

The Inner Circle #17 — The First Link: What Anger, Fear and Retirement Have in Common

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Dear Inner Circle,

I spent most of this month writing about three things that looked, when I began, like three separate subjects. One was anger. One was fear. One was what happens to a man on the second Monday after his last posting ends.

It was only when the third piece was finished that I noticed I had been circling a single idea all month without seeing it. Three essays, three categories on the website, one disease underneath.

VEDIC WISDOM

The Chain That Nobody Interrupts Early Enough

Almost everything written on anger management begins in the wrong place. It begins with anger.

Count to ten. Leave the room. Breathe. I have no quarrel with any of it, and I have used all of it. But the Gita's account of how anger is actually manufactured suggests that by the time you are counting to ten, you are already four steps into a process that began somewhere much quieter.

The passage is Bhagavad-gita 2.62–63, and it reads less like scripture than like an engineering diagram. *Dhyayato visayan pumsah* — while contemplating the objects of the senses. That is the first link, and notice how mild it is. Not craving. Not grasping. Merely dwelling on something. From that dwelling, attachment forms — *sanga*. From attachment, desire — *kama*. And only then, from desire obstructed, anger — *krodha*.

Three links before anger, and not one of them looks like a problem while it is happening.

Then the sequence accelerates. From anger, delusion. From delusion, the failure of memory. From the failure of memory, the collapse of the discriminating intelligence — and, the verse concludes, the man is finished. It is the most exact description of a bad quarter-hour I know of: the point at which you cannot remember why this person matters to you, and so you say the thing that cannot be unsaid.

What struck me, writing it out, is that the chain is not a moral claim. It is a causal one. And a causal chain can be interrupted at any link — but it is cheapest to interrupt at the first, where nothing has happened yet and no willpower is required.

VEDIC WISDOM

One Disease Wearing Three Names

The second essay began as a separate piece on fear and refused to stay separate.

We treat fear, anger and attachment as three conditions with three literatures and, increasingly, three specialists. Sanskrit does not. In Bhagavad-gita 2.56, the sage of steady mind is described in a single compound word — *vita-raga-bhaya-krodhah*, free from attachment, fear and anger. Not three freedoms listed for convenience. One compound, because it is one condition seen from three angles.

Read the chain again and the reason is obvious. Attachment is the thing that makes loss possible; fear is attachment looking forward at the prospect of losing; anger is attachment discovering that the loss has begun. You cannot have the third without the first. This is why the man who is afraid of nothing is never the man with the most protection — he is the man with the least attachment to what the protection was guarding.

“The person who abstains by force still keeps the taste. Renunciation by clenched jaw does not remove attachment; it relocates the struggle without ending it.”

— on Bhagavad-gita 2.59

Which is an unhelpful conclusion if you take it as advice to stop caring. I do not think it is that, and 2.59 is the reason. That verse concedes, with a candour I find startling in a

devotional text, that the person who abstains by force still keeps the taste.

VEDIC WISDOM

The Third Ashrama, Read Again

Then I wrote a piece about retirement, and it turned out to be the same essay in institutional dress.

Classical India did not have retirement. It had *vanaprastha*, the third of the four ashramas — a named stage with its own duties and its own standing. Our word for the same moment is superannuation, which is not a stage of life but an administrative date. And the difference is not sentimental. Retirement is defined entirely by subtraction: it tells you what you no longer have and says nothing about what you now are.

What *vanaprastha* actually prescribed was not withdrawal but a transfer of function. The householder hands over the management of the estate to the next generation. He does not vanish from the family. He ceases to command it. The phrase I kept returning to while writing was availability without authority — present, consulted, no longer in charge.

The three ways this goes wrong are, I now think, three positions on the same chain from the first section. Refusing to leave — hunting extensions, advisory chairs, one more term — is attachment declining to release its object. Folding inward, the health decline that so often follows a last day, is what happens when the object is released but nothing takes its place. And the rapid monetisation of a lifetime's relationships in the first free year is desire finding a new outlet in a hurry.

This is not a small demographic footnote. The UNFPA's India Ageing Report projects that Indians over sixty will exceed a fifth of the population by 2050. A country arriving at that number without a culturally intelligible third stage arrives with a pension and no idea what it is for.

VEDIC WISDOM

What the Tradition Actually Says to Do With Attachment

Here is the part I find genuinely useful, and it is not renunciation.

Rupa Gosvami's principle of *yukta-vairagya* holds that attachment is not to be amputated but reconnected — pointed at something that does not decay, so that the faculty itself is preserved and only its object changes. The capacity for deep attachment is not the defect. It is the equipment. The question is what it has been bolted to.

Read that way, *vanaprastha* is *yukta-vairagya* with a calendar attached. It does not ask a man to stop caring about the institution he built. It asks him to care about it in a manner that no longer requires him to be the one signing. And it was placed at the third stage rather than the fourth, I suspect, because the tradition understood you cannot relocate an attachment on the last Friday of a career. It takes years, and the years must be planned.

I would not claim to have interrupted the chain at the first link even once this month. But I have stopped believing the problem starts where I was looking for it.

Until the next edition — keep reading, keep thinking, and keep building.

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BOOKS FROM MY SHELF — SEPTEMBER 2026

If this edition's thread was useful, the fullest treatment of these verses in my own writing is below. It works through the second chapter at the pace it deserves rather than the pace a newsletter allows.

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The three essays behind this edition are all on the blog, and all free to read.