

ATOMIC



ALCHEMY

*A zine series on emotional transformation as
fuel for liberation in life and death*

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“...Anger expressed and translated into action in the service of our vision and our future is a liberating and strengthening act of clarification, for it is in the painful process of this translation that we identify who are our allies with whom we have grave differences, and who are our genuine enemies.”

— Audre Lorde, *“The Uses of Anger: Women Responding to Racism”*



Let It Burn: On Anger, Hope, and The Eternal Flames of Liberation

ZiNE #2

For as long as I can remember, I've held within me an eternal flame of rage. Maybe it's because I come from a large, loud, volatile family (think the "Seven Fishes" episode of *The Bear*, but every day of your childhood), or that I'm a fire sign, or that I, like so many others, have to constantly bear witness to atrocious injustice inflicted upon the most vulnerable communities by the leaders meant to serve the people but too busy enriching themselves off our exploitation to do their jobs. Most likely, it's a combination of the three.

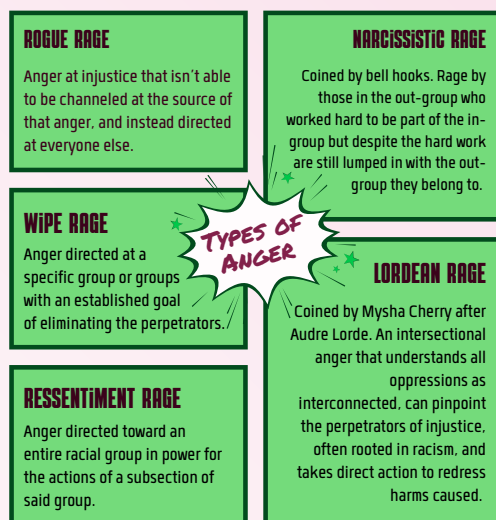
Existing as a biracial Black woman in the US means that for most of my life, I've had to withhold my anger, tamp it down, lock it away so that it wouldn't rear up and give people an excuse to dismiss me as just another "angry Black woman." Even in the face of blatant microaggressions, misogyny, and racism, I'm expected to stay calm, cool, and collected. This experience is made even more difficult and too often deadly for my dark skin comrades, those whose Blackness is unambiguous, unlike mine.

As I approach 30 years on this mortal coil, I have to tell you that I am so over it. I'm so over having to rob myself of the right to feel my feelings as they come, to be told that my anger is irrational or unprofessional or dangerous when men, especially white men, can raze entire countries to the ground, abuse, kill, or otherwise let their anger consume them until it consumes us all. But when you point this out, you're told that their anger isn't irrational, it isn't emotional, it isn't dangerous; it's always justified so long as white supremacy and patriarchy reign.

There is often something deeper rooted within a person's anger—whether that be, say, grief, betrayal, fear, despair, anger can be a useful signal that something is wrong and needs to be rectified. **The source of anger is a key determining factor in whether that anger has the opportunity for justice or destruction.**

In her work combining her own analysis with that of previous scholars like bell hooks and Audre Lorde, philosopher and anti-racist scholar Myisha Cherry has **classified** five categories of anger, four of which are unproductive at achieving justice, and at times can even be dangerous. It is often these types of anger that give the emotion a bad rap, even at times perpetuating injustice themselves.

The type of anger we must tap into in our pursuit of building a liberated world, according to Cherry, is Lordean rage. Named by Cherry after Black feminist scholar and poet Audre Lorde's **analysis** on gender, anger and race, Lordean rage pinpoints the perpetrators of injustice, often rooted in (as are most things in this world) racism, and takes direct action to redress harms caused.



It was this particular speech/essay that Lorde graced us with this timeless call of intersectional solidarity: "I am not free while any woman is unfree, even when her shackles are very different from my own." I carry this moral adage with me, tucked deep in my heart alongside a few other golden nuggets of wisdom I've collected from those before me. It is the core thread that weaves together my values and understanding of the world, that all our oppressions—from that of racial, white supremacist, patriarchal, capitalist, imperialist, militarist, nuclear—are intertwined, and only through sustainable collective action and adaptable, interdependent community building will we birth the liberated world that is our right.

It was no accident, though, that this popular quote came from an essay on anger; Lorde carefully outlines how anger "is loaded with information and energy," and when "focused with precision, it can become a powerful source of energy serving progress and change." **Anger is a powerful tool for change when you're able to direct it toward the perpetrators of injustice, and alchemize it into action that produces accountability, justice, and reparations.**

And there is so much in this world for us to be angry at. Our government wasting our taxpayer dollars to bomb and destroy communities abroad while our own communities are further exploited and extracted from, starved and abandoned. Police brutality. Mass incarceration. The climate crisis. Rampant wealth inequality. Violent transphobia. The inherently destructive nature of AI. The rise of fascism (again). The nuclear sword of Damocles hanging over our heads every second of every day while being gaslit that it's actually making us safer. These are just some of the issues that preoccupy my mind each day and feed the rage deep in my soul.

Few things incited more rage in me than sitting in lobby meetings with impacted communities spending their own money to travel to DC and beg their representatives to support efforts to provide meager compensation and care to these communities harmed by US nuclear weapons testing, and having these Members of Congress ask how much it would cost to extend and extend that program (the [Radiation Exposure Compensation Act](#)). To dare to ask, with no guilt or shame or remorse, how much it would cost to save their constituents' lives while approving blank checks to weapons manufacturers to continue building the very weapons killing them.

If you aren't careful, if you don't figure out how to transmute that anger into a productive source of energy for change, it can devour you. So many times in the past couple years alone I have felt like all I know, all I am, is an endless burning fire of anger. Blissful daydreams of personifying an atomic bomb of rage, able to bend the ensuing firestorm to my will, forging a path straight to the doorsteps of our oppressors, and finding sweet, sweet joy as I watch everything and everyone they know and love turn to ash. To make them feel the immeasurable pain and trauma they inflict on we, the oppressed, each and every day.

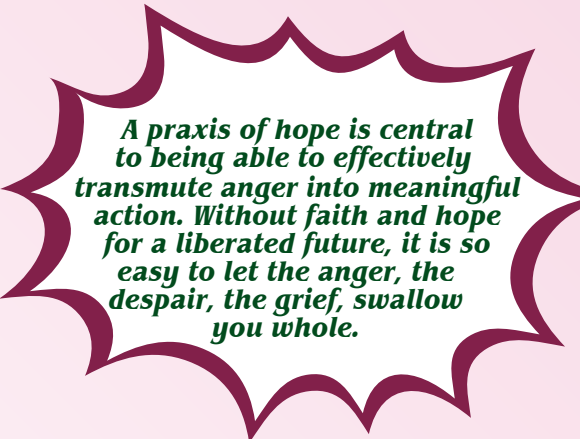
And then the daydream ends, and I shake my head clear, reminding myself that as good as that idea feels in the moment, the path to liberation is not paved with vengeance and cruelty but with militant accountability and compassion. I'm not ashamed to contain within myself many kinds of anger; after all, I'm only human. What matters is how I understand that anger, and how I choose to direct it.



I believe that my Lordean anger has sharpened my knowledge of these various systems of oppression and death-making, and has tested my capacities for radical compassion, understanding, and humility. I no longer feel guilty for feeling so much anger, because it alerts me to injustice or oppression being inflicted upon myself or others, and that I can do something to change that.

But I couldn't have gotten to this point of self-acceptance without a steadfast praxis of hope. A praxis of hope is central to being able to effectively transmute anger into meaningful action. Without faith and hope for a liberated future, it is so easy to let the anger, the despair, the grief, swallow you whole.

My understanding of hope has been shaped by various abolitionists past and present. For myself, organizer, educator, archivist, and curator Mariame Kaba has been a huge influence on my abolitionist journey (she and her father inspired my favorite tattoo of mine). In her book *We Do This 'Til We Free Us: Abolitionist Organizing and Transforming Justice*, Kaba defines hope as a discipline that must be practiced daily. While I agree with this sentiment, it didn't always feel like it went far enough to encompass the nuances of hope under oppression.



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Often, trying to remain hopeful feels overwhelmingly futile when faced with a constant onslaught of violence and exploitation happening everywhere all at once all the time. But perhaps that is be-

cause hope has been colonized, captured by this white supremacist, patriarchal, capitalist, imperialist system. A system that makes us believe its lies of hope is an individual burden to carry, precisely because those lies lead to apathy and despair.

Infectious diseases scientist, germ doctor, grassroots organizer, writer, astrobiologist and educator Dr. Ayesha Khan provides a deeper analysis of what hope requires of all of us in pursuit of liberation: "Hope is not a feeling generated by an individual from within. Hope is a flame that is intentionally co-created in community that then permeates and passes through us all."

With Khan's encouragement, we must decolonize hope so that we can relinquish the pressure and guilt of bearing this burden alone. Together we can carry that weight. **Together, we can control the burn of our anger and our hope to selectively incinerate all that does not serve us, to nourish the seeds of liberation planted by those before us, tended to and added to by each one of us alive today, so that our future ancestors may thrive in abundance.**

Key to a praxis of hope and liberation is the understanding that we ourselves may not bear the fruits of our own labor in our lifetime. Liberation is not a singular destination, but a journey to a more just, equitable, sustainable, abundant world that doesn't rely on death, destruction, and oppression to exist. We don't know how long that journey will take, but we know we must keep moving forward so that one day, our peoples can know the taste of liberation, of freedom.

The Black Radical Tradition and Indigenous ways of knowing and being in right relationship with the world have always operated with the understanding that our liberation is tied up with those of ancestors past, present and future. That we must act in ways that allow future generations to also live full, dignified lives. And that this level of forward thinking not only makes you, your environment, and your community more resilient and sustainable for the future, but that each action thus also makes your own life more fertile and rich right now (as they say, a rising tide lifts all boats).

So, let yourself be angry at this unjust, racist, patriarchal, capitalist hellscape. And let yourself relax into the arms of a collective praxis of hope, knowing that each action we take together on this journey will bring us closer in alignment with the liberated world we and our ancestors have fought, and continue to fight, so hard for. For, as Arundhati Roy said, "Another world is not only possible, she is on her way. On a quiet day, I can hear her breathing."

Another world is possible, because we are on our way.

