



Introspecting Intentions

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While not the intended effect, the outcome was surprisingly satisfying. An old man contemplated his recent past as his feet scuffed dust and pebbles. He made his way out of the city, back bent. His sun and wind burnt head hung low. His arms dangled, swaying in time with each dragging step. His ruffled thin white hair swayed with each step. As he passed, people stopped what they were doing, stared, and whispered to each other. The old man paid no attention. He continued contemplating.

Looking at the road he mumbled as he thought about his unwanted satisfaction, "It comes not from the fact that I liked the outcome. I hate the outcome. The satisfaction is surprising. Why? I did not expect to have any satisfaction. All I expected was anger. I knew the outcome. Yes, the strange satisfaction comes from the fact that I knew all along what the outcome would be and it came to pass."

"The expected came and so I am angry. I am so angry that I could cry; but no tears come. My eyes cannot produce tears. I am so angry that I want to hit something; but my muscles cannot produce any more movement than the slow pace I

maintain. I am so angry that I want to die; but I cannot die. Man is forbidden to take his own life."

The tired old man continued trudging out of the city; slowly increasing his elevation. "It would have been easier to take the low road, the one that goes to the river. I could have taken a bath, and allowed the clean cool water sooth my parched skin."

His face tensed, "No, I do not want to go to the river. I want to go to the high grounds, the land that overlooks the city." Slowly and angrily, the weak man moved along, making his way to the edge of a precipice that overlooked the bustling city.

The old man's anger generated a sharp pain in his chest and made his head throb. Yet the smidgen of satisfaction formed a twisted smile. He had predicted the outcome correctly. "That's what makes me the angriest. I knew what would happen and I tried to stop it. I could not. I knew the outcome. So I did not want to participate. I will not accept this. It can't be the end. It can't be!" The old man clutched his hands, turned his head to the left, and glared down over the precipice at the people making

their way on the river road. "I would curse you if I could; but you have already been blessed. My curse would go unanswered."

The old man had seen the blessed outcome with his eyes, smelled it with his nose, and touched it with his hands. The more he thought about the outcome the angrier he grew.

"Only one other time in my life have I experienced similar anger. I was a young man. I saw what they did to my peers. They beat them and left them to die. They were laughing at their evil work. That day I consoled myself with the thought that one day they would receive their punishment. Yet now the enemies who had pulverized my friends are somewhere in that city. They are celebrating. They are blessed. Yes, I have a right to be angry. They are alive and celebrating when they should be dead. I have a right to be angry. They did not get what they deserved. Where is the justice? If this is just, then I want to die."

The old man reached a place east of the city. The sun's heat parched his lips. The light dry breeze dehydrated his eyes. Every cell in his body ached. A sane man would have gone to the river to recuperate. He did



Introspecting Intentions

not. He stopped, looked toward the city, and accepted the view. He made a shelter and sat in the little shade it provided. A sane man would have gone to the river. Instead, the old man sat in his meager shelter and glared at the city.

“The city contains ignorant people. They are dull and crazy. Most are insane. They do not know the difference between wrong and right. They hate. They kill. They murder, rape, and maim. They’re arrogant, proud, and rich. They are selfish. None deserved to die more than they. Yet, they are alive and they are celebrating. They are blessed! I hate it. I am angry and I want to die. I cannot take my life. I want them to die. They do not.” The old man clenched his hands until his finger nails dug into his palms and bled. He ground his teeth until his jaw ached.

The remainder of the day the old man sat staring at the city. “There is hope. Perhaps it was a ruse. It was false and they will die.” The old man gazed at the city until the sun set. Then he lay down in the dirt and fell asleep.

The angry old man awoke with the sun and looked toward the city. “It is still intact! The people are alive.” They hurried about; cooking, buying, selling, eating, walking, and talking just as they did every day. The old man pounded the ground with tightly clenched fists. “I hate

them. I wish they were dead.” He moaned and pounded for a long time; then he stopped, stood up, and yelled with his arms stretched out toward the heavens, “I want to die.” Nothing happened.

His current anger spent, the man sat down and noticed something else. A large leaf castor oil plant had grown over night. It clung to his shelter, casting a complete shadow on his seared head. The shade relaxed his muscles. He sighed. “Thank you. I appreciate the love that this vine represents. I love the plant and I love you. I love the shade.” He was cooled by love. “Perhaps I am right.” The old man decided to spend the day watching the city. The old man sat and hoped. Yet, nothing happened. All day the people celebrated. The sun set, the city went dark, and the old man fell asleep under his shelter and the lush plant that grew around it.

The man awoke the second at sunrise too. The first thing he did was look toward the city. He raised his weak hands, sending streaks of pain down his arms. “It is still there!” he yelled with all his might. He stood and walked in slow circles, “The people are still there. They are moving around. They are cooking, buying, selling, eating, walking, and talking just as they did every day.” He fell to his hands and knees. He moaned as he ground his fingers and toes into

the dirt and pebbles. “I want to die,” he stated as his torso hit the ground.

Jonah moved, stretched, and moaned. As he did so his hand hit something hard. He stopped his gyrations, looked up and noticed something else. The vine that had clung to his shelter was dead. He studied the plant in amazement. Its roots and stalk were chewed by a worm. The roots hung in the dust and pebbles. Its dried stalk was bent and its branches hung low. Its withered white leaves swayed in the dry breeze and slowly fell one by one to the ground. The sun blazed on Jonah’s head. A scorching east wind whipped his dry skin. He wondered if the love represented by the plant was gone too. The old man grew faint. Anger consumed him. Even the surprising satisfaction he had known two days before was gone.

The old man grabbed the stalk and yanked at it. “Why did you die? You’re not suppose to die.” He ran to the river, collected water, and poured it on the dead roots. The old man stood staring at the plant. After several silent minutes he slowly turned around and looked at the city. The man looked up and yelled, “The plant is dead!”

“Do you have a right to be angry about the vine?”

“I do,” Jonah said. “I am angry enough to die.”



Introspecting Intentions

But the Lord said, “You have been concerned about the vine, though you did not tend it or make it grow. It sprang up overnight and died overnight. But Nineveh was more than a hundred and twenty thousand people who cannot tell their right hand from their left, and many cattle as well. Should I not be concerned about that great city?”

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