

PAMPHLET 68

A TIME OF CRISIS

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If, at a particular moment, we are in a position in which we must choose a particular model, we should probably choose the most dramatic one—that is, the one that imparts to the event being studied the greatest possible significance.
M. Scott Peck, M.D.

September 11, 2001 was the entry point to a time of multiple crises that will last for decades and, because of the interconnectedness of life, will impact every person on the planet. That dark day caught us by surprise and was an explosive wake-up call that exposed broader and deeper patterns, connections, and implications than the death and devastation of the moment.

In an instant our hearts were broken, our false sense of security destroyed, and our pseudoinnocence shattered (Pamphlet 50). Fewer of us today live naïve--blinded to real dangers. Fewer of us cling to childhood assumptions about the nature of the world. Evil is real and knows no bounds. We yearn for a normalcy that will not return.

On that day when wicked men flew jetliners outside the boundaries of humanity and into the Pentagon and the towers of the World Trade Center the world suddenly became smaller. More of us now understand that it is necessary to change how we live together on this planet. With crisis comes the potential for greater inhumanity, if we cling to old thinking, and the potential for great innovation, if we replace the models that created the problems of today with those that will address them effectively.

Will courage and creativity lead to a modern day relationship renaissance or will fear, resistance, and selfishness result in more fragmentation, malignancy, and regression?

Scott Peck's definition of evil: The use of power to destroy the spiritual growth of others and to defend and preserve the integrity of one's sick self. Evil exists as a kind of immaturity of the soul and spirit in opposition to life. Evil kills spirit.

If we want meaning in our lives, we need to confront and transform, within and outside of ourselves, those things that harm and destroy our spirits and our relationships with our selves, others, and the natural world. As people in Alcoholics Anonymous say, "it is time to grow or die."

Faced with life-threatening issues, humanity can no longer cower in the denial of false innocence and make weakness, helplessness, and powerlessness virtues. We cannot close our eyes to reality and pretend villainy will go away if we look the other way. The threats to life loom too close for us to retreat into avoidance. If we deny evil, we collude with it. We must see evil wherever it is and engage it. No more can we collude in our own diminishment if we want to retain our humanity.

The many horrors and failures that engulf us demand that we use our energy to do battle with destroyers of spirit. Freedom, the mother of all values, must prevail. Power takes many forms. Its use—perhaps the only way to influence evil—remains an option for self-respecting human beings when people threaten freedom. The times call for the courage to assert the best of humanity.

September 11, 2001 brought us into our history; we cannot go back. The immediate crisis, an expression of deeper dynamics, threatens a war and a rearrangement of historical relationships with unintended, unpredictable, and uncontrollable consequences—some good and some bad as we would define them.

The deeper creative process we are in has complex and organic underlying patterns of violence, disruption, and death and, at the same time, creativity, synthesis, and integration. We cannot stop this cataclysmic and unpredictable reordering. We can influence the forms it takes. This shift confronts us with ourselves for what we see externally emerges from within us. If we stop hiding from ourselves, this movement may take us from "material man" and "material woman" to "spiritual man" and "spiritual woman."

Creativity includes destruction, often painful and widespread. Poised for war, destruction, alienation, and confusion flourish. No one knows what the outcomes will be and each will make their own decision as to the right actions. We can be stronger than the

destructive forces around us, create our way through the times, and act to affirm life. Life will organize itself.

Within the destruction of one worldview grow the seeds of another (or others). Chaos will come to order through creative self-organization. Consequences for people, nations, and institutions, good and bad, intended and unintended, will depend on the choices we make daily and on unknown global dynamics. Neither presidents nor protesters can control completely this large creative process.

We will create our shared future by our actions—small and large. Are we ready to do the difficult inner work required to realize our possibilities? Can we weave a new philosophy of life and leadership model into the fabric of our social and philosophical systems and into the essence of our character? Can we learn the skills needed to implement a new world view?

Can we be rebels who seek to fundamentally change systems rather than desire power over them and artists who create new visions—from the personal to the global? Can we see deeper than the crisis of the moment and surface, clarify, and understand more clearly the deeper dynamics at play? Can we use the energy of crisis to create hopeful visions for healing ourselves, our families, our organizations, our nations, our global community, and our planet? Can we sustain our visions as we move toward them?

Can we—from citizen to nation—give up paternalistic relationships and a sense of entitlement and claim our freedom and responsibility and be accountable for ourselves and for the actions of the groups we belong to? We cannot be true partners in the local or global communities when we persist in dependent relationships.

What can we do on the personal level as we enter an extended time of multiple crises? What choices can we make that will influence the system? We can choose authenticity, think, and find our answers within our own minds and hearts instead of following blindly others who have their own agendas. We can abandon exhausted philosophies of life.

We can choose to act courageously from our deepest values. We can become truth-tellers (lying is a cause and symptom of evil). We can use our gifts to do what we can within our sphere of influence. Courageous people step into the unknown afraid and often uncertain of the right course and certain they will make mistakes. They go forward with wise uncertainty and adapt as they

proceed.

People (leaders) who go first often go alone—the lazy, the less thoughtful, and the less courageous will follow those who ring true. I fear we rely too much on teams, councils, committees and consensus that result in a fragmentation and dilution of maturity and conscience. The search for unanimity often makes cowards of all. I believe we do not have enough belief in and expectation of authentic and courageous leadership from everyone. The times call for great leaders at all levels and of all persuasions—warriors and peacemakers alike. Hopefully we will follow leaders who are great warriors AND great healers.

We can go within and search the shadows of our own hearts and root out the malice within us and stop projecting the worst of ourselves onto others. Each of us bears responsibility for the world we created and should take our own inventory before we make the necessary judgments of others. To combat evil, we need to recognize our own sins first. We will then have more compassionate for others.

We can walk away from blame. We can give up our search for scapegoats. We can take demonization, marginalization, and the denigration of the intentions and motives of those we disagree with—whether president or protester—and throw these defenses on the scrapheap of emotional dysfunction. The times call for self-examination and a growth of maturity.

We find our purpose in life when we use the best of ourselves to engage our chosen evil (for example: crime, hiv/aids, addiction, abuse in all its forms, corporate corruption, environmental degradation, mediocrity, helplessness, powerlessness, and non-caring in all its forms). We can re-direct our natural aggression and fight the abuse of spirit and help others feel significant as together we elevate humanity.

We can listen with a desire to understand and speak our truth civilly and realize that every authentic voice—on whatever side of an issue—has a contribution to make. We can understand that it is in our self-interest not to have our perspectives limited by our self-interest. We can be willing to reframe our perceptions.

We can embrace accountability—it works wonders. We can no longer enable and make excuses for those who choose wicked acts to express their impotence—whether in the family, organization, nation, or international community. Understanding another's pain

and motives does not pardon the acts they choose to affirm themselves--nor does compassion forgive accountability. We have deterred good people for too long—it is time to deter bad people who threaten life and spirit. The times call us to be accountable and to hold those who live outside of humanity accountable even as the more powerful among us change in ways that will give all people the choices of significance and restored humanity. Are we fit for the times in which we live?

The heroes and heroines of September 11, 2001 gave us a glimpse of our potential. They were fit, and they give us hope for they showed that our humanity lives and that creative depravity does not have to dominate.

As most of us sat transfixed in front of our television sets on that unbelievable day, we saw new heroes and heroines emerge: the women and men of New York City's fire department, police department, and the emergency medical technicians. We learned of heroic passengers on United Airlines flight 93 who fought their hijackers and probably saved the White House or United States Capitol from destruction as they themselves died. Later we heard story after story of heroic actions on the part of everyday people who helped others at the World Trade Center and at the Pentagon.

In the year after the attack we watched workers clear the area around the World Trade Center and others rebuild the Pentagon. We saw the concern, courage, and commitment of workers who would not rest until they had done all they could to recover the bodies of the dead. We watched with sorrow as they stopped, removed their hard hats, and honored the victims they recovered. We saw strong men and women weep. We wept ourselves. We continue to watch as the friends, families, rescuers, and survivors feel their eternal grief and as the people of New York City create purpose from their loss. On September 11, 2002 we wept again as the names of the dead were read at "ground zero" as their spirits swirled in the gusty wind.

These heroes and heroines—each of them a leader because they acted with courage and authenticity in the unknown of chaos--believed in something greater than themselves—they cared and they loved. Their concern asked us to care more, to love more, and to be better people. Though afraid they found the courage to act and made us swell with pride. Their courage asked us to be braver. The character demonstrated on September 11, 2001 showed us our highest potential and greatest possibilities. They asked us to be nobler and braver people for the entire world needs each of us to

be nobler and braver. They asked us to focus on our hopes, not our fears.