
Cultural Daily

Independent Voices, New Perspectives

Peace in a Time of Fear

Karen · Wednesday, March 18th, 2020

Coronavirus fever is at high pitch. My experience thus far, knock on wood, has been limited to news headlines, of which there are an overwhelming number. As weeks after weeks of new information, updates, and fear are spread virally, I feel a somewhat surprising disconnect from all of it. I remember very clearly living through the SARS scare during my years in San Jose, CA. I remember the same fear that accompanied the rise of that disease, and felt it viscerally every time I went outside or turned on the TV. The public reflected it back to me, and everyone I spoke to emanated a certain level of anxiety.

This time, however, my experience is substantially different. As I've reflected on the greater sense of mental separation that I'm experiencing with COVID-19, I believe it stems from the fact that I am living in a country with a contrasting mental and emotional climate. Mexico, of course, is not immune to the virus, and there are reported cases here which will undoubtedly grow. And frankly, I do have concerns about how equipped the country is to handle a massive outbreak of the disease (just think of Italy).

However, I also am aware that I am living in a culture that looks at outside threats, such as this virus, very differently than the U.S. I am finding unexpected internal benefits from being immersed in a cultural perspective based, at least partly, on a greater acceptance of life, including both illness and death. There is less of a sense of self-preservation here than in the States. And I'm discovering that when there is less emphasis placed on self-preservation, there is less to be anxious about. Simply put, there is less to defend.

In some ways, this acceptance of both life and death—the sense that “if it is your time, then it is your time”—ushers in a greater sense of surrender with regards to any life event. A surrender, I might add, that is not about passiveness or ignoring necessary precautions, but is about freedom. An internal state that helps liberate people's spirits from circumstances over which we have very little control. However, many undervalue this concept of surrender. It is not an easy pill to swallow, for it goes against the grain of “making things happen” and counters the (albeit false) sense we normally carry of controlling our destinies.

While we need to take vigilant actions to prevent the spread of coronavirus, our internal state of well-being is equally important. I am reminded of this daily as I see frantic news reports and social media posts, the majority driven by fear instead of guided by logic. The choice we make to live either in fear or in peace is as connected to our body's ability to fight off disease as avoiding germs. Therefore, we need to be just as diligent about monitoring what emotions we are allowing

in. And I think the idea of surrender I see modeled by my Mexican neighbors—a greater acceptance of all of life, a recognition that we are not in this alone, and a belief that no matter what comes, all is still well—is an overlooked gateway to greater internal peace.

For peace is what I encounter here, in far greater quantities than I ever did in the years I lived in the States. There is a tangible sense of well-being in the Mexican people, even in the midst of very real and difficult troubles.

So, as I think about what my response to the coronavirus will be, I've decided that I would like to consciously dwell in more peace. Not just for myself, but for the sake of the planet's emotional state. To do this, I need to release a bit of the grip I've been taught to have on life, and instead, replace it with greater trust. This too, shall pass. And in the meantime, let us become a kinder and more caring planet. Let us recognize the depth to which we are all interconnected, and may we do our part to diminish the spirit of fear that is just as damaging as the virus itself.

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