

Meeting Violence with Kindness

Brandon Dean Lamson • Jul 26, 2016 • Lion's Roar Magazine

.....I attended a dharma talk at the Houston Zen Center given by my teacher, Gaelyn Godwin. She spoke about the traumatic events of the last few weeks and mentioned how seductive and human it is for us to cling to the distinctions of outsider and insider. Either we identify those around us as insiders—core members of a group defined by shared beliefs and values—or as outsiders who reject these beliefs and values. These dualistic concepts apply to the way we see ourselves as well, sometimes identifying as an outsider who feels excluded from the group and at other times imagining that we are insiders. Dangers accompany both positions: outsiders may disregard the well-being of others and act in ways that intensify their isolation, while insiders may become complacent and ignore or deny the suffering of those who do not belong to their group.

The Zen tradition suggests that there is another space we may inhabit and practice from, that of being on the edge of the inside. When there, we can affirm the values and beliefs of the community while also questioning those values and beliefs. We can empathize with both sides in a conflict yet still cultivate compassion and nonviolence.

Honoring both sides of this duality is challenging practice that calls upon us to open our hearts to the suffering of others. I hope that in these coming days and weeks of turmoil and strife I can meet violence with kindness, cruelty with compassion, and delusion with insight. May we carry each other through these dark times through the strength of our practice, sitting in silence and stillness, breathing as one.