
A “Slap in the face” of interdependence and globalisation

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**"We don't know where we're going
And which way we're going".**

Saint John of the Cross

The illusion of being separated received a sound “slap in the face” of interdependence and globalization. It is the opportunity to see ourselves in the unity we share. In essence, we are left nowadays in a great disarray and we do not know how to live with it! "The deepest feeling of the human being is not the desire for pleasure, but the desire for meaning". (V. Frankl).

We have experienced intense moments of solidarity, of empathy, which showed the beautiful capacity for human cooperation. In the depths of our entrails, in our vital centre, the *hara*, we shelter the capacity of empathy, of feeling and putting ourselves in the place of the others. And to feel this in a deep way. To give is not enough: we have to give ourselves, *fuse*. To give ourselves to the other “as land”. The word “*infirm*” comes from the Latin “*infirmitas*”, which means “*without firm ground*”.

There appears a collective being, a Self of the group, a warm bond as in the applause every night in homage to the medical staffs and their enormous work; an unknown bond with our neighbours, a shared creativity, social groups, networks, a feeling of belonging that brings us out of self-isolation and uprooting.

In Barañáin, where I live (21,000 inhabitants), just after the news of the confinement, was created the "Barañáin Zainduz" (Citizens in Barañáin) and in two days 130 people with different profiles volunteered to solve health, psychological and educational problems, accompany loneliness, cook and shop for a group at risk. From small errands such as going to the pharmacy for medicines or shopping for a blind person who lives alone, to psychological support for elderly people who are deeply worried about the situation they are living in. Preparing meals for them. Or some cooks suggesting simple, balanced and tasty recipes. Poets, *bertsolaris* (1) dedicating their poems to those who ask for them, and at the same time proposing moments of great creativity. The human being manifesting himself as a human being. The drop of water which, recognizing itself as water, unites itself to the other, without looking at the surface tension of differentiation.

I am moved by this beautiful capacity for human cooperation, for welcoming, that the community manifests. The response (*responsibility*: giving an answer) of this country has taken place in previous crises. And it is sad to note that the elderly - who at the time were taking children into their homes because of unemployment and shared their pensions with them - are now the ones who died in greater numbers.

Can this recognition lead us to another space? A space that opens up beyond our narcissism? A space with more solidarity and empathy. With more truth, kindness and beauty. "Only beauty

can change the heart of the human being, who is by nature prone to darkness". (Saint Francis of Assisi).

And at the same time, what image do our political leaders offer? Whether we agree with them or not, whether we appreciate them or not, their "management" leads us. And they are without any doubt the mirror of the attitudes and behaviour of the societies to which we belong. And again, we see the confrontations, the divisions, the highlighting of differences and passions... Please, less passions and more intelligence!

In this country, as in Spain, from the first moment the language used has been "warlike", both in the expressions of the government and in the different communications. In each official communication, several generals in uniform from different corps of the army appeared. "The means is the message". (Mac Luhan). Playing with words, one could say that here, "fear is the message". But what is our own message and what is the message the media "inoculate" to us?

Fear is the emotion that creates the most unbalance. Hobbes said: "When my mother gave birth to me, twins were born: my fear and me". Fear, necessary as a survival instinct for our physical integrity, has - from my point of view - been transmitted and manifests itself now in many people in an excessive way. And then they withdraw into themselves and express it under the form of sideration or anger. We hold our joyful step because of the lurking image of death. Its deep root is the idea of being a separate self, and the ignorance of our true identity, of the unity that we share and that sustains us. Fear is an emotion opposed to trust. It uses the same neural circuits as trust and if one is active, the other cannot be active at the same time. Trust is an art that is cultivated in the deep acceptance of what is.

How do we regain the energy we lost in that withdrawal? We need a connected attention. The important thing is not to avoid fear, but to be able to see through it. And if we don't, there is a strong possibility that it will turn into panic, a deep and irrational fear of death that prevents us from being what we are, which increases the sense of isolation even more. How do we regulate the excess of fear? How can it be managed in a balanced way? I have been surprised to see so many people affected by panic attacks, with a feeling of "imminent death". Fear turned inward, pathological insecurity of not seeing any way out of the situation. And the human being transformed into "*homo recurvatus*" as the Cistercian philosophers used to say. Turned towards themselves, locked up, with no way out. And in this aspect the help of practitioners to manage these crises.

"My life has been full of terrible misfortunes, most of them never happened". (Montaigne). The fear that separates me from the world and makes my relationship with it difficult. And the offer to feel it, without clinging to it, but to go beyond it. Knowing that the key is not to feel it, but how we live it, what we do. We can go down to the depths of the *hara* to live it, without projections from the entrails, and go beyond it.

In each appearance, with continual bellicose metaphors about the management of the pandemic, we were told from the very first moment, about the need to be controlled, as one of the effects of fear is the authoritarian temptation. A challenge to citizen's liberties, the army with attributions unprecedented in the history of Spanish democracy. Freedom or security? What am I willing to give up of myself, without betraying or denying myself to get some security? An "application" for my mobile phone with permanent control?

And we see here how authoritarianism emerges. There is a health problem and we are gathering together very severe police measures that have no health justification. The extreme as in Spain, where you could not leave your house except for necessary purchases, the pharmacy... and only once a week. Children, the sick, the elderly, could not leave their house; dogs could. Not being able to travel by car with the people you live with, and only one person per vehicle in the early days of the crisis. And people on their balcony, intoxicated by fear and ignorance, who controlled the people who went out of their homes, or the health personnel coming back from work, just for fear of being contaminated.

I would like to include here a series of answers given by people from different traditions about the pandemic. This is what they said:

"Jesus is our healing", the Evangelists.

When it was decided to cancel the sesshin with Roland in Egino: "How little trust you have in the Dharma that heals us", the Zen.

"The best defence against the virus is faith," Isis.

"The Virgin is exempt from the contagion of the coronavirus", during hand kissing of the Virgin of Seville.

It is certain that these expressions destroy post-modernism and bring us closer to a medieval belief, to the same mythical answers as in previous "plagues".

And death, that remained hidden for so long, shows itself without any modesty in every news bulletin. It has been hidden for so long that now it gives us another beautiful "slap in the face". And we can't say even say goodbye to our dear ones who died. No matter the country, the language, the skin, we all get sick and we will all die, although it is true that the more social inequality, the more deaths and suffering. In the United Kingdom and the United States death affects low-skilled workers and ethnic groups sixteen times more than other groups. And here the idea of separation is coming back again: "ours" and "the others", "the North" and "the South". In such an interdependent world, it is essential to establish international solidarity, and that "the *invisible hand* of the market economy, the *invisible hand* of the state and the *intangible hand* of civic values, norms and virtues go in unison". (Adela Cortina, Professor of Ethics at the University of Valencia).

This crisis is caused by a tiny virus made of four letters (a.u.g.c: adenine, uracil, guanine, cytosine, combined in four triplets (ccu cgg cgg, gca). Seventy millionths of a millimetre. Its genetic code fits into four pages of a newspaper only. Its goal: to open the lock of the human cell, the ACE2 receptor. And the virus is twenty times more successful to do that than SARS. Once the cell is opened, it inserts an RNA code into it and begins to replicate itself. Its size, compared to a human being, is like a hen compared to planet Earth. But such a tiny being can lead us to enormous reflection, to enormous learning...

Carolina Emcke said: "My major concern is that we will not to learn anything from this crisis. Above all, I am concerned that this painful and bitter learning process we experience now will be forgotten, and that, when it is all over, we will rebuild our societies with the same injustices,

with the same instability as before". How long do the changes that take place under the effect of fear last, once the reason for this fear has disappeared?

We have here to question ourselves about our lifestyle, which is leading to a systematic destruction of the planet, planet that is becoming more and more fragile and vulnerable. This is a good time to question ourselves about the three instigators of the Wheel of *samsara*: greed, anger and confusion-ignorance, represented in the form of a rooster, a snake and a pig. These three Poisons watch over our own existence and over life.

What is the main cause of what is happening? Why did it happen? Very little is said about the whole network of causes and consequences that brought us there. We cannot continue with irresponsible consumption, the cause of so much ecological damage for the earth, we cannot go on with this depredation that ravages the different natural habitats.

The railways, the cities built in Congo by the Belgian colonists, have allowed the *lentivirus* of the macaques to adapt itself to the human body and then transform itself into HIV. When the huge Sundarbans wet land in Bengal was turned into a huge rice field by the British, the aquatic bacteria known as cholera spread itself and caused seven pandemics, the last one in Haiti. We have gone beyond natural, ethical and human limits; what do we deserve? Are we a viable species? Is it possible to experience all this as a profound trigger towards changes?

Xabier Euskitze, Basque journalist and *bertsolari* (1), expressed it well: "As long as life goes on/ and it is beautiful/ Only it has locked up the human race in a cage/ and wants to send us a message: / You are not necessary. / The air, the earth, the water and the sky are fine without you/ When you come back, remember that you are my guests and not my masters/.

Real change can come from a change in consciousness. From this consciousness of Unity, when we realize our deep interdependence with all living beings and realize that we share the same essence. "The awakened Bodhisattva manifests himself in *samsara*, without separating himself from *nirvana*. He dives into the ocean of negative emotions in order to discover the treasure of knowledge". (Vimalakirti, The Sutra of Inconceivable Freedom).

We were nostalgic for the beautiful wall of the dojo. The practice of zazen and this zafu with the primordial posture of non-fear and the weight of a flame above it.

Translator's note: (1) *Bertsolari*: Basque character similar to the troubadour.