

The *Anger* of the *Temperaments*

A sign post to deeper needs

By Kim-John Payne

The study of the temperaments dates back to ancient Greece and the philosopher Empedocles (c. 490-430 BC) He believed that all existence consisted of four elements or 'roots', these being earth- which relates to melancholy, air- sanguinity, fire-choler, and water-phlegmer. This study was to have a strong impact on later figures such as Socrates and through him to Plato, Aristotle. In many aspects of modern life such as government, medicine, education, science, art and psychology the influence of these philosophies is still are very much felt.

The study of the temperaments is an attempt to better understand the *individual* nature of human beings using these root elements as a basic motivating force behind our thinking, feeling and actions.

PURIFYING ANGER

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Considering children according to only four main categories of temperament may seem to be a, pigeon holeing, rigid approach. However the opposite may be true. There are few greater gifts that can be given to another person than a sincere attempt to understand them. This is particularly true if some their actions seem to you to be negative and may even bring you into conflict. Trying to empathize on a deeply insightful level can channel what may have become a cycle of destructive behavior, and open up new possibilities of relating. It may even allow you to glimpse the roots of the anger and recognize the positive, constructive aspects instead of seeing it only through a veil of uncertainty, even fear. The purifying fire, the cleansing water, the renewing earth and the winds of change are all qualities of transformation through the *rightful* anger of the temperaments.

The first and most important step is to define you own temperament as objectively as possible. Be open in identifying your own dominance's. One of the best ways to identify your own or an others temperament's to ask "what temperament/s am I not." This will guide you to the answer. Of course we have all four temperaments within us but usually one or two will be dominant. After observing some time you may notice that one temperament will tend to come to the fore in certain situations, this is particularly true for adults. In the descriptions of the temperaments that follow look for the tell tale signs that may help you identify your own temperament.

SEEING ANEW

The second task such empathy asks of you is to put aside preconceived feelings you hold for the person. Listen and consciously observe their behavior, without being judgmental. The fact that you have been able to do this often brings a new clarity into the relationship. Finally, what can you then do about it? Letting the winds of true observation gently part the mist of your own temperament and therefore the way you conceive the action of others, can be a very rewarding experience for all involved.

When children express anger it is sometimes our adult reaction to either see this as a breach of family or school accepted behavior or alternatively as good healthy self expression (the latter, perhaps being less common). While both these responses have their place, a little closer look at this emotion may lead to a much healthier relationship between you and your child.

Anger is a common emotional response in childhood. They have not yet learnt the self-restraint of adults because the qualities of self, of individualization have not yet become as strong as they will in later years. The expectation that a child will show similar control over emotions as adults often arises out of our own fears of change and need to be in control. We then are led to express our disapproval. Thus children learn to fear and suppress their own anger and in doing so are denied one of life's most necessary means of change and self-expression. This is not meant to support the child freely expressing his or her anger where ever and whenever they experience the frustration of not getting their own way. This would lead us further into a modern tendency that risks adult abdication of responsibility to guide the children into learning appropriate ways to express themselves. However the challenge we face is how to channel the frustration or anger so that the same problem bringing about the same response does not get repeated over and over.

THE SIGN POSTS

Anger often acts as a signpost to deeper needs. Children often feel they are not heard, their rights or promises made are not being honored, that what they believe to be fair is being challenged and that the

Fire storms, tidal waves, sharp shooters and whirlswinds... children usually have one of these dominances in expressing anger.

values taught by adults are not being kept by adults. The old saying "do as I say, not as I do" is confusing and often very upsetting to children; this then leads to disappointment and sometimes anger. Anger exists, and if suppressed will only emerge in other places. Helping children channel and grow through their anger is a valuable gift. For example you may ask or suggest to them "What are you actually angry about?" "When you are angry can you tell the person without having to hate everything about them?" "It's OK to be angry with a friend and still stay friends?" "How can you tell an adult you are angry with them without

needing to be very rude, because all that happens then is you get into trouble and nothing changes?"

However what is of greatest importance is to realize that different children will respond to different approaches at different times. The wrath of the Phlegmatic child resembles a tidal wave, slow to rouse but when unleashed is powerful and all consuming. The Choleric's anger lies just beneath the surface and is easily awakened, it has a short fiery intensity from which the choleric is quick to recover. The Melancholic's anger is like a sharp shooter hidden behind cover using acute powers of observation to be very personally direct in their anger, whereas the Sanguine's, on the other hand is like a whirl wind, non specific, reckless and unpredictable.

The Choleric

The Napoleon.

THE FIRE STORM

There are those who see rules as constricting boundaries, infringements on their rights. Such people normally are extroverted and dominant. They may well be stocky and thickset. They dig their heels in when walking. Speech is emphatic and deliberate. They see the game or the situation as a personal challenge providing them with the possibility for conquest. They may have a poor memory and a restless nature, impatient and act before an explanation is finished. They are quick to express anger and equally quick to recover.

Sometimes they break rules simply because they have either have forgotten or did not listen in the first place. They will seek to blame others for their own mistakes. This tendency can cause problems, as many other children will see that it was the choleric's own fault and it is not fair to blame anyone. This in turn will lead to a 'digging in of the heels' on the part of the Napoleon child.

WHISPERING DISCIPLINE

Such children need careful handling in a conflict situation as they have a strong sense of pride. Speak

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to them quietly or in more extreme circumstances *defer* the conversation until they have calmed down. If you insist on "having it out there and then" you may well harden their attitude and their behavior will become more reckless and outrageous. Be very careful with criticism, especially in front of others. Their sense of pride is especially sensitive and will often lead them to fire back cheeky or challenging comments to you if their friends are present. Choleric's are 'agenda setters', they only really feel secure if they have a good degree of control of the situation. Getting into an argument with a

choleric is, in a sense letting them set the agenda in as much as argument and anger are well-practiced skills where the choleric feels he or she is on 'home ground'. You will very seldom have a satisfactory outcome if you engage in an argument with a choleric, and in fact you may well lose face and ultimately the respect of the choleric child.

Affirm their positive deeds, particularly those that involved courage or daring. The choleric child has strong leadership potential that can at times spill into over dominance. This quality can also lead them into recklessness; many a choleric 'general' has marched into battle forgetting to take his army with him! Draw on these leadership abilities, for example if they have withdrawn or are refusing to let the game continue you may tell them that the game needs their input, that they are very strong players. Whilst the cause and particularly the solution may seem clear to you, one of the only ways this type of child can become 'unstuck' is if they can do it while being perceived to be in control and without losing face. Any solution that you may whisper may well be taken up and loudly proclaimed to the other players and friends as his idea that everyone should take note of. They prefer to make suggestions rather than receive them.

Be discreet yet strong. Make sure once a decision is made it is final. Don't waffle, be to the point. You may even challenge them by saying that the reason they have stopped playing or participating is because they can't do it or that you will ask someone else. Whilst the choleric will push you to change your mind you will win his respect for standing firm.

THE CUTTING EDGE

Choleric's need set their gaze at the far distant horizon, they like to climb to up to places with a clear unrestricted view and set a course into the future that both themselves and preferably others will follow. When Alexander the Great met the challenge unraveling the intricate and ancient 'Gordian Knot' before he could continue with his army, the solution he found was a classic choleric reaction. He took his sword, sliced it in half and marched on. Choleric have little patience for either tradition (unless it's one they created) or obstruction. If something is placed in the way of the choleric it must be done to appear as a stepping stone rather than a roadblock.

RUNNING INTO THE FLAMES

The need for a clear unobstructed space can at time lead the choleric to the use of fiery anger. This fire can be indiscriminately destructive for both the person experiencing the anger and others, unless those around take certain preventative strategies. Firebreaks need to be cleared. These are long strips of forest, around 20-40 yards wide and up to many miles long, that have been cleared of all combustible vegetation. They provide the fire fighters with both access into the trouble spot and a defense line. By

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the time the fire has crossed the clearing its intensity will be very much reduced and it will be more manageable.

Firebreaks also take into account prevailing wind patterns and which direction the fire usually comes from. It is angled to deflect the and fire away from sensitive areas such as

houses and towns. Primarily the 'emotional fire break' is best constructed by those around the choleric. Look for patterns in situations that frustrate, then anger them. In this way you may be able to prevent or at least anticipate the outburst. Create your fire break by not reacting to provocation. Be conscious of the types of comments you make. For example the "...just because you can't handle the pressure..." or "...you will do what you are told..." type of angry retort, particularly in front of others, will usually *inflame the situation*. While retreating from the fire may be a last resort if it cannot be extinguished, running into the flames obviously will serve no purpose moreover, choleric need, and even respect those who can deflect and deal with their anger. Yet it is remarkable how many of us escalate and prolong the intense yet brief choleric anger.

FINDING YOUR OWN FIRE

In Australia and parts of other fire prone countries when a bush fire is burning out of control, the fire fighters sometimes light a 'back burn.' This is another option in dealing with the choleric. This involves deliberately lighting another fire that will be carefully calculated to collide with the initially out of control blaze. The destructive bush fire is extinguished or at least slowed down. There is little or no more fuel to burn. All are now safe. This 'back burning' can also be used to help the choleric. *However it should be used rarely and wisely*. When the situation escalates to a stage where he/she is shouting in anger, you may choose to reply with an equal opposite force. It is vital that this is not done in anger but with a conscious wish to help the child. If at all possible this should not be done in front of others and should be used only occasionally. Again don't run into the flames of the other. Let your intensity ray out while you attempt to stand as consciously and calmly as possible behind what you say and do. Disengage as decisively as you engaged. Don't be drawn into a protracted escalating argument. Let the young Napoleon know that while you respect him or her, the situation is unacceptable and must stop! In this way we are asked to find our own choleric and creatively use it. Fire is also a purifying force. Choleric do not usually have a naturally strong relationship with inner reflectiveness. They have a need to put things out into the world either verbally or by actions. They then find it easier to objectively assess their impulse. Anger and intensity is an integral part of this process towards achieving clarity and a sense of where they stand in the world

The Sanguine

The Butterfly...

THE WHIRLWIND

These children do not really break rules, they *disregard* them. They see rules as applying mainly to others who have the misfortune to need them. They like to move freely from one situation to another, never stopping for too long at any one place. They are often slender and well proportioned lively graceful and eloquent. Their friendships at times resemble a light house . They shine out brightly and light up the way forward, attracting many people towards them. However, the light may move on swiftly, leaving new found friends in the dark. Like the choleric, they have a poor, or at least a selective memory, however they do have an ability to notice much of what is going on around them and recall the exciting moments when something captured their often vivid imagination. They have a well developed sense of aesthetics which is often expressed in flamboyant clothing. They relate to the present. Their enthusiasm and friendliness often leads them to over-commit themselves and not be able to carry out what they said they would do. They are often late.

THE WINDS OF CHANGE

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argument. They will seemingly accept all that has been said; others feel they have sorted the problem out, only to see that the butterfly child has taken very little notice and has repeated the breach. This will sometimes provoke fury in others because “he keeps messing things up.” They only way to deal with it seems to be to either tolerate his charmingly infuriating behavior or to exclude him from the game or situation. However the sanguine

can at times have wild temper tantrums which can be quite disturbing to the other children. If you as the adult, don't get caught up in the whirlwind, but instead remain a little detached, assuring the others that “this is something he needs to do from time to time” you will find that often the tantrum will end as quickly as it started .

HIT AND RUN

The butterfly child has what may be called a '*hit and run*' method of expressing anger or discontent. They may say or do hurtful or outrageous things and then very quickly change the subject or leave the room leaving others (particularly the melencholics) to cope with the destruction and mop up the mess. They have very little consciousness for process particularly group process, they often have short concentration spans and may well invent ways to relieve their boredom; such as when the group is coming closer to a decision after careful consideration, the sanguine may begin 'a little whirlwind' by introducing a picture or idea that flies off at a tangent. Unless the group is careful they find themselves far away from the origin topic, not really knowing how they got there. If sanguines are challenged over this behavior they may later deny that they meant anything, saying that it was just a joke, or they were bored, or that it is everybody else's problem for taking things so seriously.

THE CHARM OFFENSIVE

Sanguines have a genuine charm when relating to others however they can at times employ this charm in an attempt to avoid what causes them great discomfort *consequences*. The often unconscious pattern of avoidance usually takes the form of initially 'forgetting' then comes the 'charm' stage, if this does not extricate him or her the "only a joke" comment may follow, if all else fails the tantrum strikes.

Attempting to point out to a sanguine what he has been responsible for and then to take the consequences, is like trying to catch a butterfly or a grasshopper on a warm summers day. The only way to stand any chance of success is to use a net. When working with groups the best 'net' that can be used is to involve as many people as is manageable to reflect back to the sanguine the effects of their behavior. Invite others to tell the sanguine how they are both positively and negatively influencing what was being said or done. Do this with lightness yet directness. Use the same words often. Identify a word or a phrase that can be called out, playfully exposing when the 'hit and run' tactics are being employed

DEVOTION

However there are other ways. In a supervised situation where conflict occurs, act immediately. If you delay he may well have moved on to the next adventure and will show little interest in the past problem. The sanguines, ability to *sympathize* can be called on. Ask them to try and appreciate how frustrating it must be for the others. Alternatively you may ask them to remedy the situation as a personal favor to you. The butterfly child responds with great warmth to the cultivation of personal contact. Whilst their interest in many aspects of life may seem superficial, their real devotion can be awakened through personal connection.

The Phlegmatic.

The Water Dweller.

THE TIDAL WAVE

The phlegmatic has a love of the rules. "For everything a place, and a place for everything," could be their motto. They seldom break the rules but if they do and agree that they did, they will accept the consequence with good grace. If however they don't agree they will refuse all penalties and stubbornly insist they were not in the wrong. They may become quite immovable no matter how much pressure is bought to bear. Normally slow to complain or express anger, they can react with intensity when someone breaks a rule or does something they consider to be unfair and won't own up.

The phlegmatic is often round and fleshy, and walks with an ambling constant gait, slow but well defined gestures. They are logical, amiable but somewhat withdrawn. In a game situation, they will if interested, be good team players and will adopt a supportive role. Occasionally, if they know the game well they may emerge as a leader. They are strategists, able to make elaborate plans if given the time. They need lots of warning about anything new. If they are told to do something and they don't want to, they will not often disagree, preferring to simply, quietly and implacably not co-operate.

HEADING FOR THE HIGH GROUND

The anger of the phlegmatic is like a tidal wave, which forms far out to sea slowly, silently, swelling and growing but then strikes land with a devastating force it is all consuming and reckless, anything that gets in its path is engulfed. The previously gentle lapping waves and predictable tides now wreak havoc. If one carefully observes phlegmatics early warning signs an approaching outburst can be detected. Just as the regular patterns of the tides begin to erratically change before a tempest, so too does the phlegmatics normal responses. For example the normal easy going attitude may become a little touchy; they may become less tolerant or withdraw deep into themselves rather than their normal quiet comfortable reactions. Their all-important routines may become disrupted you simply may feel that something is not quite right. Of course you may ask if there is anything bothering them and show patient and an unthreatening attitude but if that has little effect then batten down the hatches and head for the high ground putting in any damage you can think of like warning other members in the family or class not to take it too personally or get overly involved in her anger. Screaming matches will achieve little. They will particularly need you in good shape to offer comfort In the aftermath and begin the reconstruction process. You will not be so effectively in this if you get overly involved in the accusations and anger.

RECONSTRUCTION

Apart from the obvious effects a tidal wave has on the land another phenomena often occurs. The old shoreline, where the water meets the land, will be altered. The sea will recede far beyond its normal

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mark, exposing much previously submerged terrain. This earth is bare, uncultivated and unmapped. This has obvious parallels with the phlegmatics rare outbursts. Not only does the anger effect and challenge many old forms and routines, it also offers the potential for new growth and change. This is a delicate time. Quite a few days may pass with you consoling and reassuring them before you gently suggest areas of positive

change. You will need to give them time to think this over as processing thoughts and ideas resembles more the tortoise than the hare, but let them know that's fine. They will be feeling raw, perhaps guilty and almost certainly exposed. Phlegmatics possibility for change is inextricably bound up with the anger.

When the phlegmatic becomes 'stuck' either in their dreamy apathy or their stubbornness, don't be afraid to speak immediately, intensely and consciously. this is not to suggest that the voice needs to be raised, a clear calm intensity is the tone. This usually serves to jolt them out of problem. You can also draw on their strong nurturing instinct perhaps pointing out to them that there are many in the game, or situation that need their care.

BOREDOM

A phlegmatic can often be heard to say wearily "This is boring." In these instances you may choose to take their boredom to its limits. Ask them to sit out of the activity and do nothing, absolutely nothing! They may well enjoy it for a while, but stay with it and every time they come back ask them to sit out again so they may fully "enjoy" their boredom. Let them know that you are not angry with them but make little attempt to engage. It may take some time but this approach is usually very effective in stimulating the phlegmatic and safe guards you from becoming an exhausted or exasperated pseudo camp activity leader, performer or servant.

However, eventually they may well approach you saying they are fed up with being bored and ask if they can join in, at which point they is warmly welcomed. Superficially this may seem like a small thing but on a

deeper level this is an important developmental shift, one that may well have positive implications in their life In general.

The Melancholic.

The Earth Carrier.

THE SHARP SHOOTER

What particularly leads the melancholic into conflict is their self absorption. They are amazed, hurt and sullen if they are accused of wrong doing. They can be so engrossed in themselves that they cannot easily see the other persons point of view. The melancholic hears every complaint as attacks aimed only at themselves. They may lash out with personal, subjective comments about the people who are challenging them but will not easily focus on the source of the problem at hand such, as the rule infringement or misdeed. They are very sensitive to sarcasm when directed at themselves, yet will freely use it towards others. It is these tendencies that combine to make the melancholic an open target for teasing and bullying.

HIDDEN SHARP SHOOTER AND FLAG OF PEACE

The melencholics anger may take the form of 'the sniper' sitting hidden in a safe or camouflaged area shooting hurtful or destructive comments at anyone who is a perceived threat and comes within range. The more one aggressively searches for the sniper the more they retreat behind their cover and redouble their shooting in an attempt to protect themselves. This is a dangerous for all concerned. Even if you

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do manage, often wounded, to expose their hide-out will have to hold an antipathetic prisoner whose only options are to try to escape or crack and give in to your will.

Far better to assure the melancholic that you understand their pain, and that you are no threat. Wave a white flag and walk the ground between where you stand and where she has retreated to slowly letting them know that while you don't blame them for what they have done it is causing both themselves and others some pain and that

done it is causing both themselves and others pain and that you would like to help sort it out. Only then may the sharp shooter allow you to approach. Whilst they may not give up their weapon the next time a conflict occurs they will recognize you and your negotiation may be easier.

The melancholic finds it difficult to join in even though they would like to. They stand on the edge of the situation restrained by imaginings of injury, insult, intimidation and generally all the bad things that may happen if they take part. They are often thin and willowy. Their demeanor resigned, their complexion sallow. They speak haltingly, often pausing to consider what people may be thinking of them. They have a low pain threshold feeling every bump and knock. Their friends will be few, preferring to make special bonds with one or two others. They sometimes prefer solitary activities such as reading and painting. They love long walks in nature where they take note of all the small details they see. They have long memories when it comes to things they have been involved in. They have a strong relationship to the past.

However for each of these difficult traits the melancholic displays there exists a positive one. A bridge needs to be constructed from their introverted self, over the perceived dangerous waters, to the world on the other side, the world that exists outside themselves.

EMPATHY

It does no good to try and console the melancholic with statements like "Never mind, it wasn't that bad really." This merely confirms for them that no one understands; and increases their feeling of isolation. Far better to empathize or even have them visualize all that bad things that have happened or may happen. If you observe them watching a situation from the sidelines it's helpful to talk to them about how hard it is to join in and indeed that boy may call them that awful name he used two years ago, but if he does they will just have to feel sorry for him that he has to do such a horrible thing to make himself seem important, They will have to try and overcome the hurt, besides which you (the adult) will notice if it happens.

Melencholics have a well developed capacity to notice suffering in others. This can be a wonderful quality if they can be helped to not only notice the pain of another but see what they can do to assist them. If they feel that they are making a sacrifice they may well go to great lengths to be of service.

While it is important to show understanding to the melancholic be wary of going too far and becoming morose. Sympathizing with the events of the past and the fears of the future are done kindly but in a matter of fact way, showing that whilst you understand their feelings there also is a steady hand safely directing the situation.

In Conclusion

The Adult Reaction.

Children who break the rules and challenge authority can be really trying, even infuriating to the adult. You have the feeling that no matter what the situation the same child will inevitably try to disrupt or become difficult in some way. It gets to the stage where you are anticipating it, even warning the child that you will not stand for it again. In a sense you become a part of maintaining the pattern you actually wish to change.

You can find yourself in an escalating conflict situation where your reactions become somewhat unconscious. Later that evening you are still disturbed not only by the actions of the child, but moreover by your own lack of control or ability to change the situation.

The type of response we give in a conflict situation is seldom straight forward. However there are a few basic 'checks' that you can do. First and foremost, examine your own temperament. For example, do you have choleric tendencies. When the child shouted at you in front of others did you react too forcefully because you could not stand to loose face? Or were you so keen to 'get on with things' that your explanation of what you wanted was too quick, resulting in some children not knowing what to do and as a result they played up?

Did the situation spiral out of control because of your sanguine nature that prevented you from noticing the warning signs? Was your explanation of what you wanted so disjointed that the conflict arose because some children were not clear what to do?

Was that caustic, sarcastic comment you made a result of your melancholic nature? Did you feel personally wounded by the child telling you that the game was "dumb" and that she would not take part any more?

Were you over connected to the form of what you had so carefully and slowly planned that when the child sabotaged it you reacted strongly?

These are just a few examples of the many reactions we may have that our own disposition plays into. It is essential that we not only look at the part the child played but more importantly at our own response. *It is the adults responsibility to reach the child, not the child's to reach the adult.* There are some difficult situations that you feel you handled well. Look at these, learn from you successes. Why is it that the child was able to calm down and accept what you suggested?

It is often helpful to look at your own biography particularly at the same age of the child or group that you had the difficult situation with. For example you may ask yourself, "Is there a connection between my overreaction towards that child who was picking on that small boy, related to my own small stature and the fact that I was bullied at that age?" or, "Is the reason I don't really grasp difficult situations due to my own unconscious fear of conflict? Are my reactions connected defensive or avoidance tactics?" These questions and others may arise if we have the willingness to look into ourselves. Addressing of the difficult situation may actually lead not only the children to growing up stronger, but the adult being able to deal with some of his or her own unresolved feelings. The child unconsciously respects the adult who is able to deal with his or her own weaknesses in a private yet searching way.

Search for what is causing stress in the life of the child. For example the melencholic it is often being misunderstood, for the phlegmatic it may be they feel hurried or flustered, for the sanguine it could be feel they are wildy overcommitted and the choleric may feel disrespected. By understanding these stressors and anticipating them we help our children de-escalate conflict situations in a very individual way. This deep insight into the soul of the child allows them to face and overcome the hinderances they have within them to becoming free social beings.

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