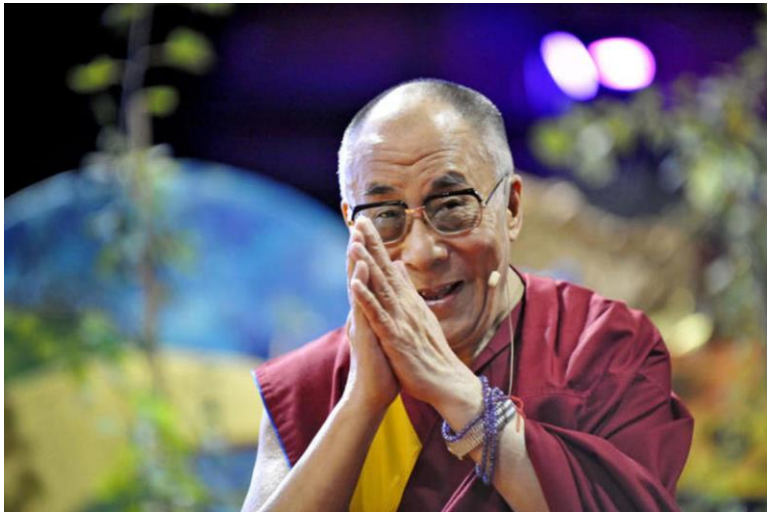


## INTERNAL DISARMAMENT

By the time you read this blog two months will have gone by since the Dalai Lama addressed the California State Legislature. He spoke simply, clearly and to the point. I am still stunned by one of his observations. As he addressed several issues that are important to our nation he turned to gun control. He expressed a belief that may be difficult for many of us to accept.

When I did an Internet search on the Dalai Lama's speeches, I found his "Message for the New Millennium."<sup>1</sup> He noted there, and to the California Legislature, that violence is a major problem for the world. We can probably all agree on that. However, he identified an aspect of violence that we may not all agree on. He wrote, "In order to make non-violence a reality we must first work on internal disarmament and then proceed to work on external disarmament.



By internal disarmament he did not mean that a country should get rid of all of its weapons in one dramatic sign of its desire for world peace. He meant ridding ourselves as persons of all the negative emotions that result in violence."<sup>2</sup>

It does not require a graduate degree in psychology to recognize what he means. The Dalai Lama wants us to give up the anger that many of us experience as an ongoing emotional and spiritual burden. Anger is a burden because it can be difficult to

find socially acceptable ways to discuss or even to vent our anger. In northern New England we were encouraged to chop wood for a few hours. Even after hours of chopping, however, the anger may still be with us. In fact, if we listen to our own voice we may hear our anger coming out as sarcasm, ridicule, bitterness or even the desire for "justice."

I have lived in California for only eight years. However, it has been more than sufficient time to notice how many occasions arise for genuine anger. It may happen because someone experiences road rage. People die because of mistakes by healthcare professionals, mechanical defects in cars or because they were in the wrong place at the wrong time when a drug deal went bad.

If someone we care about is killed, we may decide that we want someone to "pay" for our pain. We want "justice." However, one person's view of justice may mean that the person who committed the crime is held "accountable" by the courts. To someone else it means wanting "revenge—even violent revenge."

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<sup>1</sup> <http://www.dalailama.com/messages/world-peace/millennium-message>

<sup>2</sup> Ibid.

Yes, I'm in favor of justice and accountability. However, they often get confused with the early Biblical view often summarized as "an eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth." ([Exodus 21:24](#)) My professor of Old Testament, Dr. Stephen Szikszai, referred to this as the "law of the Talon." It was meant to set a limit to how much retribution we could take from someone who took something from us. If a thief made off with one of our animals that did not give the victim the right to burn down the other person's house or kill one of their children. However, living only by the "Law of the Talon" without relying on God's love often leads to deeper resentments and possibly more violence. When many of us were young we lived with the fear that the Soviet Union would do something so awful that someone in government, theirs, or ours would launch a nuclear attack.

No, I am not forgetting the incredible suffering experienced by the family and friends of a victim of needless violence. I simply agree with my professor that we need reliable ways to limit our response to a loss. I also agree with the Dalai Lama that the process begins within each of us. It's quite normal and appropriate to get angry at death and other losses. It is not OK to stay angry.

If we don't actively work on letting go of our anger it doesn't go away. In fact, our anger may disappear into our unconscious minds. That is dangerous because those hurts don't go away. They accumulate. The anger may become so much a part of our personality that we don't realize how difficult we become for others. Our unconscious anger comes out in very inappropriate ways. I know. I've been there, and I am grateful for those who had the courage to confront me about the intensity of my anger. I also appreciate the therapists who have helped me.

We live in a nation that is full of anger, and much of it is understandable. But some of our responses are not. Perhaps we do not have friends who will tell us how much anger they sense in us. Perhaps we don't have enough healthcare insurance to pay for what may be extended therapy.

However, we are not limited only to counseling or psychotherapy. We can pray! We can ask others to pray for us. We pray when we tell God how upset we are with the sufferings that we and others endure. We need to pray even if all we can talk to God about is how angry we are that God did not prevent our losses.

We have choices. We can stay angry. We can turn every experience of grief into a reason to lash back either at a perpetrator or at an entire group. Or we can decide to work on healing from the anger. Don't set any time limits for yourself, but do expect to change as you heal. It may take a lifetime, but God has shown us the way. Jesus put the need for internal change when he said, ""But I say to you, Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you."<sup>3</sup> That, of course, is the subject of another blog.

As always, I am open to your responses and to [discuss your responses](#).

Rev. Larry LaPierre

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<sup>3</sup> [Matthew 5:44](#)