

MALICE

The Denial of the Unique Self Encounter

THE OPPOSITE OF A UNIQUE SELF ENCOUNTER is an encounter motivated by malice. *Malice manifests as both the denial of, and the attempt to destroy, the Unique Self of the other.* The desperate attempt to destroy the Unique Self of an other is based, paradoxically, on a primal recognition of the other's Unique Self, and a feeling that somehow the other's self makes one less, or not enough.

Most of the literature of the human potential movement and its daughter, the New Age movement, ignores or even denies malice. But you cannot skip malice if you want to truly understand and practice love. *Love is a Unique Self perception that creates pleasure and joy in its wake. Malice is a Unique Self distortion that creates envy and hatred in its wake.*

Malice is a verb in the same way that love is a verb. However, it is essential to remind you that being aroused to malice does not mean that you let yourself be seduced by the arousal. You have every ability to clarify your arousal and transmute it into goodness and love. The kinds of people that might arouse you to malice are:

- People who remind you that you are not living your Unique Self.
- People who you think, by their very existence, are taking away your ability to let the radiance of your Unique Self shine in the world.

- People you believe stand in the way of you fulfilling your Unique Self.

In these situations you will be sorely tempted—if you think you can get away with it—to seek to destroy their Unique Self in order to cover up the inchoate yet agonizing pain of your disconnection from your personal essence.

Know in advance that you will experience great resistance to this teaching. Your primal, desperate desire is to deny any connection between yourself and malice. It may be that you have never acted it out. This is good. Or you may be one of the people that M. Scott Peck describes in his book *People of the Lie*. I have called them people of malice. People of malice are people whose own early pain has made them evil in the way that they act in the world. *The core expression of people of malice is that they attack, undermine, or demonize others, instead of facing their own failure. The attack may be subtle or overt. However, it is always covered by the sophisticated fig leaf of respectability, or even by noble motives.*

You may know someone like this; they seem respectable, even noble, yet underneath the veneer, they have wreaked brutal destruction—often on those who were or are in their closest circles of intimacy. This might include parents driven by malice toward their children, an employer toward an employee or the converse, friends and colleagues, a teacher toward a student, or a student or group of students toward a powerful teacher. Their malice is almost always covert. Echoing Milan Kundera, it would be correct to say, *“Since malice can never reveal its true motivation, it must plead false ones.”* Leading British psychoanalyst Joseph Berke informs us that malice is to moderns what sex was to Victorians.¹ It is to be repressed at any price. It is an obsession, best denied, avoided, or forgotten. The perpetrators of malice often claim to be “protecting” some imagined victim from harm. If you even suggest they might have any other motivation that is less than the pure mask they don in the world, they are outraged. There is nothing the people of malice fear more than having the lie of their motivation or the ugliness of their hidden machinations exposed. There is a ferocity to malice. This makes it intuitively frightening for people to confront. So most people withdraw into the shade of their own cowardice, covering their coward’s tracks with well-reasoned and plausible disclaimers.

Often the coward finds it easier to energetically join with the movement of malice than to oppose it. This is the worst and most deplorable form of laziness, albeit one of the most common, even if hidden from the public eye. It might take the form of blaming the victim or exaggerating their responsibility. If in some sense “he had it coming,” it is easier to rationalize joining the executors of malice than it is to arouse the discernment and courage necessary to oppose them.

In the great spiritual traditions, much of the judgment after our death about who we were in this world, as well as the greatest creator of karma, is related to *how we behaved when confronted with malice that was disguised as a righteous cause. Did we speak truth to power? Or did we cleverly disguise our cowardice with a thousand rationalizations, even as the Unique Self of your friend, colleague, or teacher was thrown under a bus?*

Malice Is Painfully Private, Publicly Dangerous

Let’s look more closely now at the phenomenon of malice, so you will be able to identify it clearly. It is absolutely necessary to liberate the world from malice. As you read, keep in your heart that malice is a poison that threatens the blooming of Unique Self more than anything.

Malice operates through a simple four-stage process: Malice (1) perceives genuine flaws, (2) exaggerates or distorts them, (3) minimizes the good in the attacked person’s character, and (4) absurdly and insidiously identifies the person with their distorted caricatures, painted by the purveyors of malice themselves.

The internal perception of malice operating in you or your friend is the same as love, for malice is love’s opposite. *Just as love is Unique Self perception, malice is Unique Self distortion.* The malice-motivated distortion happens in two ways. First, you might see the Unique Self of the other, but since that image provokes the pain of your own lack, you try to tear it down. Or second, distortion might mean that you cannot see—you see only distorted images of the other—you have lost the ability to see with God’s eyes.

In malice you sense the awareness of something provoking you as either an unbearable feeling of intense pleasure or as a “grenvius” vexation. “Grenvy,” a term coined by Joseph Berke, is the ill-fated brew of greed and envy that produces the potion of malice.

Malice elicits forceful attacking and even what psychologists in the field have called annihilating behavior. Malice is not connected with legitimate causes at its core—it always hides behind them. It is painfully private, yet when it bursts out of control, it is publicly dangerous in the extreme. It is fed by what Berke calls a distorted “inner world of fact and fantasy, brought about by the confused interplay of perception, memory, and imagination.”

“There is bad intent that arises in the world; there is intent to hurt and do evil to other people—we have to confront that.” This sadly correct truth was spoken by my beloved friend Ken Wilber several years back in a public dialogue we did on the topic of evil in the world. Ken was responding to a questioner who made the all-too-common argument that all the tragedy that befalls us is ultimately our own creation, and thus we must take 100 percent responsibility for everything that occurs. The New Age narcissists cannot bring themselves to bow before the mystery, so they claim all power to themselves.

Of course, more often than not, the hidden agenda is that the victim has no right to be outraged or demand justice. Since the victim is the creator of their own reality, the ones who have been hurt should be taking responsibility. This cleverly lets the inflictor of pain off the hook. The moral context of justice and injustice, right and wrong, and good and evil is undermined by a subtle relativism in which no ethical discernments are genuinely possible. Or, in a related scenario, the abuser themselves claim to have been abused, thus legitimizing the pain inflicted by them on the true victim. This type of claim is one of the most aggressive and insidious disguises of malice.

This New Age view has found a strange bedfellow in distorted American presentations of Theravada Buddhism. Since everything is the result of cause and effect, you must be the creator of everything in your reality. If you take total, 100 percent responsibility for everything, you will find your way to spiritual depth and maturity. So the popular dharma goes.

This view is not all wrong. It is in fact a powerful and desperately needed antidote to the victim culture that so pervades much of the American spiritual scene. We have been ushered into a new world where any hurt party claims victimhood and uses the claim to inflict all manner of abuse. This often comes together with an abdication of responsibility

and often the filing of some sort of suit or complaint. The filing of a complaint gains the ostensible victim a long list of goods, far beyond finances. Attention, focus, community, love, and a feeling of power and aliveness are high on the list. Those who encourage and even instigate false complaints are often driven by hidden or disowned malice.

Often, the true predator is the victim who inflicts cruelty and pain on their alleged tormentor to a degree far greater than whatever imagined or even genuine hurt the victim themselves may have felt. Disguised as the victim, the true predator receives the communal love and support. The true victim, cast as the predator, is debased, dehumanized, and ostracized in a thousand cruel ways.

In this context, it needs to be said that while the Buddhist teaching, with its demand for self-responsibility, is a desperately needed and crucial counterweight to the abdication of responsibility through the *false* claim to victim status, it is only part of the story. At the same time, what is clear from the scenario of false complaints is that self-responsibility is no more than a partial truth. *Whenever something happens, you must identify what part you played in creating the conditions that allowed for suffering to occur.* You may have contributed 5 or 50 percent to the system. Even if you have only 5 percent responsibility, you must take 100 percent responsibility for your 5 percent. But not more. The other part of the story is often the malice of other players in the situation.

Taking total responsibility is actually a disguised form of hubris. It is a refusal to give up control. In this case, the control is maintained precisely through “taking responsibility.” But your insistence on being the sole creator of your reality ignores the larger creative field of which you are but one small part. It ignores the greater evolutionary intelligence at work in and through your life. It ignores the mystery, and blithely dismisses all other people in the story as but supporting actors in your narcissistic control drama.

Total control of your life in the form of total responsibility is not an expression of spirit—quite the opposite. It is one of the more clever disguises of the narcissistic ego.

What is appropriate is for you to identify your contribution, if any, to creating the conditions that led to your suffering. You can and must take 100 percent responsibility for your part. This, however, is a more nuanced, sacred, and humble posture than 100 percent responsibility for everything.

This posture bows before the mystery, even as it recognizes the possibility of malice.

The Murder of Christ

Humans seek the death and destruction of others, even as we seek their happiness. Both drives and both voices exist in every person who lives in the separate self of the ego. We think that malice only appears “out there,” that it does not show up in respectable or polite society. Sadly, this is completely untrue. Lynch mobs manifest in many and varied ways. The prime movers in lynch mobs are energetically attracted to each other. They find each other. They move in unison, almost always hiding their own malice, even from each other. They are drawn to the lynch party to partner in destroying the common energetic emotional threat.

Freud’s brilliant student and colleague, Wilhelm Reich, called this not-uncommon phenomenon “the murder of Christ.” *The murder of Christ is the attempt to murder life force.* All sorts of reasons justify the crucifixion. A thousand demonizations build the cross. The murderers support each other, often outdoing one another in their maligning of Christ. “See, he is calling himself Christ,” they say, in order to give evidence of his narcissism.

Remember that malice is sourced in Unique Self distortion. This is the matrix of the endless cycle of demonizing by those disconnected from their daemon and incapable of owning their demon. They lack the spiritual courage to name what moves them in their breast, which is that “he,” the always-flawed Christ they seek to destroy, has a light that threatens their light. He has an appeal, a draw, that is different from theirs. They cannot explain it. So they seek out his imperfections, magnify them a hundredfold, distort and add some major dose of lies for good measure, and the necessary mix for murder is set. Hidden envy, jealousy, and greed are the basic ingredients necessary to conjure the witches’ brew.

This is the source of the “Foul whisp’rings . . . abroad” that Shakespeare saw as the source of villainy and even murder. As author Philip Roth describes it:

The whispering campaign that cannot be stopped, rumors
it’s impossible to quash . . . slanderous stories to belittle your

professional qualifications, derisive reports of your business deceptions and your perverse aberrations, outraged polemics denouncing your moral failings, misdeeds, and faulty character traits—your shallowness, your vulgarity, your cowardice . . . your falseness, your selfishness, your treachery. Derogatory information. Defamatory statements. Insulting witticisms. Disparaging anecdotes. Idle mockery. Bitchy chatter. Galling wisecracks.

It is in this regard that Geoffrey Chaucer wrote, *“It is certain that envy is the worst sin that is: for all others sin against one virtue, whereas envy is against all virtue and all goodness.”*

The Evil Eye

Envy, as we saw earlier, is often the envy of an other’s Unique Self, which reminds you of your own unlived life. Envy that motivates malice is directly related to what has been called through history the evil eye. The evil eye is not a superstition, but an inner trait of black character. St. Thomas Aquinas wrote that “the evil eye is affected by strong imagination of the soul and corrupts and poisons the atmosphere so that tender bodies that come within its range may be injuriously affected.” Envy then partners with greed, which is an “insatiable desire to take for him what another possesses.” It is motivated by a ruthless acquisitiveness, which is publicly denied.

A greedy person is concerned with possessing. An envious person is obsessed with that which they do not possess. Often greed and envy come together in “grenvy.” Berke’s work remains the most insightful analysis of the inner dynamics that animate people of malice. According to Berke, for the envious person, the “goodness must not be preserved, only attacked, spoiled, and destroyed.”

The first stage of envy is often idealization. The idealization, however, cannot last. It arouses too much anguish in the heart of the envier. Therefore, the reverse process sets in. Denigration, equally extreme and unrealistic, follows idealization. This is done to mitigate the anguish of the previous perception. So the elephant becomes a midge, the palm tree becomes a toadstool, and a cloth coat turns into a rag. A kind of hysteria sets in, and there is a refusal to see any goodness at all in the person attacked.

The distorting impact on awareness shows up not only in the envier, but also in the envied. The envied often engages in two forms of self-deception: the envied person idealizes their envier, which is not that hard because often they were once loved by their envier; or they shut down in order to avoid the pain engendered by the awareness of the envy.

One of the demarcating characteristics of malice is its intense cruelty. King David writes in Psalms, “Many have risen against me,” and he goes on to describe in exquisitely accurate detail the dynamics of deception and self-deception that guide the ostensibly respectable lynch mob disguised by the fig leaf of the “noble cause.” In Joseph Berke’s incisive formulation, “The politics of envy culminates in the effective disguise of individual or collective enmity and its expression through political relationships or institutional decisions that are ostensibly virtuous.”

When an individual in the mob is confronted, they refer to “all of us,” or say, “There are many people throughout this life who say this,” and the like, ignoring the fact that the righteous and disgruntled always attract each other.

The philosopher Socrates is perhaps the most notable victim of the “slander and envy of the many,” including, of course, the political and religious establishment of his day. All of them nodded knowingly to each other, demonizing Socrates even as they—in their collective pathology—denied any suggestion of their own envy being a motivating force, discounting this as an absurd and malevolent suggestion that did not deserve serious rebuttal.

The envy of the “successful one” by students, teachers, and colleagues was much more forthrightly recognized in older cultures. Among the Khoikhoi people of South Africa, if a hunter has scored a great kill, he is sent to his hut until the village elder calls on him. He is then placed in the center of the circle surrounded by his fellow hunters, who literally piss on him. In this way, a legitimate outlet is created for the enviers to express their discontent and even rage.

If this seems culturally hard to grasp, just note the same custom in Western culture. On Yom Kippur, the holiest day of the year in the Jewish tradition, when the priest offers sacrifice to the divine in the temple, a sacrifice to the “other side” is offered as well. The psychological premise is that shadow must first be owned in the person of the individual and the community before it can be transmuted and atoned for.

Envy corrupts and corrodes love. It turns good into bad. In Shakespeare's *Othello*, Iago accomplishes this by a lethal mixture of slander and duplicity, a process of bad-mouthing and backstabbing. *Envious revenge is fueled by hidden arrogance, unyielding aggression, and pride.* It is based on distorted or exaggerated hurts rather than significant injury. The envier, in their internal self, considers only their accomplishments in comparison to the one envied. Envy, at its core, is grasping for Unique Self.

Envious destructiveness is deliberate. The envious person denies goodwill or love toward the object of their ire. What they want to do is remove the bilious anger and bitter vindictiveness that lurks just beneath their surface self. Their surface self appears more often than not as spiritual, and filled with ostensible good intention and light. It is also possible that the surface good intention and light are real. Envy is often a vicious streak in an otherwise decent and even good personality. This is precisely why the malice of seemingly good people is so persuasive. The envious person wants to get rid of the feelings that they vaguely know exist right beneath their surface personality. They violate their own sense of goodness and even righteousness. Since he (unconsciously) blames the one he envies for how he feels, he sets out to make him feel bad or appear bad. *It is no accident that "evil" is "live" spelled backward. Evil stands against life force. And life force is nowhere more powerful than in the full bloom of Unique Self.*