

Overcoming Vulnerability Using #TaoFu

Sermon by Minister Angela Smith of COPE for March 22nd, 2020 (and beyond)

The more vulnerable or aware of one's vulnerability one is, the more fear is activated. If you're relatively safe from harm, you may be unaware of potential danger and threats that others have experienced resulting in traumatic stress or trauma. If you've ever experienced any injury or even responded to a person sneezing or coughing near you with apprehension or caution, then you've experienced some level of that natural fear response. If a person appears to be ill with sneezing, coughing, vomiting, or the like, then naturally you seek to avoid that person as an instinctual response which before modern medicine had many theories regarding potential causes of sneezing including the devil being nearby. If you stub your toe on a piece of furniture, you may be hyper-aware of that piece of furniture going forward and that's a microcosm example of that fear response based on awareness of a threat or risk of harm.

The #TaoFu way to address fear is honest reasoning to correctly assess the risks and a good sense of humor. The fear response results in either fight or flight when adrenaline is activated which can be a result of a trauma trigger if living with traumatic stress. So, when someone with traumatic stress is triggered the body chemistry can result in a hyper-vigilant response which can be managed with honest reasoning and a good sense of humor if aware of one's traumatic stress, trauma triggers, and how to manage them to the best of one's ability given life experiences and temperament.

If honest reasoning fails you and you are dishonest or delusional denying your own experiences, then acknowledging that's an issue is your first step in self-examination to avoid hypocrisy. The issue is that many people who have been abused by Cains/Lucifers/Narcissists in their life feel powerless and see the Cains/Lucifers/Narcissists as powerful. When encouraged to be empowered and speak truth to power, some mimic (while others like me mock) those who made them feel powerless by taking on the characteristics of the abuser. One way I tell the difference between a malignant narcissist and someone suffering traumatic stress (arguably someone could exhibit or reasonably experience both conditions at once) is that someone suffering traumatic stress shows willingness to listen and seeks additional information because the goal is to assess the risk or danger and not just lash out in response to an unintended trigger. Traumatic Stress sufferers welcome full context and additional information as it assists with proper assessment of any perceived threat and helps deescalate. The goal with Traumatic Stress sufferers is to deescalate. Open communication and honest discussion can defuse a situation that otherwise might turn volatile. But, it helps for Traumatic Stress sufferers to recognize other people suffer Traumatic Stress too and may appreciate additional information to feel more at ease themselves which is why Traumatic Stress sufferers are known to over-share or that's one coping strategy employed by Traumatic Stress sufferers.

But, a malignant narcissist has NO sense of humor and doubles down on vicious misconduct and deception like the Cains/Lucifers they are which undermines their attempts to manipulate when playing the victim. I'm always more fond of people with a

good sense of humor who are humble enough to laugh at and with me too. And, I've found the unreasonableness of malignant narcissists with no sense of humor both funny and sad. In an attempt to better understand the thought process I've been mocking narcissists when responding to them in e-mail correspondence at times. Mostly, I give everyone the benefit of the doubt that it is Traumatic Stress and more often than not that is the case. But, there are a few who are malignant narcissists who have contacted me for assistance through the mission. They follow a similar pattern. It usually involves an ex-spouse or other parent of a shared child. The e-mails are excessive and inappropriate revealing way more than I ever wanted to know or needed to know to assist in any way. Allegations are vague, general, not specific, and seemingly isolated to one or two bad moments the ex-spouse had where full context of the situation is not disclosed nor any official reports nor allegations of criminal misconduct are included. In one case, there were vague reports and when pressed for how the courts or law enforcement handled it the parent I was speaking with said both parents were ordered to anger management as the court found both had acted badly. The parent I was assisting insisted it was all the other parent's fault and they were perfect and the victim. The issue is one parent who is not financially stable wants custody for the financial stability and the other parent who is financially stable wants custody because they are prepared to provide. And, when that happens, the financially stable one would rather their child not live with either parent than give sole custody to the other parent. So, sometimes such parents won't look at their own documented public record objectively or the situation objectively and demand their narrative while excluding facts to clergy, experts, and lawyers that are pertinent to offering any recommendations. And, then those parents blame clergy, experts, lawyers, and the other parents when they don't support the narrative of whom I'd identify as the malignant narcissist in such scenarios. That's one way children end up in segregated congregate care. It's private orphanages of sorts until the parents can reach an agreement so the child has some stability while the parents work out the permanent arrangement.

For all of us who work with struggling families, I bear witness that King Solomon wasn't far off and that the story of the two mothers is still relevant today. King Solomon determines which of two mothers is the real mother by threatening to tear the child in two so each can have half a dead child to see how they respond. One is for it and the other would rather give the child up than see the child torn in two. King Solomon sees the wisdom of the one who would rather give the child up so the child may live as evidence of being the true mother. So, with any other set of parents in a dispute even now, the courts see the one who is willing to share custody evenly rather than force the child to choose between parents as the more reasonable one. Often the more financially stable one starts out willing to share custody, but, that's not enough money to cover the expenses of the one who isn't financially stable and so out of selfish reasons they create a narrative to attempt to get additional resources they haven't earned but believe they are due and have found a way to argue that point or so they think. Some will argue that point until the kids are adults even if the kids are institutionalized in modern orphanages the whole time the dispute is continued in the courts. This is because they can't even agree on someone in the extended family to provide a stable home while they work it out. Sometimes both parents are equally unreasonable or unfit too. But, foster care doesn't have enough family homes and most won't take teens so institutionalization wherever a

bed is available including psychiatric wards is where these kids end up. Please pray for those children. I do every night and throughout the day too.

A malignant narcissist will claim traumatic stress to manipulate for personal gain of some sort rather than explain themselves if triggered and coping. I live with traumatic stress and can be hyper-vigilant at times or at least that's what I call it and others say it is just being very assertive. I communicate early on in any new relationship, business or personal, that I live with Traumatic Stress and provide guides for how to help with deescalating or responding if I am triggered and request assistance. I openly communicate and cite my sources regarding concerns or perceived threats personally and professionally. And, I'm willing to consider what the perceived threats have to say for themselves as well which when they are honest and verified helps with deescalating if I've been triggered. But, where someone is dishonest and escalates, that increases the alertness regarding the threat resulting in more fear which must be managed through honest reason and with a sense of humor in most cases. Those of us who are reasonable and living with Traumatic Stress appreciate when others are considerate enough to accept we do our best and if they haven't been raped repeatedly, trafficked, hit by a fully loaded double-decker car carrier, poisoned, friends killed/died, and/or severely neglected and abused then they may not understand trauma or trauma triggers so be totally unfamiliar with how to help even where someone is kind enough to provide the information in advance. And, a malignant narcissist will hear of someone else's trauma and say #MeToo and then not be considerate when told of the other person's trauma triggers or of requests regarding communications as a result of that out of mutual respect which really makes me want to trigger the fuck out of their trauma if remotely possible to see if any such trauma actually exists or is just made up for some Machiavellian purpose.

But, I choose not to do that because if I did that and they were actually living with Traumatic Stress that would be cruel and evil. And, I give victims the benefit of the doubt. One way I test things is by being reasonable and using the Socratic Method to ask questions to determine veracity of statements made and/or the likelihood of their veracity. One parent said their child was a missing person and asked me to find their child. That's beyond the scope of what I do and I advised contacting law enforcement. That parent contacted law enforcement and then contacted me and said law enforcement refused to investigate. I asked why. I was given some ramblings about court orders I hadn't seen and some custody order in dispute. I was told the other parent was a criminal and the courts were on the criminal's side. I was then told the child might be dead and the parent wanted proof of life and demanded I help. I suggested the parent request a photo with that day's newspaper being held by the child to prove the child was alive on that day. (That was sincere and also a mock because I almost suggested milk cartons and think I may have in a subsequent message.) That photo was reportedly provided or some photo was and they said that wasn't proof enough because they needed to see the child in person. There was a restraining order in place preventing that at that time. And, I told the parent I was uncomfortable with their attempt to get me to do something arguably illegal or put out a civilian manhunt for a child that was simply with their custodial guardian. That resulted in my being called unsupportive and statements that I don't care about the child. That is simply not true. I do care about the facts and respect court

orders. I also understand the importance of being reasonable and objective in consideration of all pertinent facts the court will certainly consider because everyone gets heard and reasonably believed, not just one side in a court. And, I feel at times like malignant narcissists disregard the entirety of a situation in full context with a severe blind-spot for their own faults and misconduct. And, I see that as self-sabotage because everyone else sees the flaws, faults, and misconduct and the courts won't ignore it just because that's the preference for the malignant narcissist's narrative. I honestly don't know how to help people like that, but, do my best understanding more likely than not I've signed up for a train wreck by offering to help for the sake of the children. The children are my priority and not sticking it to any ex-spouses. I do my best to think like a judge in family court or King Solomon when advising on these issues as clergy and consumer/victim's advocate.

But, when addressing fear, fight or flight comes into play. And, where mutual combat is involved like the two who were both ordered to anger management, clearly both may respond to each other in the future with traumatic stress. So, the one who manages that best will seem most stable to the judge. One parent stayed calm in court and drove the malignant narcissist insane resulting in the dispute being drawn out and the child being institutionalized until reaching age of majority. The malignant narcissist refused to get evaluated. I recommended they do so because the court directed it and best to comply if you want the court to hear you, you need to show you hear the court. They said it would only work against them. I thought, "What aren't you telling me?" I honestly can't help if I don't have all the facts because without those it's taking shots in the dark and the kids deserve better. So, if someone is experiencing fight or flight instinctual response regardless of setting it is best if they consider all facts as objectively as possible exercising honest reason with a sense of humor (maybe some mercy and forgiveness too). And, those who do that or want to do that are simply living with traumatic stress and not malignant narcissists. Malignant narcissists deny facts in evidence and are severely dishonest while being seemingly delusional but you catch them in saying certain things that reveal or seem to reveal they know the truth and are intentionally and knowingly lying to you. It's when they contradict themselves or their facts don't match their claims. And, Traumatic Stress sufferers very keen on staying in reality with full awareness of things as they are with willingness to consider additional evidence don't engage in that level of dishonesty and manipulation but often really do need sympathy and a hug if you ask first because I for one hate being touched without permission and I always ask first as a result. Golden rule. I want to be asked before I am touched so I treat everyone else the same way.

Have you ever seen someone throw a tantrum and watched as they realize no one is paying attention? In Child Development, one method discussed for dealing with tantrums in toddlers was to walk away, stay near enough to monitor, but, don't actively respond to see if the toddler will self-correct and/or self-soothe. I personally thought that sounded mean. But, a tantrum is different than a "boo boo". A tantrum often surrounds a wish not granted. A toddler screams "But, I WANT IT!!!!!" And, it's about a toy they've outgrown or that's being washed and they have a perfectly equal and good toy available or whatever. Or, at the supermarket, a toddler throws down screaming because they want

"Lucky Charms" and got too excited in the cereal aisle too near naptime where they hadn't had lunch yet. So, I've dealt with toddlers who protested bedtime as well with similar antics. In such cases, I first try reasoning depending on level of theatrics. If the toddler is still standing and just whining and stomping about bedtime, I describe the day and every time they had a moment of joy as a result of my choice to go to the park and such. I say after such a lovely day that it is a shame to end it on such a sour note. And, I say if I'm unsatisfactory they can tell their parents (whether friends or family or employers) they don't wish to have me as a caregiver again even though I thought we had a lovely time. And, that has successfully worked to deescalate and get the toddlers off to bed. Now, with the big tantrums where reasoning appears to be out of the question, I've had friends pretend to be the child's favorite superhero or fictional hero on the phone and tell the child the favorite hero won't like them anymore if they don't stop. That has worked and the kids love it. They talk about how they spoke to their favorite hero and how cool it was and are well-behaved after that. And, I've tried walking away where a child's tantrum was too much and reason and humor wouldn't work. The child does slowly realize they aren't getting the result intended from the theatrics. They stop sniffling, crying, and sit still. They look around to see if you are watching and if you are, sometimes they start up again. Sometimes they just get up and focus on something else having forgotten the reason for the tantrum and it's best not to then ask "Still want the toy?" if they've moved on. Don't bring it up. You might think it is funny, but, that kid will then use that to say you are mean because you are giving them false hope by mentioning it. Don't mention it.

But, dealing with adults who act like toddlers who hold their ears and say "na na na na I can't hear you na na na na na" while ignoring reasonable appeals or teachable moments and just say "Ha! You said, "Fine, you win", so I win" when you even say that sarcastically out of frustration and arguably gave false hope in doing that, or a talking point out of context and lacking nuance which would be expected with a toddler but not an adult, is why some refer to malignant narcissists as developmentally disabled where they refuse to take responsibility like proper criminals. And, it is infuriating to deal with someone you'd reasonably expect to be able to have an honest conversation who is dishonest and then blames you whether you misunderstood their lies or not. So, that's natural too. And, malignant narcissists do tempt even the most even-tempered who are not living with traumatic stress to Wrath. Regardless of your temperament or challenges, #TaoFu can help. Did you have any adults in your life when you were a child that responded to any error or mistake with "Why did you do that?"? Say you hit another child and that child told on you but that child hit you first. The supervising adult asked you to tell them exactly what happened and you explain the other child hit you first. What does the other child say to that? If the other child says, "That's only because I wanted to play with the fire truck and they wouldn't give it so I hit them," that's not a good reason to hit the other child and is a selfish or greedy act showing a lack of generosity of spirit and sharing. The issue is the child who wanted the fire truck will say the fact the other child wouldn't let them have it shows the other child wasn't sharing or generous enough for their liking. But, in #TaoFu, you respond to feelings of envy with kindness and greed with generosity. So, that doesn't involve hitting. That involves leading by example in saying "You lack the quality of generosity evidenced by your

failure to share on command. I will lead by example in gifting you more time with the fire truck rather than asking the supervising adult if they can set a time limit because you need your hands on that fire truck for some reason and other toys aren't currently doing it for you. Obsessed with it are you? That's sad. I think you are addicted to the fire truck. I'm going to suggest that's the issue if this comes up later." But, that may come with maturity one would hope. And, one needs to learn words before one can use words effectively to communicate. So, those less familiar with words are more prone to use nonverbal communication strategies. That's why children do it, why do adults? And, I'd take the truck and it would get a time-out for the rest of the day which would be a consequence for both children hitting rather than using words or asking an adult to set a time-limit on use of the fire truck when more than one child wishes to play with it on a given day. Maybe time to buy a second fire truck that is exactly the same or two and get rid of that one altogether so each has their own or they learn to share.

The point is we are all vulnerable and can all be perceived as threats or just authority figures depending on context. And, if we are all considerate, respectful, honest, and open to all available facts and information, then, we'll all likely get along. Where there is an imbalance in that, use #TaoFu yourself to avoid being tempted to Wrath by malignant narcissists who we cathartically see get killed in most action films and horror too. And, patience and due diligence through honest objective reasoning is the best way to deescalate your own Wrathful impulses and best serves Justice (one of the many names of God). But, for people with no interest in Justice who just want to be vicious and vindictive, for God's sake, don't fuck them even as a joke! We're all sick of cleaning up your mess and I'm likely at odds with people I might otherwise find enjoyable and be friendly with because of that type of bullshit.

So, I live with Traumatic Stress and manage by staying as objective as possible, open to additional information, and exercising art with a sense of humor. I'm a fight response to most fear situations, if not all. Honestly, I have allergies and feel like my body is hyper-vigilant in responding to perceived threats even when I'm not feeling triggered it reacts on it's own to allergens. So, I try to think of my trauma triggers like allergic reactions at times and remember that just because peaches cause me anaphylaxis doesn't mean we have to ban peaches or that that would be a reasonable response. And, the difference with trauma triggers is where you run into someone who raped you, who has been released from prison in the event they were adjudicated for it, you think they are a threat to everyone including you because of their past. And, even if you just see them as a threat to yourself given the history, that's actually reasonable in context and understandable where even if you think it is them but aren't sure because the hair is different that you would want to leave or perhaps even warn others. So, please think of anyone naming names effectively as trying to protect the public and anyone seeking help privately who isn't ready to name names as too traumatized to self-advocate at the moment. But, the goal of those who report is to get justice and protect the public since apparently someone has failed to exercise self-discipline to the extent they've criminally harmed another person and the victims get free speech too, but, so do the perpetrators and proving financial loss can be difficult for either side regardless of veracity of claims. So,

the court of public opinion is the last resort for those who failed to get justice elsewhere and has way more variables than permitted in a court of law.

I do believe victims and I recognize mutual combat is a real occurrence as does the law. This sermon is getting very long and may seem to be rambling at times. Inside joke if you want one right here. But, the issue with peace is that everyone has to agree to the terms without oppressing the other side and that perspective varies. The financially stable party seeking custody feels the other side wants to strip them of their parental rights while dipping into their pocketbook and that feels oppressive or unfair when they are willing to share custody and the responsibility. The financially unstable party seeking custody feels entitled to custody and whatever money they want or claim to need with full authority over all of it and no consideration for the financially stable party. And, regardless of other factors, prima facie whose side do you take? Be reasonable for the kids.

For more about COPE and the HEAL Mission, visit:

<http://www.churchofphilosophicalexploration.church>

and

<http://www.heal-online.org>