other person
6. What defenses am I wanting to use? Am I being passive, aggressive, or passive aggressive in some way?

By the time you have done this work, you will be in charge of your own anger and be able to correct your thinking, tend to your feelings with compassion, set limits with your behavior and meet your own needs. But it will take time and effort.

Next week we will talk about cleaning up the devastation on your mountain for the times in which you have not had awareness, or a practice and have erupted, so that we can turn the ashes and solidified lava into fertile soil.

We have to be loving and responsive adults to our inner child’s rage if we want to create world peace. The Atomic Bomb – is the equivalent of the metaphor of the volcano – man can actually do way more harm than the rest of the natural world.

Recommended Reading: Winchester, Simon. [Krakatoa. The day the world Exploded.](#)