

## What are Epidemics?

*“The strongest passion is fear.”*  
La Fontaine (1621-1695)

*“Passion is catching.”*  
Shakespeare (1564-1616) (in Julius Caesar)

### **Update March 2020:**

*The current Corona virus epidemic is the latest iteration of what Rudolf Steiner predicted would be recurring crises in our global society until an adequate number of people acting as a kind of “critical mass” of humanity, developed the insight, courage and will to work in the world from, and for, a totally new spiritual worldview. How and why does a worldview embodied in a small number of people become capable of changing the world?*

*Because such a worldview builds a living conduit between humanity and the spiritual world, flowing in both directions, ultimately allowing wisdom, power and love to flow from their source in the spiritual world into human hearts and wills, at first in a small number of people, then gradually spreading through humanity like a beneficial contagion.*

*The current crisis and others that will surely follow challenge us to radically revise our thinking about health, illness and infection. An excellent guide to the healing thinking so greatly needed now is the 2011 66-page book from Rudolf Steiner Press, On Epidemics: Spiritual Perspectives from the Work of Rudolf Steiner, compiled by Taja Gut. (It is in print and can be ordered online. There is also its companion volume, entitled On Fear!) The recurrent theme of all the excerpts of Steiner’s healing wisdom on epidemics assembled in this little book is*

*that every infectious illness is caused not by the virus or bacterium which physically identifies the illness, but by its accompanying dark spirituality, which is the infectious, active reality of the illness and which has critically disturbed and distorted the balance and harmony of the patient's spiritual members of being.*

*Here is a quote from p. 21 of the book: "... if one can educate human beings in ways which befit their nature so that they can ... come closer once more to the spiritual element—then it would be quite possible to work against the unconscious thought: 'Here comes a smallpox epidemic!'*

*If it were possible instead to be completely aware 'Here comes something spiritual, something spiritual which is undesirable against which I must remain firm.'—then this would be just as effective [as a vaccine] in making people strong in opposition to such influences."*

**The 2009 article below was my response to the Swine Flu epidemic occurring at that time:**

An epidemic, say of influenza, like many things in life, seems at first easy to understand, but on deeper examination becomes surprisingly complex.

We think of an epidemic as a contagious infection, that is, a contamination of our inner bodily environment with an outer disease germ, that takes hold of one or more people and then spreads widely by human contact throughout a larger population. A pandemic is an epidemic that spreads over the entire world.

The great epidemic of black plague in the 1300's is estimated to have killed more than half the population of Europe. The great flu pandemic of 1918-1919 killed over 40 million people worldwide, including a half million deaths in the U.S.

In 1976, a soldier at Fort Dix, New Jersey died of a respiratory infection and was found to have had a new type of swine flu virus to which the U.S. population had not been exposed but which was very similar to the Spanish Flu pandemic virus of 1918-1919. The flu experts, who had been worrying for some time about the next great flu pandemic, thought this new swine flu virus was an excellent candidate for a major twentieth century pandemic. Medical experts convened urgent meetings, studied the virus from every angle, and consulted with the U.S. president Gerald Ford. It was decided to recommend the new hastily prepared swine flu vaccine for every man, woman and child in the U.S. At that time, I was the medical director of Camphill Village in Copake, New York. The staff members could decide for themselves to take the vaccine or not, but what about the mentally handicapped residents?

I wrote a letter to the parents of all the residents explaining that I had studied the issue and did not recommend the vaccine, but that I would honor the parents' decision. So it turned out that about half of the residents received the vaccine from the local health department. As I recall, none of the residents caught the flu and none suffered any adverse effect from the vaccine. The rest of the country was less fortunate. The vaccine producers had agreed to release the vaccine for distribution only under the condition that all liability for any adverse effects would be insured by the U.S. government.

A minority of the U.S. population chose to be vaccinated, the predicted swine flu outbreak never appeared, and many cases of Guillain-Barré Syndrome, a sometimes fatal nerve paralysis, were caused by the vaccine and millions of dollars of taxpayers' money was paid to the victims by the Federal Government. This episode has since been referred to in the medical literature and in the press as the "Swine Flu Fiasco" of 1976.

The World Health Organization (WHO) has declared that the current 2009 swine flu has reached a global (pandemic) extent, which could result in the 2009 swine flu vaccine, when it's ready, becoming mandatory for one and all. Health freedom groups are up in arms, protesting in advance against the real possibility of forced vaccination.

In these situations, the underlying powerful fears that live in the shadow side of our human nature and that pervade modern society rise strongly to the surface.

Some believe that fear of illness, epidemics and bio-terrorism is deliberately provoked and disseminated by those who stand to profit from a passive, frightened, obedient populace who lack the knowledge and will to take charge of their own health. In the words of George Bernard Shaw (1856-1950), "Of all the anti-social vested interests, the worst is the vested interest in ill-health." In 2005 a book by Marc Siegel, a New York physician and medical professor, was published entitled False Alarm: The Truth About the Epidemic of Fear. One of the book's reviewers stated, "Those who think for themselves will find useful guidance here."

Yes, clear, unbiased thinking is greatly needed today for individuals and for society to be healthy. But even the most penetrating thinking will fall short unless it has access to all the facts. Our medical, healthcare, media and government institutions, in

intransparent and paternalistic fashion, have always had the tendency to control and manage the facts, rather than allowing them to flow freely into the public consciousness.

Physicians very commonly, from motives they believe altruistic, provoke fear in their patients to convince them to follow the doctor's advice. On the website of the crusading physician Joseph Mercola one can read the article "Researchers Find U.S. Media Keeps People Uneducated About Health Issues." Even in a democracy, the people are disempowered if they are denied access to the truth. One can also find on the internet, at [nwotruth.com](http://nwotruth.com), a very enlightening interview with flu expert Dr. Tom Jefferson, titled "A Whole Industry is Waiting for a Pandemic."

In 1920, in his lecture "Healthcare as a Social Issue," Rudolf Steiner warned that if knowledge of the spiritual and holistic aspects of health and illness were not widely and democratically spread among all people, then medicine and healthcare would become excessively powerful and autocratic mega-industries. This has come to pass, and now a trillion-dollar healthcare plan is being debated in the U.S. government. Nowhere in this debate do we find the notion that it's the modern medical way of thinking itself which is so astronomically expensive. No matter how we slice, administer, or insure it, the cost of health care and the power and scope of the healthcare and drug industries will continue to grow until medical knowledge opens up from its narrow focus on the physical mechanisms of illness that are assumed to be identical in everyone (a "one-size-fits-all" approach that is perfect for the mass healthcare market), and begins to appreciate and understand the all-important role of the individual human soul and spirit in health and illness. When this rational and straightforward understanding of the spiritual basis of physical illness becomes accessible to everyone (it's not rocket science!), then people

will be empowered with the knowledge necessary to prevent and manage their illnesses, and dependence on doctors, tests and drugs will diminish.

Until that distant day, many of us will be as helpless children in the face of the threatening epidemic of the moment, relying on a paternalistic and hugely powerful healthcare and drug industry to protect us.

But knowledge is power, and very few lay people and even doctors today know that medical research over the past twenty years is challenging the firm grip held by the germ theory for the past century on our everyday understanding of infectious diseases. This new knowledge, called the cytokine theory of disease, relegates germs to a secondary role in illness, and boldly states that cytokines, the chemical messengers produced by our own overreacting immune system, are the direct cause of all of our infectious disease symptoms like fever, weakness, acute headache, muscle pain, vomiting and diarrhea. More importantly, cytokines also directly cause the organ damage and are responsible for the lethal outcome, when these occur, in an infectious or septic illness.

In such severe cases, it is the overreaction of our own immune system, sometimes even in the absence of infection, which can kill us. Yes, multiplication of a virus or bacteria within us can make us sick, but only if our immune system reacts to these germs with a vigorous outpouring of its cytokines into our circulation. During any epidemic a great many of those exposed, even the majority, are found to be infected yet not ill. This has been known since the early twentieth century, but has been ignored because it couldn't be explained. Knowledge of the illness-producing effects of our own cytokines sheds new light on why many of the infected remain well, but it also raises

more questions than it answers. The all-important question is: why does the immune system overreact and cause illness only in some infected people and not in all infected people?

I once asked a leading cytokine researcher why this revolutionary knowledge of how our own immune system makes us ill is missing from the health reports of the popular media. He replied tellingly that it was “difficult to explain” to the public because a drug or vaccine had not yet been found to block the illness-producing effects of our own cytokines. I took that to mean that while it’s customary to greatly exaggerate the danger of “killer flus” and other diseases for which drugs and vaccines exist, and to imply that all other preventions or treatments are ineffective, it would be counterproductive to alarm the public and create a demand for a cure before medical science is able to supply that cure. There you have it! In modern medicine the necessity of meeting a public (economic) demand and of maintaining the dependence of the populace on the healthcare and drug industries clearly trumps the free dissemination of knowledge that might rouse people to ask questions, to seek the answers on their own and to become self-reliant and healthier in the process.

Scholars who today study the great plagues of medieval times have said that the power and authority of the church maintained itself through keeping the populace in a state of ignorance, fear and passivity. Today the power and authority of our medical institutions and healthcare industries have replaced the church. When people become disempowered, frightened and apathetic, they become more vulnerable to illness and epidemics, whether of medieval plague or 21<sup>st</sup> century swine flu.

So what precautions should be taken against the “killer” epidemics that will no doubt continue to threaten us? Here was Rudolf Steiner’s comment on the subject: “If fear of illness is the only thing created [during an epidemic] and one goes to sleep at night with that thought, it produces afterimages, imaginations impregnated with fear. That is a good method of cultivating and nurturing germs. If this fear can be reduced even a little by, for example, active love and, while tending the sick, forgetting for a time that one might also be infected, the [inner] conditions are less favorable for the germs.”

For those desiring to have remedies on hand for the prevention and treatment of flu, I recommend contacting the Weleda pharmacy, or the Uriel pharmacy or the True Botanica remedy and supplement company.

Avoidance of protein foods and stimulating elimination and detoxification with herbal laxatives or magnesium is also very helpful for acute flu. In all cases I recommend avoiding Tylenol, as it only suppresses symptoms temporarily, it does nothing to draw out and heal the illness, and it is toxic to the liver, being the number one cause of acute liver failure in the U.S. Ibuprofen and aspirin are also liable to cause complications and should also be avoided. The great majority of flu-like illness will self heal with the time-honored methods of warmth, clear fluids, rest, quiet and sweating and bowel cleansing to eliminate the flu toxins. There is little or no evidence that Tamiflu or other anti-viral drugs are truly helpful, and they can have bad side effects.

Fear may be catching, but so are knowledge and courage!