

We are approximately four weeks into this season of self-isolation and social distancing, and it may continue for some time. In my last installment of these mid-week reflections I focused on spiritual practices which can support us in these days. In this week's reflection I want to look at "perspective"—how we train our minds to live with the reality before us. The apostle Paul wrote of having the same mind that was in Christ Jesus (Phil 2:5) and the "renewing of our minds" (Romans 12:2). How we view the circumstances around us impacts not only how we feel about matters, but it is a witness to those around us. I have gleaned three wonderful items, at least items I deem wonderful, from generous souls who have forwarded me material which has been important for them in the training of their minds. In two weeks I will explore the role of humour in helping us through challenging times, so if you have something which has made you laugh amidst all the tears please send it to me for potential inclusion in that reflection.

Patrick Preheim, co-pastor Nutana Park Mennonite Church

A Different Perspective On COVID-19 & Self-Isolation..... an e-mail forward from a friend of a friend living in Australia:

1. There are no bombs raining on our heads.
2. I am not a prisoner held in solitary confinement, as millions are.
3. I am not a refugee trying to escape with my life.
4. I am not standing in line waiting to fill a pot of water.
5. I have access to fresh food and I'm not starving.
6. I have hot running water.
7. My country has not been ruined by years of war.
8. I can reach my friends by phone and check in on them.
9. My friends check in on me because they care about me.
10. Any whiplash I feel about this strange turn of events is itself a sign of privilege.
11. More than half of the world would gladly trade their everyday problems for the modest inconveniences I am experiencing.
12. I may have anxious dreams but I'm dreaming them on a proper bed and I'm not sleeping on the sidewalk.
13. By staying at home, I'm helping the planet rest.
14. As long as I have my mind I can create, imagine, dream and not be lonely.
15. This global crisis connects me to people around the world and reminds me of our common humanity. This is a good thing.
16. When something tragic happens to another country next time, I will respond to it not with superiority, but humility and recognition.

17. I will fight for positive changes and economically just policies in my own country.
18. I am surrounded by books.
19. I am surrounded by love.

From a Richard Rohr reflection on “restraint” out of his regular postings:

One of the ways we can practice restraint is to follow Life's pattern of downtimes, using day/night and seasonal cycles like premodern societies did, as opportunities:

- To refurbish and repair tools, equipment, buildings, infrastructures and community and intercommunity relationships
- To both help and allow bodies and ecosystems to renew themselves
- To refresh and expand the community's base of knowledge
- To reflect on successes and failures and decide what needs to be done differently

These activities can be seen as investment in personal, family and community well-being rather than time off. . . . Ecological economist Herman Daly calls the process of building in downtimes "fallowing," letting land regenerate after a period of cultivation. "Fallowing is investment in short-term non-production in order to maintain long-term yields" and is exemplified in the ancient Hebrew's *Jubilee*.<sup>1</sup>

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From : *Solitude: a Singular Life in a Crowded World* by Michael Harris<sup>2</sup>

Dr. Edith Bone has decided not to cry...She steps from the prison's entrance and blinks at the sky. And then she sees them waiting for her. Those suited, peering men. They are all waiting to see her tears.

Photographers and reporters hoist their barrel lenses and spiral notebooks by the gleaming bus that has come to take her to the British embassy. They watch for the mark of those seven years alone. What scar does such isolation leave on the face? Or on the hooded eyes? The ordinary result is a descent into madness and crippling depression. But as Dr. Bone steps slowly across the courtyard toward the iron gates, she appears perfectly sane. If anything, she now looks cheerful. The officials and journalists stare. A man from England's Daily Express scribbles in his notebook, trying his best to dramatize things. He writes that she is limping. A week later, he'll be embarrassed to learn she was simply given the wrong size shoes.

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<sup>1</sup> Adapted from Ellen Laconte, *Life Rules: Nature's Blueprint for Surviving Economic and Environmental Collapse*, (New Society Publishers: 2012).

<sup>2</sup> Michael Harris, *Solitude: a Singular Life in a Crowded World* (Penguin Random House; Anchor Canada: 2017).

Dr. Bone was born in Budapest in 1889 and proved an intelligent, if disobedient, child. She wished to become a lawyer like her father but this profession was closed to women. Her options were schoolmistress or doctor; she accepted the latter...

She was held in filthy, freezing cells; the walls either dripped with water or were filled with fungus. She was generally half-starved and always isolated except when confronted by guards. Her captors received no false confessions, no pleas for mercy; their only bounty was the tally of her insolent replies. It became a kind of recreation for Dr. Bone to annoy the prison authorities on the rare occasions when she saw them.

When she asked for a barber, her guards told her women must have long hair, so she spent three weeks tearing each hair individually until she had the short cut she preferred. In the Summer of 1951, she went on a language strike, refusing to speak Hungarian...offering instead to speak German, French, Russian, English or Italian. She was fluent in all five.

But her most extraordinary stratagem was....the way she held sway over her self. The dogged maintenance of her own sanity. From within....she slowly, steadily,, built for herself an interior world that could not be destroyed or stripped from her. She recited poetry, translating the verses she knew by heart into each of her six languages. Then she began composing her own doggerel poems...

[S]he took herself on imaginary walks through all the cities she'd visited....She set out in her mind on a journey home to London. She walked a certain distance each day (wore grooves in the cement beside her bed) and kept a mental record of where she'd left off. She made the trip four times, each time stopping when she arrived at the channel because it seemed too cold to swim.....

[S]he decided she must have an abacus. She molded bits of stale bread into beads and strung these along pieces of straw which she stole from the broom guards handed her to clean up her cell...now she could make calculations up to a trillion. She tallied how many words in each language, how many birds she could name, how many trees, how many wines....

She molded more breadcrumbs into letters, four thousand in all, which she kept in 26 bread crafted pigeon holes. This was her printing press of wheat, and she used it to spell out her ideas and her poetry. The guards, when they peered in, frowned and told her she was not normal. Dr. Bone agreed...

Dr. Bone's guards were infuriated but she proved to be proficient in the art of being alone. They cut her off from the world and she exercised that art, choosing peace over madness, consolation over despair, and solitude over imprisonment. Far from being destroyed, Dr. Bone emerged from prison (in her words), "a little wiser and full of hope".