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# Looking ahead to 2021

by Kathrin Stauffer

I live in Britain which has its own political and sociological conditions. It is hard to know if what is happening here applies in a similar fashion in other places around the globe. At the start of the pandemic last spring, there were many voices saying that this was a chance for the world, the 'Pause' button had been pressed and we could now rethink how we wanted the future to be when it was all over. I particularly remember reading Charles Eisenstein's article 'The Coronation' which made a very good case for saying the world-wide anti-coronavirus measures showed that it was possible to do almost anything if there was enough momentum behind it, such as the very widespread public support to keep us all safe from Covid. He went on to suggest that in a similar manner measures could be taken to, for example, stop children starving to death everywhere, or combat global warming.

I loved this essay and found myself agreeing that the scale of measures that were taken by almost every government across the world were staggering and gave the lie to much political resignation which had previously always postulated that political change was not going to be possible because the power of national governments had become too limited, and anyway the world had become too complex for any single intervention to be very effective. The pandemic

appeared to demonstrate a huge revival of the power and credibility of political institutions. After decades of global capitalism advocating as little state intervention as possible, suddenly the cries for more intervention by states all over the world were quite deafening.

However, I have been aware throughout 2020 that the energy behind all these momentous happenings is, unfortunately, fear. I am a psychotherapist who works most of the time with people who are fearful, and so I consider myself as a bit of an expert on fear. One of the things I know about fear is: it is not good for anybody. Fear stops people's brains from working properly, and it stops people from being the best they can be and making the best choices they can make. Instead, fear throws people back into their most primitive survival programmes and brings out the most regressed and immature self-states. It is a serious block to clear, differentiated and well-considered thinking and feeling. And I therefore find it hard to believe that a pause in the life of the world that has arisen out of fear could create conditions favourable for re-thinking how we want our world to look. Rather, it seems to me obvious that all people want is to feel safe. And the easiest way that many imagine they will feel safe is for the world to go back to the way it was. The universal prevalence of fear in 2020

is not favourable to taking the necessary risks that could allow substantial change in the way the world is going.

Indeed, this chimes with the narrative that seems to be peddled by (at least the British) government: that everything is done in a quest for safety. This is probably a very tasty sound-bite that will be gobbled up greedily, because we are all so unsafe and so desperate for safety. Perhaps this is the wider context to where much of the energy that galvanised the world into anti-coronavirus measures came from: years or even decades of steady erosion of all communal structures that contributed to our safety. If there is a wider significance of the global response to the pandemic this year, it is perhaps that so many people have given expression to their fear and their profound sense of being lost and no longer able to access any safety.

But as far as I can see, especially in a country where we don't only have Covid to deal with but are fast approaching our severance from the European Union in an attempt to recapture a spirit of freedom and independence fantasised to have existed in the British Empire, there is no chance at all that the many frightened vic-

tims of our 'gig economy' are going to gain anything. I expect it will be like the effect of the great Credit Crunch in 2008: the end result will merely be a re-distribution of wealth in such a manner that those who have a lot now will have a lot more, and those who have little will have even less. Social justice will once more be the loser, and the mental health of the population at large will suffer further.

I try to think about what it would take to create a better world in 2021. One thing that comes to mind is something my very first therapist said: 'The medicine for fear is not safety, it is courage.' Courage, in contrast to fear, can make good choices. It comes from a more mature part of the brain, and from a healthier state of the soul that results from an open heart. And I feel encouraged to see how many people are out there who have recognised this, and who are using their courage to try and bring about changes for the better. I am not optimistic that there will be enough of these people; but oh, I wish that they may make a big difference. And I wish with all my heart that their courage may not fail, that all our courage may not fail, in 2021.



Kathrin Stauffer, PhD, is a Body and Integrative Psychotherapist who was born and educated in Switzerland. She was originally trained as a biochemist, but became more and more interested in describing the human organism from a subjective rather than an objective point of view, and thus retrained as a body psychotherapist. She works in private practice in Cambridge, offering individual psychotherapy, biodynamic massage, EMDR and supervision for psychotherapists, counsellors and complementary therapists. She has taught Anatomy and Physiology at various institutions including the London School of Biodynamic Psychotherapy, and counselling at Hills Road.

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