

Reflections on the Pandemic

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For four years I have been traveling around the world trying to awaken folks about the dangerous times we are living in, through political lenses, religious crises, and economic and environmental issues which are all spiritual and moral issues. These years of presentations, taping and guiding individuals as well as systems has now come to a crescendo in the present worldwide pandemic. I feel I need to address this moment, which we must prepare for the consequences of the radical changes ahead. We are on the brink of either addressing, denying or wanting to withdraw into regression.

The first statement I want to make is, this collective crisis now imposes itself on every person in our society and the way we come together and grow through this may create either a future in greater awakening or in fear and projection. The collective now forces us to recognize the interpersonal relationships in our lives and also the intrapsychic issues within all of us which triggers our responses. We cannot fall asleep; the temptation to withdraw into fancy is deadly. We need to touch into the inner hero who stays awake not only for ourselves but for others. Holy Week and Passover are fast approaching with the pandemic exploding in our midst in New York. God calls us to remain awake with him this holy week. To stay with the suffering is the challenge. Those who are attached to the ego and its ridiculous need to remain secure must face life itself as the pandemic rips away all our illusions.

I will reflect on two different levels of response the first being on an individual level and then the greater collective level which may need a long time to integrate and shift our human consciousness.

Individual Level:

1. In times of crisis the reptilian part of the brain automatically awakens with alarm and our first response is fight or flight. The survival of the fittest is tested. Take no one with you. Fear, panic, anxiety, and hoarding set, as well as seeing the other as the enemy. We freeze before our choices and toilet paper becomes a symbol of our needs not being met. Guns are selling at 300% of normal, as if the virus can be fought by a militia in arms. Our primitive and ancient conditioning must be raised to a higher level. We are called to truly remember our core and the 'blessed assurance that we have known many times before. *Who do we trust at this moment? Where is our real knowledge? To whom shall we go?* Our contemplative practices have informed us of the truth of who is our rock and foundation. Lean into this energy beyond ourselves and the craziness of the world. *Where do I choose to go -- to the most primitive or to the awakening Self? As my ego falters in energy, where is my strength?*

2. Each of us has cracks in our personality, the weak link which is always there, but is generally hidden by the illusion of control. When locked up together for any length of time without the escapes of ordinary times, we can blow up and under extreme cases do violence to one

another. We need to recognize and name our vulnerabilities and seek others understanding and forgiveness for stepping on each other's last nerve. What normally does not bother us is accelerated by the intensity of close living without an exit or a time frame without an end. Patience is a form of conscious suffering. I choose to accept my limited self and those of others. This is so important in families who are under financial stress, children with needs being overwhelmed. We can suffer the cost of patience, or suffer the conflicts and wounding to each other. One form of suffering provides life the other harm and violation. *Which do I choose daily?* I am reminded of *The Diary of Anne Frank* and her description of the struggles of fear and extreme limits of space and food to survive months into years. We have only a small window into this. *Today, when millions live in makeshift tents in the cold in Syrian camps, can I learn some compassion at this moment of stress?*

3. Part of this crack in personality is the upheaval of my addiction of choice. Under stress those who struggle with addictions (all of us) find the lack of footing brings back the illusion of escape and immediate consolation. The liquor stores are open under the pandemic. Let us drown out our fears and not stay with reality in drinks, food (ice cream my favorite), cleaning, movies, talking etc. We are tempted to escape but don't numb the opportunity to grow in maturity. Our weakest link emerges and we need to express our real feelings, stay with ambiguity rather than immediate withdrawal and resolution. Past memories and traumas will arise from our depths. The memory is in our DNA. We need to comfort and hold the distressed self with reassurance and God's compassion. My Jewish friends and directees will suffer once again the college fear of persecution. Those who suffered abuse will remember in deeper ways the traumas of the past. Meditation, prayer, journaling, and human connection can help salve the pain. To simply be retraumatized is not of God. God is somehow not the cause, but dwells in the mystery revealing itself in nature. Reach out to others who will create a bond of truth not an action of illusion, isolation and false control. *Which are you called to choose?* The first three steps of recovery are here: being out of control, the reality of a higher power and surrender to this power. *Where is the battle? Can we let God win?*

4. Our normal noise of the Bronx has been quieted by the shutdown of non-essentials in the neighborhood, with less trucks and buses; but now the sounds are of ambulances going to Montefiore hospital a few blocks away. Each day there is the count of the dead as if it was a bizarre tally. Hundreds and now thousands of our fellow citizens are dying. The illusions of physical immortality are being wiped out every minute. The humility that I am now in the elderly category of high-risk individuals breaks down the illusion that 70 was the new 50! 70 is 70 and vulnerable. The harness of reality is here. Death is surrounding us and we cannot deny our vulnerability or that we are all terminal; it is a matter of when. *Will this awaken us to the quality of life with greater intensity of love or will it depress us and take away our energy?* The ego must face its terminal space. *Is this the hour and moment to do this heroic act? Will this give us the energy to be our True Self before we leave this world?*

5. This is a time to implement and act upon all that I know, and have learnt in the past and use the tools which I have in my tool box. The games are over and the serious truths of our identities are at our disposal. My shadow may erupt and I have to decide do I go into denial, project it upon other folks I live with, or split it off. Do I integrate this obvious truth consciously in my life? This is the time to practice! My typology informs me how as an introvert I enjoy the quiet and alone during these times but how I am not in control of my future and how this disturbs me as a J. Do I have empathy for the poor extrovert caught alone, or the sensate washing the floor four times a day! *Can I see how my Enneagram number in the pandemic can lure me into being engulfed by sorrow or try to find an escape in play while others suffer?* Our coping selves show up. *Can we learn to move towards health or do we surrender to despair the ultimate logic of mere survival?* It's time to take my journals out and implement the insights into behavior not based on feelings but facts. We are all called to put our adult pants on...and even to fake it till we make it! The Pandemic is forcing us to show up and pass the test ready or not. History will not wait for another time. It is now.

6. *Is this an opportunity to evaluate what really matters to me?* We live with economic instability and a world recession or depression is ahead. *With what attitude do I choose to face this unknown future? What are my core values of conscience which are greater than possessions and titles and personas?* This may be a time to take stock of everything and what are non-essentials and what are essentials to body and spirit. Under these conditions, we may come to appreciate the relationships that are vulnerable and precious. During times like this we see those who are truly heroic like the staff of our hospitals, risking their lives on the front line for all of us. The Depression and the World War II impacted a whole generation. It changed how we saw the world. Some of our leaders do not want us to change but to return immediately to the ordinary. This is impossible. *How is this changing your perspective of yourself, your loved ones and world you live in? Is this a conversion of heart during this Lenten season? The powers who don't want us to grow will attempt us to return to normal. Is this tempting you? Or are you ready to help the planet to move in a new direction? Are you ready to admit that things will be permanently changed and our choices will either make it better or worse?*

Collective level:

1. We are now leaving *Chronos* time and we are entering *Kairos* time. The ordinary repetitive time of daily life has been transposed into a liminal space for transformation. We cannot put this moment away, no matter who tries to do it. This is God's time to see reality on a different level of intensity and awareness. We are asked to let go of everything, weddings, funerals, celebrations holidays and holydays. This has not been before and may or may not happen again. This shock wakes us from our slumber, of religion as usual. There is more prayer going on, wrestling with God images and our understanding of life around us. We are all living something together, a common experience of life. We must wait. We are not fully in control and though we don't like it: this is true all the time under our illusion of control. Religion and its pietistic responses

cannot survive the testing period of deep transformation. It is the experience of God now which must come forward, stripped of security. *Does Kairos time demand something from you? Are you being called to a different trust in life and death during our Passover and Easter season? The God who awakens in disturbances is here. Can we greet the mystery? Mystics in the past have done so, are we called to the 21st century responses to the mystery? What is our vocation at this moment?*

2. The world in the 1960's got a view of the world from space, a unified reality without borders and walls; the earth is one organism working as a whole. For 20 years scientist have been warning us of a potential global crisis, and men of power and money have refused to listen as the speed of disaster is growing yearly and all the signs are here. This pandemic is a warning to all of us that power of money, guns, Wall Street are impotent before a microbe that can destroy our economy as a silent invisible killer. We are one world. *Will our consciousness of making America Great Again be silenced in the face of potential losses in both blue and red states? Do we need to revolt with all our might to ignorance and the refusal to listen to nature and its messages to us? We are nature and cannot stand above it in our hubris, defiant egoic arrogance, and fierce neglect. As we neglect the earth we neglect ourselves. We must learn to do this now before it is too late. Radical changes are necessary for the sake of the young and their families and lives 30 years from now. Will you stand for the future even if you have little time left on the planet? Are you passionate for life itself and the most prolife fight for dignity of all life, not only human life?*
3. Our deepest one-sided shadow is coming forward as a nation. From Charlottesville and the border crisis to accepting 100,000 deaths as a form of collateral damage to extreme incompetency is beyond words. Our illusion of American exceptionalism has been exposed as the sham it is right now. We have many gifts, but right now we are lambs to the slaughter of a harsh system of injustice. We admire and canonize those who are totally independent. What a complete illusion this pandemic has exposed! The clerk in the grocery store, the immigrants picking our food, the volunteers in our hospitals are all essential to a functioning society. We are radically interdependent. No conspiracy theory can suppress this truth. The age of alternative facts must end. Truth does make a difference and competency and science is not the "deep state" but our collective God driven knowledge and wisdom. Lies, manipulation and fear mongers on talk radio must be identified as antiheroes. The true heroes are those who show up in danger, risk their lives, and make their wills to respond to the urgency of the moment in service of others. These people deserve the medals of freedom, not an arrogant, divisive, misogynist. We need to be more discerning in who we reward with true gratitude for service, otherwise, we cheapen the real heroes in the face of antiheroes. *Are you willing to enter into discernment over and over again to stay with the truth, no matter how costly?* During his passion, Jesus has a dialogue with a puppet authority on the nature of truth. Truth is

not based on power and money. *How do I realign myself daily in Christ who is the Way, the Truth and the Life?*

4. We are recognizing the underbelly of a divided society; one with the best health care in the world and the other, vulnerable to this pandemic, without preventative medicine. How is it that so many folks in our rural counties and our cities, have very high cases of asthma, obesity, and diabetes? As the world responds to the crisis, we will emerge as the least prepared developed nation, and have the most cases and the most deaths. The truth will be known of how terrible we treat people and have refused to see health as the human right of a citizen. Half the country does not have \$500 in reserves while the other half worries about the stock market. Our greed and selfishness are made real for the world. We have this image of ourselves as being so generous, but that is not our present reality. To stop a pandemic in another country not only helps them but protects us. Small minded and ignorant, we use our resources in a gluttonous way and then pay the price. This shadow has a bright light fixed on it at the moment. We cannot cover it over with flag waving patriotism which hides a dark reality. Some have actually advocated those over 50 sacrifice their lives for the economy. These “money martyrs” advocate others, and not themselves, for the ultimate sacrifice. We have real martyrs in the pandemic throughout the world. The 55 chaplains in Italy who have died and the nurses and doctors infected daily are the true martyrs. The cult of money and its equation with American values is a scandal and a moral plague throughout our land. We need to shout from the hilltops the lies that are being proposed from the fascist right. These are now approaching the atrocities from previous generations. This is a materialist and secular interpretation which is verging on evil. *How do we detox from the evil that is surrounding us? How do we reach out to God pleading for light in this darkness which wants us to move to despair? With whom do we align? Christ also said he came to bring the sword of discrimination between good and evil. Are we willing to stand for this?*
5. Leadership in times of crisis matters. This has never been so clear as the present moment. When a malignant narcissist is in charge, it is impossible to make decisions for the common good of the whole country and the world. Ratings, money, profits and self-interest over-ride preparation and empathy for people. There is a total lack of any ability to accept personal responsibilities for mistakes. The enemy is other than me, the fake news, the other party, the corporations, the doctors. It is a perfect response like a perfect call to Ukraine. The selfishness is so massive a worldwide pandemic cannot break into it. A young black reporter is a threat, but the collapse of the health system is not. Rich people in the past had a sense of duty and privilege to the less fortunate. Today we have a self-serving cult for the few. Morality has collapsed. Conscience is under fire. The need to flatter, grovel at the feet of power for supplies and service to the weak is a scandal. We need to support true leadership among us in the areas of politics,

religion, economics and social needs. Millions are suffering but they are all dispensable; the money people must make their profits. We need leaders from around the world who are willing to take on the irrational skeptics and hate filled racists emerging. *Can the pandemic help us to see clearly and forcefully the right and good? Can we unite with confidence that the evil being done is not personal but archetypal, influencing the choices of the worldly?* Holy week is coming soon. Most of us will not be able to celebrate together the holy mysteries of suffering, death and resurrection. This may mean that in the silence and quiet of these moments, we actually live into these mysteries in a whole new way. *How do we surrender to a higher good in the face of transpersonal evil?*

6. Lastly, many directees have mentioned to me a felt sense of a call, a synchronicity that they are alive at this moment for a purpose. Collective consciousness increases with the multiplicity of individuals called to wake up. *How many mystics are in our midst waiting to blossom forth for the sake of the whole?* The lighting of the Easter candle is the real sign of this reality. Christ's resurrection then lights the way for all of us to see more clearly and love more fully. We must communicate that love and reality to create new contemplative communities of faith and experience. Jung said that these communities are the only hope in a dark world. He wrote this in 1942 in the darkest moment of the second World War. We need to take that advice on a whole new level to enact a vision in reality.

This has been my life's work and I feel it passionately at this moment. We do not need presidential optimism based on false reality; we need transpersonal hope from the depths of our souls. Love, prayer, action -- the inner and the outer must come together. The collective crisis is inviting us to new ways of being together in interpersonal relationships and to awaken the intra-psychic reality of union with the Divine, the highest goal of every person on earth.

In conclusion, please feel free to share these thoughts with others and to check out my web site for many topics which might assist the conversation (www.donbisson.org). May this time of prayer, coming in days be a passionate turn towards the Light.

It's time to move fast; there is no time to lose. The urgency for the kingdom of God birthing around us and in us is here. Let us have the courage to face the challenge as our sisters and brothers before us throughout the ages. The communion of saints both here and in heaven are wrapped in Divine Love.

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