

Overwhelmed by All the Violence in the World?

Bhante Bodhidhamma · Tips of the Day · 2 min read

What to do when we feel overwhelmed by the stories and videos coming from the seeming endless conflict between Israel and Palestine and the terrible images and slaughtering by Islamist fundamentalists – to mention two main areas of conflict. Here are some ways to undermine overload, unrequited compassion, despair and burn out. First it's a case of humility. Power: We need to accept what we can do and can't do. And let go of trying to do something about a situation that we know we can't do anything about. Consider this modern koan/paradox: What can we do when we've done everything we can do? Influence: We need to know what we can and cannot get other people to do. And let go of trying to have influence where we have none. Secondly, we need also to take the long term view. Look at Europe and its 1000 years of internecine wars. That's how long it took, with every bit as horrible events as in the Middle East, until we finally agreed to live peacefully together. Of course, there is also the carrot of the benefits of peaceful co-existence. Thirdly, we need to do what we can always do – send our goodwill messages of love and compassion. Even if we don't think it has any effect beyond ourselves it makes us feel we are doing what we can. In the Buddhist Tradition, it is understood that metta/karuna blessings will have an effect no matter how slight. There are also donations that can be made to the various charities that deal with such situations. Fourthly, we also need to come to a place where we know enough and enough is enough! Stop feeding the heart and mind with horror stories. Why stop at Israel/West Bank, Islamic State? Finally we need to accept that this is samsara. This is where delusion will always play itself out, but also where it is possible for individuals to liberate themselves. This is the training ground. Do you have other suggestions? Please email and I shall add to next Newsbyte. Thanks. Comment by Sally Lever You asked for additional suggestions. What I'd like to offer and share is something I've noticed in myself when faced with so much atrocity, particularly the senseless killing of innocent civilians, including children. When I started my first job after finishing with Uni, I had a very inspirational and caring boss. When he noticed us criticising others, he would say something like: 'When you see yourself pointing a finger at someone else, take a moment to look at your hand and notice who the other fingers are pointing to.' So I quickly learned to check things out internally with myself first before projecting my grievance onto others. Having been practising this for another 30 odd years since then, I still manage to criticise others and to be aggressive towards them from time to time, although I think my level of awareness is improving, thank goodness! So, returning to violence in the world, in addition to all the suggestions you've made, I also reflect on how what I'm witnessing externally might be reflecting anything internally in me or externally in relation to my behaviour. For example, I found myself feeling particularly upset learning about children being killed. I asked myself what I might do with my behaviour towards children. Where am I being aggressive towards them? I remembered myself speaking harshly to both my sons, to my niece

and to the neighbour's children - aagh! I remember your enthusiasm for setting a daily intention, so when I feel upset about others harming children, I set an intention to behave peacefully with them myself. Bit by bit, it does seem to help me and maybe, like metta bhavana, the effects will ripple outwards?

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