

## Investigating Impulsive Reactions

When we act upon an urgent compulsion to have our way, we harmfully impose our will upon others or to influence a situation more to our liking. The sacred work to further life on Earth requires us not to act on an urge to harm others for self-benefit. Those on the path to further life on Earth pause and investigate the forces and intentions of wanting to impose our will on others or the situation *before* they act.

Rashly acting on a compulsion forces our will upon others or a situation to have our way and ignores the path to furthering life on Earth. We prevent the sacred ways to unfold within our lives. Anger and fear empower our willingness to harm others. Underlying the anger and fear, we find confusion and ignorance.

Because Western culture promotes impulsively imposing our will to get what we want, we likely have experienced the connection between our urgent impulses with the consequences of remorse and suffering. Thus, early on the path, we learn the self-discipline of investigating our impulsive urges before we act upon them.

Feelings of anger, fear, and anxiety signal that we have exceeded our capacity to act wisely, that we do not know what to do. Those on the path strongly attune themselves to the emotional warning signals that an impulsive urge to act has emerged. Our obsessive ruminating about the need to act disturbs sleep and prevents us from staying with the breath even for ten breaths in meditation.

Once we recognize our impulsive reactivity, then we stop ourselves from acting on it. The wise never act when emotionally charged. Instead, we pause and impulsive urge to act. In the process we have the near guarantee that we will discern a better option than what we felt compelled to do.

When investigating whether to act upon our impulsiveness, we stay present and drop the stories we have about our feelings. Once we can just rest with our feelings, then we ask ourselves questions about our feelings and what we feel impelled to do. Writing down your answers helps, especially if we approach this investigation as a brainstorm rather than a fill in the blank exercise. Questions we answer could include,

- Impulsivity covers an unwanted aspect of yourself. Can you name the underlying inner difficulties your impulsiveness tries to distract you from and avoid?
- How do your feelings and what you want to do align with the sacred values<sup>1</sup> and support your path to further life on Earth?
- How does the situation itself ask you to respond?
- If familiar with the I Ching, what advice have you received?
- Whatever action you intended, can you decide not to do it?

By the time we answer these and other questions about our urge to act, we have likely defused the urgency. Look at what you have written and find their interconnections.

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<sup>1</sup> Sacred Values of the Earth Interbeing (work in progress): sacred unity, equality, and respect of life on Earth, yielding and bearing the burdens of life, knowing what to do to further life on Earth, humbleness, affectionate caring, sharing and cooperation, compassionate action, and self-discipline to remove what harms life on Earth.

A transformative practice renounces doing whatever specific action we felt compelled to do. Not doing it avoids indulging our willingness to harm and takes it off the table for further consideration. We open to more calmly considering other options.

We can understand our impulsiveness as a lesson. Once the impulsivity has passed, we can discern how to respond to the underlying difficulties of a difficulty in ways that nurture our sacred path. Turning to the I Ching supports this process.

Impulsivity arises out of ignorance and confusion about how to respond to a situation. The wise do not act when they do not know what to do as that only makes the situation more difficult and confusing. In a situation that triggered impulsiveness, nonaction allows the situation to unfold on its own, which includes our own unfolding. With the support of the path, you will come to know how to respond in ways that further all.

Knowing how to derail impulsivity before it overpowers our purpose to further life on earth gives us a powerful tool to diminish the hold the willingness to harm others has over us. We investigate our impulses before we act upon them. The more we use this practice, the earlier we can begin to investigate and before the urgency to act overpowers us.

Confusion and ignorance lie at the bottom of our impulsive willingness to impose our will upon others and the situation. Once we accept the depths of our not knowing, we open to the sacred. Once we acknowledge that we do not know what to do, we allow sacredness to unfold within our lives.

The wise do not let external circumstances trigger them to act. Instead, the wise act to bring into life the sacred ways.

10-9-25. Rev. 11-20-25