

Violence in America – What Can Be Done?

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I feel fortunate to be living in the United States. It's a wonderful country filled with beautiful places and good people. But over the last month or so, there have been tragedies that show the problems that undermine our nation.

Back on Saturday May 14th, there was the killing of 10 African Americans who were at the Tops Supermarket to shop for their groceries. A young white male who targeted that market since the shoppers were predominantly black. The day after that, at a Taiwanese Christian church congregation in Orange County, a gunman entered trying to blend in and when he aimed a gun at the parishioners, Dr. John Cheng charged at the man and was killed. He was credited with saving the lives of others including his mother.

The latest tragedy occurred on May 24th at the Robb Elementary School in Uvalde, Texas. There, an 18-year-old gunman entered the school and killed 19 fourth graders and 2 teachers. The innocent children who had so much to live for and the two dedicated teachers lost their lives for no reason.

As futile as it may be, we offer our condolences to the family and friends of all people, especially the children, who died in those and other tragedies due to gun violence. In our schools, unfortunately, children now learn active shooter drills, in addition to the earthquake and fire drills from the past.

America is a country that gave its citizens the right to keep and bear arms. However, as so many have said, assault weapons that were created for use by the military are in the hands of so many who use them for the wrong reasons. From my perspective, there are no right reasons to own such weapons.

I am sure that it isn't only us who wish for a country in which we can all be friends working for common causes. Christians, Jews, Muslims, all wish for the same thing. In one of the press conferences following the tragedy, I remember the Lt. Governor of Texas, Dan Patrick, ended his talk by saying, "please, give us your wisdom." Wisdom to try to make sense of this tragedy is hopeless perhaps. But wisdom is what Buddhism would say is lacking in the current state of our country.

I remember years ago seeing the documentary, "Bowling for Columbine." It was a Michael Moore film based on the tragedy at Columbine High School in Colorado back in April 1999. 13 high school students were killed then.

One of the things mentioned in the movie was that there are more firearms per capita in Canada in comparison to the United States. But gun violence was a tiny percentage in comparison to that of our country. I remember walking out of the theater thinking I would like to move to Canada. Japan is a safe country in comparison to the U.S. also. There is no legal way to purchase firearms there. There is crime. But without guns, the frequency and degree are so much lower than our country. We still must deal with COVID, but the worries of continued violence is a growing concern.

We can do what we can to foster friendship with people we meet. We can do what we can to help people in need. And, although it is a monumental task, to take the lesson included in our teachings to make the world a better place for everyone in which neither weapons nor war become unnecessary. That's the wish that I believe Buddhism and all religions yearn for. Living with hope and being able to share our happiness with others is so much better than having to live with fear. We also hope for a peaceful end to the invasion of Ukraine and a return to peaceful and happy lives for its people.

Amidst all of the challenges that everyday life brings to us, we have the ability to make our lives and the lives of those around us happier and more meaningful. Let us continue to listen to the Buddhadharma as we maneuver through our daily lives.