

Addicted to hating Trump

It's one thing to oppose harmful actions. It's another to need to be right.

By [Teri McDowell Ott](#)

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A few nights ago I dreamed about a man I love to hate—a man whose conservative, self-righteous Jesus talk drives me crazy. In my dream I publicly embarrassed this man. I called out all the ways he was wrong in a room full of people. He was humiliated. I even made him cry. I woke up from this dream feeling so satisfied.

Karen Armstrong, a British author known for her books on comparative religion, wrote [12 Steps to a Compassionate Life](#), which she based off of the 12 Steps of Alcoholics Anonymous. In an [interview on the TED Radio Hour](#), Armstrong explained, “We are addicted to our pet hatreds. We don’t know what we would do without the people we dislike. We meditate on their bad qualities. They become our alter egos. They are everything we are not. When we say something negative about these people we get a buzz of pleasure almost like the first drink of the evening.”

I immediately thought of the man in my dream as I listened to Armstrong speak. Her words rang so true. My dream reflected my ego’s desire to win, to be right, to defeat this man with whom I disagree. “People don’t want to be compassionate,” Armstrong said, “they want to be right.” Our egos drive us to these conflicts, even in our dreams.

We would be well served to pay attention to Armstrong. My Facebook feed has been full of articles about Donald Trump—negative articles, because that’s what my friends are posting. At first, I read these articles eagerly, looking for more reasons to support why I was right about our president-elect. But I have started to question this national addiction to hating, to opposing, to proving ourselves right. It seems like we are enjoying ourselves a little too much.

Over dinner the other night, my husband, Dan, cut off our nine-year-old son as he was making fun of President-elect Trump. Our son was just mimicking what he had heard others do. But Dan corrected him, saying that we will not make President Trump the butt of our jokes. We *will* critique what he does when we believe his actions are wrong. We *will* work to hold him accountable to what we believe is just. But we will not disparage him or make fun of him for the sake of our own pleasure.

I appreciated Dan's words to our son and realized I needed to hear them myself. It's easy to hate, criticize, and meditate on the bad qualities of others. But putting another down is a terrible way to win. It does nothing but produce more conflict and rancor. Ugliness just breeds more ugliness. Armstrong suggests, then, that we wean ourselves off of our addictions, our pet grudges, our hatreds. It's a project for a lifetime, she warns. But it will be a lifetime that prioritizes compassion—all day, every day.

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