

Making a Real Difference

Earlier this week, I began to write a message about staying cool in a general election month, but then I heard the ghastly news about the Manchester terrorist attack, and that message seemed rather trivial.



When something as terrible as the Manchester bomb attack, or London terrorist attack, happens, we tend to feel frightened, angry, helpless, or a mixture of all three emotions. Unfortunately, the energy of fear, anger or helplessness is very low, and so if we continue to entertain our fear or our anger, we will inevitably leak shaky, dark energy into the atmosphere around us. We then accidentally become part of the problem, rather than part of the solution, because the energy of fear and anger is basically a life-destroying type of energy. On the morning after the Manchester attack, I tuned into the atmosphere in South Manchester where we live, and it did not feel good at all.

It is relatively easy to tell everyone to stay strong and united in love and compassion after a horrific incident like this, but how do we do that if we are feeling really upset and fearful?

I think the best thing to do in the aftermath of any shocking news is to send ourselves a lot of loving kindness – like a mother comforting a distressed or hurt child. If we possibly can, we should take a few minutes to just sit still, gently tune into our breath and notice the emotions rising up in us. Then, if we notice that we are feeling angry, fearful, anxious, or even rageous, we can bathe those feelings in love and compassion until they naturally start to dissolve.

But I do have to warn you that you will need to be able to steady your wobbly mind to do this, which is why some kind of daily meditation practise is the key to rising above all the endless, terrifying news in our world.

You do not have to sit and meditate for hours every day to gain real benefits from a daily meditation practice. Even sitting still and watching your breath for just 10 minutes twice a day will have a beneficial effect on your general state of mind in the long run. In fact, meditating for just 10 minutes every single day of your life will have a much greater positive effect on your long term well-being than going on a month long intensive meditation retreat but then dropping your practice all together soon after you get home.

Meditating is rather like watering your house plants. If you water them a little and often, they will thrive, but if you only remember to water them once in a blue moon, they are going to die on you.

If you tell yourself that you do not have 20 minutes to spare each day for meditation, I have to tell you that you just have a lot of resistance to looking within. But don't worry, we all have a great deal of resistance to regularly practising any genuinely awakening practices, because our egoic-selves really, really do not want to give up all the juicy dramas of being the innocent victim of a wicked world.

For example, we can probably notice a strong tendency after any kind of terrorist attack to see ourselves as the good guys and the terrorists as evil. But now, after many years of slowly awakening, I try not to think like this. I find it much more helpful, and far better for my own peace of mind, to see everyone as innocent children of God, but innocent children who have fallen fast asleep and are now dreaming crazy, paranoid nightmares.

In this crazy dream world in which we all seem to live, our vulnerable minds can so easily be persuaded to believe complete nonsense. A large number of apparently sane Americans for example truly believe that they have experienced being abducted by aliens. So it does not really surprise me that some young Muslims can be persuaded that killing as many infidels as possible is their golden ticket to go straight to heaven. The only difference between them and medieval Christian crusaders - who went off to kill as many Muslims as possible - is that no one seems to have believed that Christian heaven was full of virgins!

Seeing this, I can now feel some genuine compassion for all the aggressors in our world because I see how their minds have been totally warped by a crazily destructive egoic thought system. So now, when I extend love and compassion out into the world at the end of my meditations, I always try to include the perpetrators of terrible violent acts as well as their victims

Sitting still and sending loving kindness and compassion to just our own frightened or angry self is not going to make much difference to our troubled world, but if we consciously extend that loving kindness and compassion to everyone caught up in any kind of horrific nightmare, I do believe that we can make a real difference.

All minds are linked. In fact, modern scientists now tell us that we all exist in a web of inter-linked energy waves.

As Buddhists have been teaching for thousands of years, we are not nearly as separate as we perceive ourselves to be when we are in a normal state of consciousness. We are actually all intertwined energetically, and we therefore influence each other quite significantly with our 'private' thoughts and feelings.

Knowing this means that we no longer have to feel so helpless after any kind of tragedy or in the midst of any type of conflict. We can turn our attention away from our own self-centred concerns to focus on how we can make a real difference to our local community by calming our own fears and then remaining strong and steady as we hold everyone in our prayers.

We can extend the life-supporting energy of love, light and peace on behalf of all those who are suffering in our world, and just by doing this, I now truly believe that we can become part of the solution. We can consciously practice ameliorating any frightening situation, rather than accidentally contributing to the terrible problem of endless violent conflicts in our insane world by entertaining thoughts of hatred, rage or revenge.

Peggy Foster
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