Nothing Left to Fight Against, by Zenkei Blanche Hartman

During the Vietnam War, I was a political activist. Â I fought for peace. Â There was some contradiction. Â There wasn't any peace in
me. Â I hated the people who disagreed with me. Â That was a kind of war within myself. Â In 1968, I was just beginning to look at the way in which I was vigorously clinging to my opinions about things and denigrating others who had different opinions, when there was a strike at San Francisco State University.
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The police came with their masks and clubs, started poking people. Â And without thinking, I ducked under the hands of people to get between the police and students. Â I met this riot squad policemen face-to-face with his mask on and everything. He was close enough to touch. Â I met this policeman's eyes straight on, and I had this overwhelming experience of identification, of shared identity. "This was the most transformative moment of my life -- having this experience of shared identity with the riot squad policeman. Â It was a gift. Â Nothing had prepared me for it. Â I didn't have any conceptual basis for understanding it. Â The total experience was real and incontrovertible.
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My life as a political activist ended with that encounter, because there was no longer anything to fight against. Â The way I described it to my friends was the policeman was trying to protect what he thought was right and good from all of the other people who were trying to destroy it -- and I was doing the same thing. Â "Since I had no basis for understanding the experience of shared identity with someone whom I had considered complete "other" (i.e., the riot squad policeman), and because the experience had been so real and so powerful, I began to search for someone who would understand it. Â How
could a riot squad policemen and I be identical? Â In my search I met Suzuki Roshi. Â The way he looked at me, I knew he understood. Â That's how I got here [as an ordained monastic.]
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--Zenkei Blanche Hartman, former abbess of the San Francisco Zen Center
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