

Smile, Smile, Smile

One smile for the lessons of yesterday, one smile for the gift that is today, one smile for the wishes and promise of tomorrow.

The Gifts of Covid

Our teacher, Thicht Nhat Han, re-minds me in the most gentle of ways, and I paraphrase:
No Mud, No Lotus.

At this moment of time, 22 months having passed since my vocabulary added “COVID-19” to the lexicon, I have had the chance to intimately experience some of the frustrations and hardships while observing at some greater than personal distance more of the danger, the sadness, the solitude and the pain generated by this novel Coronavirus. The Mud, indeed.

I never wish to minimize the necessary suffering that has been experienced among all of us. This shared experience has left us at times, and for some extended time, wallowing in the mirk of loneliness and separation, lacking in some direction and support, weighed down while grieving and hopelessness only add on to the mystery of what’s next and what can be done about it? I understand the anger, confusion and frustrations that abound under these conditions.

None of those emotions are to be trivialized, and no timetable mandated to “build a bridge and get over it”. There is necessary grieving and acknowledgement for our losses, and crucial questions to be answered and resources to be identified to inspire plans for moving ahead, above, and beyond the setbacks that Covid has introduced. There is much healing to take place amongst all our shared domains - the personal, interpersonal, and institutional. Those reconciliations will be informed by our deeply spiritual reckoning as well. There are, however, Douglas speaking, a plethora of Gifts, the “Lotus” if you will, that have presented and blossomed from the fecund soil of our shared Covid-19 experiences. I have found peace, solace, promise and inspiration as I have identified and even celebrated these offerings, these opportunities, these numinous openings to the phantasmagoria that encompass the multicolored quilts of our lives. I have discovered an increased strength of that fabric as the darker squares of Covid-debilitation are intertwined and reinforced by the bright swaths from the unique patchwork of light shining through from the endowments of this pandemic.

As is the condition of some of my most valued gifts received along my trips around the sun, they come at a dear price. I never wished to be gifted in these ways, and yet can only know gratitude for the clarity and perspective that unfolded from their wrapping.

I offer this suggestion: pick a time or times to reflect, whether individually or collectively, on the ‘gifts’ you have received through the shared experience of the pandemic. I truly believe, upon soulful consideration, we will all experience some moments of light, and love, some introspection blooming into some color and pleasant fragrance from the muck that continue to be the trials of Covid.



- turning the pages...
- Covid Holiday Gift ListOnce upon a pandemic
- Susan reminds us....
- Dr. Austin embraces Winter
- Radical Empathy
- What goes 'round comes 'round

Here's a few ideas to get you stirred up when meditating on
your own personalized Covid Holiday Gift List!!!!
(several from my own list of gifts received)

a time for reflection; We'll see the books and music releases that are beginning to be dropped;
The babies made!! adult coloring books ; Letter writing (lost art/re-discovered?);
Bread making; reacquainting ourselves with Ole Ma Nature;
listening to Dave Mathews and Phil Lesh broadcast from their own living rooms
remote workplaces

Zoom repertoire (I declare a powerful and welcomed bridge outside of our bubbles)

New musical venues (Frederick Drive In socially distanced)

NetFlix binging No Television (when 'enough' became 'enough'!!)

Blasting the 'tune of the day' at 7 p.m. out the deck speakers in honor of the hospital pros;

Having my isolation 'pod' include Isaac, Danielle & Evan;

established exercise/diet regimens;

or in consideration of some community gifts:

Ingenuity: the army corps of engineers summoned to convert motels and college dorms into
nearly-hospital grade facilities; changing arenas and convention centers into community
health care facilities; megaspeed development of vaccines and boosters

Intelligence: the analysis and creation of flow patterns and supplies for everything
from trash and used gowns to food & beverage and groceries and toilet paper and.....

Empathy: for how traumatic compulsory isolation can be; especially for mentally
challenged folks or folks with a tradition of close-knit family and community relations

Compassion We learn how under-served many of our communities are for public
health; we witness healthcare workers and first responders as they exceeded the human
limits of care and support of our communities at significant personal risk

Humility: re-cognizing value in lesser things that I took for granted

Truth re-cognizing the unabashed fact that we all belong to each other

Contentment making do with less and realizing I have all I need, all along,
anyway

May you continue to know the safety from inner and outer harm, the joy stemming
from well being within you and without you
from this finish of 2021 and on .

Once, upon a pandemic

October, 2021

Enough, enough already

As I draw the curtain tighter

Enough, enough

as I slowly cease to breathe

Enough, enough

I once was known as a fighter And now,

I only wish to leave but wait, the

window has a gap

Air is leaking in

It fills my lungs and clearly It's time

to begin, once again

Nici Repose



and Susan declares..... “ with all the pressure we have been under the past 2 years, make 2022 the year to shine!”

"A Diamond is just a piece of coal that did well under pressure"



Quarantine, or Isolation????? Keep reading.....



**Dr. Austin, sharing some thoughts on
Embracing the Winter Season**

Many times, when I greet a patient during the winter season or even in the months leading up to Winter I hear the same comments. Something to the effect of

“These short days are so depressing”

and “The worst part of winter is the lack of sunshine”

or “I can’t wait for the warmer weather”

Often, I too am drawn into the same less than happy thought process and find myself thinking of the drawbacks of winter weather and its darkness.

Recently, I came across a different way to think about the months of December through March...

Interestingly, many of the happiest populations reside in areas of the world where Wintertime brings the shortest days.

During the darkest days of winter in Norway, the sun never fully rises and there are only two to three hours daylight. Researchers have shown that residents of these areas have low rates of seasonal depression. So how do these populations thrive while Marylanders complain about a robust nine and a half hours of daylight even on the shortest day of the year?

Instead of focusing on the areas where wintertime lacks, Scandinavians focus on ways to make the season special.

^

^^

^^^

cook a favorite dish,

Celebrate with holiday light

gather around a fire with loved ones,

cuddle up in a fluffy blanket with a hot beverage,

Norwegians refer to these feelings or atmospheres as “Koselig” and the Danish call it “Hygge”. While there is no direct translation for these terms, some closely related English words that come to mind are comfy, nice, happy and warm. It’s not just a physical adjective, it’s a mental state of being.

If achieving Hygge is easier said than done, you may wish to try these other known mood boosters may help you through the season.

**Regular exercise, balanced diet, quality sleep,
getting outside in the sunshine, meditation, time with friends and family.**

Wishing this point of view helps guide others toward a happier and healthier Winter, no doubt it has helped me think differently about this time of year



Radical Empathy

I shared my insight, my perspective
with humility enough to not call it wisdom
And I am shunned.

dismissed, discounted,
denied the gift of your listening

My needs for understanding and respect negated, scoffed at, challenged.
All I know now, I hurt even more, sensing your pain.

Nici Repose November, 2021



What goes 'round comes 'round

Do you remember drawing your first complete circle?

No, you don't.

And maybe,

just maybe,

Someone caught the moment, and celebrated, or
didn't.

Now - only I know when I draw the circle complete.

And I celebrate those moments.

Nici Repose November, 2021

Quarantine

When you think of Quarantine, what emotions are stirred up? Until I learned about the true definition of Quarantine, I admit the utterance of the term stirred up a bit of uncomfortable feelings yielding a cringe or two, and not just a bit of gnashing of the teeth. I was confused and therefore uncomfortable as I perceived Quarantine to mean the same as Isolation. For someone as company-loving as I, Isolation and the pending loneliness it suggested was not anticipated as a happy zone. I have now come to embrace Quarantine as a distinctly separate essence from Isolation when I place them as noun and verb, respectively.

Imagine, if you will, that there is something deep inside you, yet to manifest, yet on the verge of breaking out and being set free. This could be something wonderful, it could be something monstrous. It is stirring, no question. It may be potentially highly contagious, no doubt. Or it may be uniquely your own, intimately personal and possibly not something others would care to share. The space and time required to see whether and how it will emerge is Quarantine. In this way, Quarantine is a term meaning the allowance of space between the nascent birth of this psychosocialphysical evolution and its maturity in whatever form it takes.

Quarantine provides a safe zone while padding the way from one world to whichever world comes next. The Safety Zone may protect us individually, and it may protect our interpersonal relations as well. Until, perhaps, the presentation is perceived as more monstrous than splendid. Or the other way 'round.

The Quarrymen (decidedly not named after quarantine) became the Beatles following their determined Quarantine for over 10,000 hours between Liverpool and Hamburg, virally 'breaking out' in the U.S. at the D.C. Armory in 1963. Without the allowance their quarantine informed, their artistry may never have evolved.

The Quarantine that was the "Sixties", from Civil Rights to Women's Lib to protests over the conflict overseas, erupted as the social outbreak introducing a decade of sociopolitical and personal change and challenges not seen before or since in such far reaching, coincidental and powerful ways.

Adolescence may be considered as a state of quarantine, perhaps not so comforting, and still a zone all its own as child morphs into adult.

Most often political movements endure a Quarantine, slowly rising up until a tipping point is achieved and the ethos spreads like wildfire among a population. These Quarantines have not been mandated. It has simply been the natural organic evolution of our earthly existence.

Furthermore, Quarantine is not only harboring viral illness about to set sail. Additionally, many mental diseases require a Quarantine development, essentially hidden until fully manifesting, sometimes not revealed until our late twenties. Adult-onset diabetes is in a Quarantine state until the 4th or 5th decade of life. Ultimately, the veil is lifted on the form that had been in-waiting, and the outcomes can be truly apocalyptic. Even pandemic. You see, History tells us about the monsters behind the veil of mystery, they always break free - incarceration is only temporary.

And what might be our response?

Isolation!

As if we need more time and space to develop our response to the challenges presented to our health, our morals, our ethics and our communities, even our

natural evolution to the next level of maturity. Isolation is a powerful verb that is decidedly not very powerful when it comes time to thwart any number of outcomes perceived as monstrous, birthed from quarantine and unleashed on societies.

However, the monsters exist as a rebuke to enclosure within the lines we might've drawn and a reminder of just who's running the show.

By the time the Beatles made their second appearance on Ed Sullivan it was far too late to isolate Rock and Roll from the airwaves. The pandemic tsunami had already begun to rise. There was no way to 'close the borders' to the British Invasion. Quarantine is NOT Isolation. If you had a confirmed diagnosis from signs, symptoms and tests you'd be isolated, told to stay at home or hospitalized. Quarantine, however, demands uncertainty. There is only potential in Quarantine. Potential for infection, possible risk, but nothing guaranteed. Pre-teens become adults, we simply cannot predict how they will manifest.

The foundation of Quarantine is designed by values and biases within the given domain, the structural blocks laid in accord with the existing perceptions, theories and learnings informing how the 'infection' takes place. This is the same way we parent, as well as the same way we partner those perceived as less fortunate. Furthermore, the same way we, ineffectively at this time, partner and support those experiencing mental dis-ease. Protocols and procedures, ritual behaviors are put into place to distance ourselves from that which we don't understand and reassure us as we confront and attempt to master the unknown, the unfamiliar, the untoward.

Quarantine may have earned a bad name as a powerful political tool wielded through the strength of public over-reaction. Beatles' records were publicly torched when John was misunderstood to say the Beatles were "more popular than God". Isolation, not Quarantine. Quarantine can be understood as a form of perseverance symbolized by the Chinese calligraphy of 'knife over heart'. A passionate trek necessitating navigation along the space between purity & danger.

Cass Sunstein coined the term "probability neglect" to describe what happens when we start paying little attention to the likelihood something could or will happen because the outcome (you'll put your eye out! Or, perhaps, you will experience rapture!) is potentially either joyous or horrible. Therefore, when our emotions (e.g. public perceptions) blind us to the likelihood of something happening, whether a really joyful or a really horrible outcome potential, we behave in ways (hysterically at times - think toilet paper shortages, or standing in long lines for the latest cell phone) that are ineffective at best, or potentially dangerous and damaging (banning records).

The engines powering these behaviors include expedience and fear. The processes often morph into the 'New Normal'. And sometimes the borders and ordinances that started out short term evolve into permanent borders, laws, and inequities (the 'War on Drugs')

Ostensibly, if we wish to seek some semblance of control over the perceived monsters of the unknown, a clue may lie in determining the cracks in the foundations, the weaknesses and vulnerabilities identified through clear observation, free from 'probability neglect'. There are a multitude of documented attempts to disinfect or clean to allow escape from Quarantine.

Some of our attempts in discerning these fault lines of invincibility have

included

Essential workers stay - all others vacate

Close the borders, even though the threat is unclear

Label recordings for 'adult language content'

Ban the books

Develop Health Passports, which actually date back hundreds of years - since the first issued were supposed to identify those who were Black plague-free

Banning free press (Oz magazine in 1971)

Teleworking

Virtual classrooms

Any of these protocols can be especially dangerous when we pick targets of certain populations as if they came from a contaminated, infective place (Hippies; the mentally diseased). All are based on perceived risks of yet-to-be-proven calamity - a slippery slope indeed and, depending on the emotion mitigating behaviors, can lead to a guilty before proven innocent verdict rather than the other way around. Think: prohibition of risky teen behavior when kids need to get into the right kind of trouble to grow into response-abled adults.

Additionally, there will inevitably be those who strive to do anything possible to evade quarantine. And, although recent Quarantine edicts served as a welcomed 2 weeks Netflix binge, a welcomed if unexpected respite from their previous day to day, others found Quarantine breeding anxiety, boredom, depression, loneliness, abuse and financial hardship.

Some of our biggest questions in our society today:

Is Quarantine even legal?

Can Quarantine be effectively implemented (what are the cost of resources financially, personnel, facility, emotionally)?

Should Quarantine be implemented in the first place?

If not now, then when? If so, then, how?

And meanwhile, establishing a Quarantine protocol that is not in violation of individual rights for freedom, allowing legal rights of challenge, while simultaneously sustaining the populace in the meantime (food/shelter/healthcare/vaccination/unemployment/business grants and loans!!!!!!)

What we ask of our nation to live in!!!!

This begets an enormous dilemma: achieve public health goals (sustain mutually agreed upon basic human needs) while using the least restrictive means. Health Security balanced with Human Rights. Again, put rock and roll, adolescence and mental disease in this mirror.

Is it the 'electric fence', or a choke collar?

Yet, voluntary Quarantine as a part of an overall addressing of the 'disease' can be more effective than mandated, compulsory constructs, actions that will always drive cases 'underground'.

Perhaps some successful Quarantine models include:

College as Quarantine: a safe zone for self-discovery while considering the morals, ethics of society and choosing how to fit in

Summer camp??? Not many of us who were sent off to summer camp had a thought

we were being quarantined, and certainly not isolated. We did, however, share a glimpse of what was burgeoning among our peers and how to fit in during those shared experiences outside of our biological families.

Mental wellness communities supporting self-discovery and safe management of medication and wellness practices.

Perhaps re-spect underscores the basis for successful quarantine practices. To look again at the dis-ease (or, the lack of ease, e.g. kids with long hair) and invest the time to inspect, evaluate and partner with the issues considered 'other than'.

Quarantine against one's will inevitably causes tumult and revolt. (see the "Sixties") A mutual understanding (the common ground under our thoughts, needs, values, bias) may at times bring the benefit of Isolation. Yet an agreed upon pause, a co-determined pace to process and partner the mystery allows for another instrument wielded for the sake of mutual benefits begetting prosperity, creating and sustaining health and ushering personal development. To coin a popular parenting term: a 'time out' among domains, personal, interpersonal, educational, societal and institutional to allow these benefits to flourish.

Just isolating things isn't as big a challenge as convincing other humans that it's the meet and right thing so to do. Gaining the trust that there is danger afoot and separation is a powerful if nothing less than necessary tool requires the gift of trust.

I read about a plan to determine how to warn future generations, 10,000!!! years from now, should they begin to approach radioactive waste landfills placed miles below the earth. Will the warnings be decipherable? Understood? Heeded? Or scoffed at or ignored? ... Mankind has made these mistakes in the past, and uncovered tombs with undesirable lasting ramifications regardless of universal language and signs heeding the danger.

The risk vs consequence distinction is a powerful motivator: is it best to design our architectures of isolation and quarantine because of the risk of the potential monster (Civil Rights, Women's Rights), or is it done to mitigate the most awful of consequences (anarchy, pandemic)? Very similar to crowning a tooth before it fractures (investing in time, treatment and cost to preclude future pain/tooth loss)

This is also why some have less tolerance for precaution if they think they are less at risk for the worst outcomes (cavorting college students neglecting social distancing at spring break) Our astronauts, however, have historically quarantined in order to prevent the worst of outcomes, even though the risk was entirely unknown. They did it for the rest of us.

How about data sharing? Talkin' 'bout trust here big time. However, as we most certainly will face similar if not more contagious and debilitating epidemics in the future, the more data we share the more accurate we will trace, isolate, and manage our mutual wellness in shared efforts for the promise of medical protection.

Pre-internet, The Grateful Dead created this model when they simply asked their fans to "stay in touch" through a request posted on the back of a record album, resulting to this day in a mutually supportive community of folks sharing a common bond and offering support to one another through shared values and a communal spirit that transcends race, religion and political ideologies.

After all, healthcare diagnostics are already on our devices, and there are reasons your favorite clothing store's ads show up in the margins of your morning Washington post.com ritual. Do we have a moral medical response-ability to forgo privacy in the

interest of the common good? It is time we recognize our common humanity – which doubles as our shared frailty, to further anticipate and project prevention while allowing progress.

“Who can stop what must arrive now, something new is waiting to be born”
Robert Hunter, *Crazy Fingers* as recorded by the Grateful Dead

Perhaps Quarantine is an inevitability. That is, an essential process that we may or not be consciously aware of being swept up in, yet necessary to issue in the next wave of thinking, doing, being. Expecting Quarantine, preparation would seem appropriate, wouldn't it? Like PPE (personal protective equipment) the methods of Quarantine are painstakingly laborious, not easy to get right. Looked at in this way, why not hold official Quarantine practices from time to time for the sake of 'skill' development? Sort of a forced 2-week Netflix binge. We could create a communal, cultural collaboration for the common good to foster humility, mutual trust and the gift of personal sacrifice as a re-minder that wearing masks, missing special occasions and celebrating Holidays in isolation are not seen as a political-power-over paradigm. Could we view Quarantine as the fuel for a nascent re-awakening of the eternal flame that Mother Teresa re-minded us of – that we belong to each other? I am so much more comfortable with that perspective than viewing Quarantine as some onerous limitation to my freedom and rights.

In closing, I have assembled a simple, short Wish List for our shared Future:

I wish for the allowance of the time necessary for the opportunity for the scientific method of theorizing, testing, measuring, analyzing in the presence of mystery, without strong willed resistance and misunderstanding of end game potentials.

I wish we all aspire to be “Good Neighbors” e.g. wash our hands, social distance, wear masks, pick up after our dogs, wear headphones, refrain from blowing leaves before 9 a.m.... (I'll keep it short)

It is good to remember, Quarantine is only one skein of a sifter used to separate the wheat from the chaff. Quarantine can be overdone, underdone, or fail even when done well. However, Quarantine must be realized as an alchemist's cauldron where gifts of creativity and connection brew into the next thing. Isolation may sever the ties that bind, and in no way will foster productive growth of future possibilities. Some aspects of the choices presented are volitional- like a two-year-old, you have a choice ... or predictable outcomes prevail. And making no choice will ultimately result in not living (feeling, belonging) at all.

Is Quarantine decidedly tellurian? Hmmmmm, perhaps our existence as a militant populace is simply a quarantine for our transition to the next level of salvation.

January 1, 2022... Well, that's all folks, thanks for reading. Here's my wish that all of you recognize the wonder and gifts of all those along your path in the year to come.

I know I remain so grateful for each of you.

After all, without you, I am not. this issue
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