

HATE
What Erupts in Me, You, and In The World: An Inquiry
IPV January 16th, 2019

I have dedicated much of my life to working for peace, both internally and externally, sitting with the Dharma inside myself, and making many attempts to bring the Dharma into the world. So I've been working with *hate*, with conflict, and with making peace. But there was something that shifted in me when reports came of the shooting at the Tree of Life Synagogue this fall. Even as I speak now, emotions arise and my heart fills. What was it about this shooting that was different? What was it about this shooting that landed me flat on my back at a whole other level of not understanding at all *Why We Hate*. You might think, *how naive.....*

When I was young I had the privilege of meeting Martin Luther King, Jr. and I followed his work like so many thousands of others. It was a time...a time when the movements for justice formed a deep and lasting imprint on my own mind and heart. I thought I understood *hate*. All these years I felt I understood the roots of *hate* and the necessity for non-violent action. And then that all fell away. After The Tree of Life shooting I was left with this aching question: *What is this?*

And then some weeks after this tragedy, the B'nai Israel Synagogue in Northampton and the Pioneer Valley Workers Center called a community gathering to oppose white supremacy and such hateful acts. We at IPV were invited to come and perhaps speak at the event. I was so grateful for the opportunity to gather with others. Being in community felt like a healing balm. Yet, as I drove to the synagogue I felt my own heavy heart, wondering, if asked to speak, what could I possibly say? As a young person myself I had been a victim of antisemitism, and this felt all too familiar.

And, as I drove to Northampton in that dark, cold night, something from a deep place inside arose.... the Buddha's Teachings on The Three Poisons....Greed, Hatred, and Delusion. And I thought, this is nothing new! *Greed, hatred and delusion have been around for a long time*. And again I thought: *What is this?*

So that night on my way to the synagogue, this question came alive and this inquiry into hate particularly has been front and center in my heart and mind ever since.

I don't have to enumerate all the tragedies and experiences of hate that flood us daily, that shake us to our core. Perhaps you like me experience this distress in the world as a daily exercise in regaining stability, regaining equanimity after witnessing or hearing about one devastating event after another. We are all too familiar with what feels like the innumerable costs of hate.

Tonight I don't expect to say anything that hasn't already been eloquently said before by spiritual teachers and leaders. But I do want to share my own inquiry in the hope that we can inquire together about this destructive emotion, and see where and how we can gain more insight into our very own lives. So tonight I have another question: How can we cultivate our own understanding so that our actions can be of benefit not only to ourselves, but to others in our life and for all beings everywhere?

When I grapple with the presence of hate, these questions arise. What is it I need to see? And how can I lift my own veil of delusion so that I see clearly into *my* own reactivity? How can I more closely discern what is skillful and not skillful? And how can I cultivate even greater compassion for myself and others?

There are wonderful organizations and people worldwide who tirelessly work to address hate, but my own teachers and practice remind me that we each need to begin with ourselves.

And having said this, I can honestly say, that for the most part I have looked at hateful acts in the world and thought.....*well that's not me.....i don't hate.....not like that....*

And yet now, as I look more deeply, I see that this hate is within me too. I see the flood of hateful acts in the world as a window, a window I can't turn away from, a call to go deeper, to look further into this question of hate and how erupts in me, perhaps in you, and in the world. This very flood of hate is heartbreaking....but it's a necessary heartbreak, in just the same way as we have to face other heartbreaks that we play a part in. What do I have to see in myself? And if we can allow ourselves to stay

with it, especially in the company of community and sangha..... there is much to see. The gathering of community makes it even more possible to wake up and witness my own heart, my own mind, and I can see my own delusion. When we come together in this way, we can turn to each other for the courage it takes to face the delusion we may have relied on.

I want to explore this act of courage we take by even sitting here together tonight, our own courage in this room and the thousands of others acting courageously around the world. What does it take for us to see what motivates us more clearly? What is it that stirs our heart to take action, even in the smallest ways, for ourselves and in the world?

I've turned to the Buddha's teachings on the Three Poisons, aversion most especially.....and this is what I'm finding.

In Joseph Goldstein's book Mindfulness, A Practical Guide to Awakening, he says the Pali word for aversion literally means "striking against." A great teacher Bikkhu Bodhi explains aversion as the attitudes of resistance, rejection, or destruction. He says they are all the condemning mind and include a wide range of aversive states: violent rage and hatred, anger, ill will, animosity, annoyance, irritation, fear, and in very subtle ways, sorrow and grief. In Buddhist psychology all of these mental states are rooted in hatred. Joseph writes: "In English we usually reserve the word hatred for an intense hostility or extreme dislike, there can be an insightful and perhaps not obvious understanding of mind when we consider that even the milder forms of aversion we're more familiar with are deeply rooted in the more powerful underground force of hatred. We can see the force of this mind state when it erupts in times of war, in racial, ethnic, or gender violence; or in intense interpersonal conflicts."

Joseph goes on to say: "But as powerful as hatred is as an often-hidden current in the mind, the power of mindfulness lets us look clearly and deeply into our own minds and begins to weaken and finally uproot even the deepest tendencies.

The Buddha summed up all these causes of the suffering mind: *aversion arises when we don't get what we want or we do get what we don't want.* Mindfulness can free us of this conditioned habit of ill-will."

So in this exploration of aversion, I can see the roots of hatred in myself, when I experience my own reactivity...my own irritation or annoyance or 4 fear. I can honestly say I have daily experiences of one or another aversive emotions, or even multiple aversive emotions all at the same time! On a continuum, it can range from my irritation at how my husband loads the dishwasher to my outrage at government officials separating immigrant children from their parents.

And as I've been inquiring into the roots of hatred in this way, I have come to see through this lens of the Dharma how much I can convince myself of my right views, and to see how easy it is to fall into the trap of I'm right and you're wrong kind-of thinking. How easy it is to justify my actions. Perhaps you too can see this potential in yourselves. I can see how self-righteousness can mask aversion and seeds of hatred. I need to look again at the slippery slope of aversion. With mindfulness I can recognize how this attitude of self-righteousness can be a real clue, a key to our understanding, a way of seeing our habitual patterns, a key that can lead to freeing ourselves from the trappings of aversive tendencies. We can come to feel a sense of freedom and possibility for another view.

As I've been inquiring into hate in just this way, I learned about the work of former white supremacist skinheads, who founded "Life After Hate", a nonprofit whose mission is to help people leave hate groups, particularly white supremacy groups. Life After Hate is committed to compassion, education, and countering violent extremism. One founding member describes the profile of a skinhead: "I sought power when I felt powerless, attention when I felt invisible, and accepted when I felt unloveable." If we close our eyes for a moment, is there any one of these feelings that any one of us can relate to? Can I recognize the times I too have felt the same?

In Transforming the Three Poisons, leaders within by the Source Point Prison Dharma Service write: When there is conflict or perceived enemies around us, our mind is never calm, we are endlessly occupied with strategies of self-protection or revenge." In just this way, when James Fields Jr., the man who drove into the crowd in Charlottesville, Virginia was being questioned about his action, he answered, "I feared for my life". He apparently felt justified in committing this act of hatred out of his own need for self-protection. And then when he learned that he had killed Heather

Heyer he was “shocked and upset.” He was so blinded by his hatred that he had no awareness of the life-threatening act he was committing.

How many times have you or I been blinded too in our need for self-protection or self-righteous beliefs? Maybe this isn’t an action you or I would commit, and so we can easily disassociate ourselves from acts of hatred like this, when really we are all capable of doing terrible things. It’s even part of what we came in with as human beings. We are meant to learn, we are meant to discern between what is skillful and what is unskillful.

So what is it that can help us transform our own unskillful reactivity or hurtful, even harmful acts? I found the mission statement of Life After Hate one such example of this transformation. Their mission statement says: “Inspire people and communities to a place of compassion and forgiveness for themselves and for all people.” One member’s t-shirt reads: Make Empathy Great Again!

Joseph speaks of the quality of compassion this way, “because when we can open up and see what’s there, and feel the suffering, feel the difficulties, feel the challenges from a place of equanimity, compassion actually flows. It’s compassion that actually motivates us to get engaged.” Joseph goes on to say, “We need to cultivate these two qualities of equanimity and compassion within ourselves first and then bring them out into the world.”

Thinking about the shooting at the Tree of Life Synagogue, led me to reflect on the shootings in 2012 of a Sikh Temple in Wisconsin. In conversation with members of Life After Hate one temple official said “the shootings forced members of their community to do some deep soul searching themselves, and they were able to give forgiveness to the shooter and understand and build compassion and empathy for more people that are in this same situation.”

While acts of violence and hatred are heartbreaking, discovering our capacity for forgiveness and compassion is at the same time so inspiring. How do we grapple with the truth of both?

In his book, The Wise Heart, Jack Kornfield says: “The courageous heart is the one that is unafraid to open to the world. With compassion we

come to trust our capacity to open to life without armoring.” Jack quotes the poet Rilke who reminds us, “Ultimately it is our own vulnerability upon which we depend.” Jack goes on to say: “We need the same courage to pass through a difficult divorce without lashing out and increasing the pain and anguish. We need it when our children are in trouble, when things go wrong at work. In all these situations we are vulnerable and everyone involved needs compassion.”

So how do we work with aversion, our own irritabilities, annoyances, our own reactivity? As I’ve been in my own inquiry, I just keep returning to genuinely observing my own reactivity, my own aversive tendencies because I see that it’s only here that I can make a difference, not only in my own life, but with my family, my community, and in the world.

No matter how small it may seem, our own intention to bring love and compassion into our lives and into the world can accumulate and have impact. Gil Fonsdal, a West Coast Teacher speaks of the Buddha’s teaching on lovingkindness. “The Buddhist tradition is designed to develop our capacity to love. Like a muscle, love can be strengthened through practice...Even practicing lovingkindness for the time it takes to snap the fingers is beneficial. Each drop of practice is significant and, as the Buddha said, with dripping drops of water, the water jug is filled.”

We cannot underestimate the effect of our practice...good sits, hard sits, it all accumulates and can bring us to greater understanding even when we can see it the least.

Some instruction from Joseph — Practice Mindfulness When Aversion Is Present

The first and most direct approach is simply being mindful of it, without judging the aversion or ourselves for having it. We simply open to it as an arisen mind state. The practice of noting can be helpful here. We can make the soft mental note, “ill will,” “anger,” or “discouragement” as soon as it arises and keep noting softly until it disappears. It would be interesting to notice how many notes it takes until the aversive mind state passes away. Is it five or twenty, or a hundred? At a certain point, the mind state will change, and noticing its passing away offers a deepening and important insight into its impermanent nature....Sometimes though, even if we are noting the aversion, this mind state seems to persist.

It is important to realize that all aversion does not fall away with our first loving wish. The Buddha spent years, and whole lifetimes, cultivating and purifying this quality. But as we practice it, recognize it, and become more familiar with it, metta begins to arise more and more spontaneously in our lives. It becomes the way we are, rather than something we do. As lovingkindness grows stronger, both for ourselves and others, we feel more tolerance, are a little less judgmental, and slowly and gradually start to live in a growing field of benevolence and goodwill. Here is where metta as a dissolver of aversion also becomes the ground for wisdom. The more loving and patient we are with difficulties and disturbances, the less lost we are in reactivity. Our choices and actions become wiser, which in turn leads to more happiness, more metta, and greater freedom.”

Let's sit for a moment.....