

UNCONCLUDING KIERKEGAARDIAN POSTSCRIPT ON THE NEW NORMAL

As we weather this curiouser & curiouser -- not to say 'Monty Pythonesque' -- season, let us remember that we were never promised an 'ArMegaFear'-free ramble in this Bosch-like Garden of Unearthly Delights. According to the Franciscan Richard Rohr, 'Do not be afraid' occurs 365 times in the Bible (from Rohr's "Falling Upward," 2011). To probe more deeply into this ongoing conundrum, J. Krishnamurti has this to say: "Most human beings are frightened, have innumerable forms of fear: fear of darkness, fear of growing old & dying, fear that they might lose what they have. Being human, I am afraid of so many things, but I want to understand the root of fear, because if I can understand, observe the nature of fear, then it is finished, whereas if I merely trim the branches, then fear will continue. In other words, fear is a movement of time & thought, & that very knowledge prevents us from seeing something new, something fresh. But if you investigate & become thoroughly familiar with the movement of time & thought, which is the basis of fear -- then because you are so completely attentive, that very attention burns away fear." (from a lecture delivered in Madras, India, on Jan. 1st, 1984, when Krishnamurti was 89 years old).

Thirteen years later, the American Buddhist nun Pema Chodron had a very similar InSight in her "When Things Fall Apart: Heart Advice for Difficult Times." "Fear is a universal experience, a natural reaction to moving closer to the Truth . . . What we're talking about here is getting to know fear intimately, becoming familiar with fear, looking it right in the eye -- not as a way to solve problems, but as a complete undoing of old ways of seeing, hearing, smelling, tasting, & thinking." This observation is in its turn strikingly akin in Spirit to E. M. Cioran's statement that "Nature has been generous to none but those she has dispensed from thinking about death, for to aspire to Wisdom is to seek to conquer that particular fear without delay." (from Cioran's essay 'The Oldest Fear: Apropos of Tolstoy' in his "The Fall Into Time;" as trans. from the French by Richard Howard; Quadrangle Bks., Chicago, 1970). Which brings us back around to Krishnamurti's 'Observation is like a flame which is attention, & with that capacity of focus, the wound, the feeling of hurt, all that is burnt away, gone.' (from a lecture delivered at Brockwood Park, England, Aug. 29th, 1982). To 'translate' this into terms with which we're more familiar, the antidote for T. S. Eliot's 'fear in a handful of dust' is the Creative Use of the Imagination, which directly echoes our emphasis in last month's Newsletter.