

## A Sermon on Sparring with the Vulnerable

Sermon by Rev. Minister Angela Smith of COPE for January 14<sup>th</sup>, 2024 (and beyond)

I was initially going to title this sermon “A Sermon on Why They’re Like That” and/or “A Sermon on Making It Worse”, but also considered making it a meditative questionnaire or putting it in dialogue format. All of that may be considered over-sharing which is one symptom of post-traumatic stress, particularly complex post-traumatic stress compounded by multiple traumas of varying sorts and degrees.

“The most dangerous animal you can encounter in day-to-day life is an injured or sick one. It can be very tempting to approach the animal to attempt to help it, especially if it’s in pain. It’s very important you resist this impulse. An injured animal may perceive you as a threat looking to capitalize on their weakened state. When animals lack other means to confidently defend themselves, they have to be far more aggressive than usual. Most people who sustain animal-related injuries approached the attacking animal with good intentions.” Source: <https://varmentguard.com/blog/wild-animals-dangerous>

“Deimatic behaviour or startle display[1] means any pattern of bluffing behaviour in an animal that lacks strong defences, such as suddenly displaying conspicuous eyespots, to scare off or momentarily distract a predator, thus giving the prey animal an opportunity to escape.[2][3] The term deimatic or dymantic originates from the Greek δειματόω (deimatóo), meaning "to frighten".” Source: [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Deimatic\\_behaviour](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Deimatic_behaviour)

Often victims of violent crime are edgy and/or will threaten more force than permitted at law to use in a given situation because threatening greater than allowed is legally allowed to prevent greater harm or to scare off a real or perceived threat in most jurisdictions. This is why it is best to deescalate independently and attempt to do so when faced with a real or perceived threat whenever possible. Humor is a great way to disarm.

My house was burglarized last year and I was home at the time, but in bed alone. They broke in through a window facing the veranda and only stole my mother’s mostly full carton of cigarettes. My laptop was 5 feet from where she keeps her cigarettes and it was still there. The burglar only stole the cigarettes. My purse was also in the living room, nothing taken from it either. I believe it is how the house was decorated in part and/or the fact the burglar broke in right after I went to bed and turned the lights off so may have rushed being worried they’d be caught. Perhaps to manage my own stress of having a burglar in the house I thought it might be the décor. There's a poster of dogs playing poker, a photo of Tim Curry as Frank Furter from “Rocky Horror”, and a poster of Johnny Depp as Captain Jack Sparrow all visible from where the burglar entered. I thought maybe they thought the décor was cool or particularly inspired. But, there are also two statuettes of Metatron with one holding the tree of life and the other holding nothing above their heads and I consider the set #TaoFu. And, as a joke on top of the cable box there is a ram/devil skull with split tongue and head injury of some sort with a “hear no evil”, “see no evil”, "speak no evil" trio of stacked skulls facing the devil skull. The joke is because many believe the television is a tool of the devil and I keep the ram

skull there to acknowledge that perspective and as a reminder there may be some truth to it, but the skeleton trio as representative of objectivity or reserving judgment. The burglar stepped over that and didn't move any of it, but left a footprint on the top of the entertainment center and slightly put the cable box at an angle to step across the entertainment center. No DVDs were taken and one I had out is a collectible that is no longer available and last I checked was selling for over \$300 on Amazon Marketplace. There would be no way to know that any particular DVD had that much value or was so rare now for most. But, I knew. I felt very fortunate.

I wondered if the burglar was frightened by the décor or if they liked it so left quickly. But, after a long time I thought they were casing the house and knew I was home so just got out before being caught. It was just so weird though because so many things like my purse were right there and easy to grab. The burglar left through the door that leads to the veranda and left it ajar. So, maybe they were freaked out. I don't know. Sometimes how we dress, wear our hair, or even decorate our homes may act as deimatic displays without causing any harm. So, for people who have a specific style that others find threatening in terms of dress, hair, or decorations, it is important to consider that they may just be trying to protect themselves because they feel particularly vulnerable and live with traumatic stress.

Some who live with traumatic stress stay in the present here and now, rather than stuck in a traumatic memory loop, through art (including humor) and others through total chaos because when everything around you is in turmoil you can think of nothing else and it keeps the traumatic memories at bay. I prefer art (including humor) to manage my traumatic stress and with that last crime I was victim of referenced above I actually in part credit art with deescalating the situation even if it was just my presence and potentially being caught that resulted in the speedy exit rather than anything to do with the décor.

Deimatic displays are instinctual defense mechanisms throughout nature and when one feels particularly vulnerable, one is likely to be more aggressive. If everyone feels equally vulnerable at any time, everyone can be aggressive or reasonably seek to deescalate depending on circumstantial variables. Deimatic displays aren't the only defense mechanism when living beings feel threatened and vulnerable, but do play a large part both consciously and subconsciously in how all respond to real or perceived predators. I personally believe the Yeti is an example of a deimatic display initially intended to scare away foreigners that is now another tourist attraction because some believe it is real and others want to call the bluff. However, I see the Loch Ness Monster as a mock of the Catholic Church that potentially began as a deimatic display to scare off superstitious people.

I see North Korea's often ridiculous failed missile launches as both a mock of war in general and also a deimatic display that involves self-deprecating humor. Dennis Rodman pulled the most fake-out fouls and became the goodwill ambassador to North Korea. But, this is how I manage feeling that being on the west coast puts me in the line of any successful launch from North Korea of such projectiles. So, to deescalate any fear

that may bring to my mind I think of it in the terms I do and believe it is likely theater because North Korea has fighter jets and an air force as well as collaborates with China who has successfully launched missiles on earth and also rockets into space. So, they could actually do it and any failures to do so I believe are just theater and threatening more force than they may legally be allowed or willing to use themselves because they feel threatened in some way.

Did this sermon get away from me/off-topic or not? Microcosm v. Macrocosm and we all do it big and small. The more vulnerable we feel, the more aggressive or artful we become in response. If everyone becomes aggressive, then everyone becomes a threat to each other. Humor and laughter are disarming. Source: (Harvard Business) <https://hbr.org/2014/05/leading-with-humor> Give peace a chance.

For those interested in starting #TaoFu Self-Defense Exercises, please see <https://www.cope.church/taofu.htm> and begin at any time.

There are opportunities to send messages, receive mystery bonus blessings, and more with or without donating available now on our "Pass the Basket" page at <https://www.cope.church/basket.htm> . Thank You.

"And ye shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free." John 8:32 KJV Willful blindness is an abomination.

COPE accepts Feedback, critical and complimentary. Learn more at <https://www.cope.church/feedback.htm> . For the sake of keeping myself and others humble, a sense of humor is welcome on all sides.