

St. John Fisher College

Fisher Digital Publications

Cardinal COVID Journal: Prose

Cardinal COVID Journal

4-10-2020

Corona Letter 3 (April 10, 2020)

Jill Swiencicki

St. John Fisher College, jswiencicki@sjfc.edu

Follow this and additional works at: <https://fisherpub.sjfc.edu/covid-journal-prose>

[How has open access to Fisher Digital Publications benefited you?](https://fisherpub.sjfc.edu/covid-journal-prose/5)

Recommended Citation

Swiencicki, Jill, "Corona Letter 3 (April 10, 2020)" (2020). *Cardinal COVID Journal: Prose*. 5.
<https://fisherpub.sjfc.edu/covid-journal-prose/5>

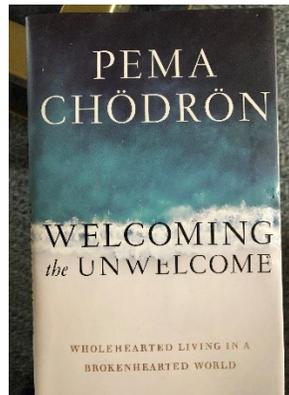
This document is posted at <https://fisherpub.sjfc.edu/covid-journal-prose/5> and is brought to you for free and open access by Fisher Digital Publications at St. John Fisher College. For more information, please contact fisherpub@sjfc.edu.

April 10, 2020

Dear 199 Students,

I call it The April Sucker Punch. The day it snows, blows, and April becomes January for a day. I woke today, saw the snow blowing sideways, and got back into bed. It was so quiet, the way winter is quiet. I have gotten used to the birdsong, the golden sun, the greening grass. Sucker punch. We are in the liminal space: neither here nor there. Neither winter nor spring, neither healthy nor sick, neither in school nor out, but somewhere in between. It's disorienting.

Let's go with it. Let's be a little disoriented today. Instead of my massive "to do" list, I'm going to start the day and finish the book my friend Rob Ruehl gave me recently as a gift. It is by Pema Chodron, a Buddhist monk I have admired for a long time. Like all Buddhists, Pema teaches the practice of non-attachment and openness to what is, not what we hope things to be. There has been no spiritual practice that has challenged me more. Buddhists don't usually swear while practicing non-attachment. I do.



I am attached to ideas. My ideas. They seem real and true to me. For example, I am attached to the fear for my brother's safety. Here he is, before going into the hospital ward in Buffalo, NY now filled with patients sick with Coronavirus. I am attached to the idea that he is in danger. But Pema's writing helps me to detach from this perception. What if I attach to his safety? To his love for his community? To the pleasure he feels applying his knowledge to lessen the suffering of others? What if I attach to . . . nothing? What if this picture of my brother is just like the one of him grilling hamburgers in the summer, or the one of him with his son at the Sabres game? What if it is a moment in his life that is as rich and open as any other moment? What if I let it be, without attaching—projecting, labeling—my own ideas on to it? What could happen for him, for me, for the community? Pema argues that "if we don't notice and work with our projections, we won't be able to reduce the suffering of ourselves and others. Nor will we be able to fulfill our longing and commitment to wake up for the benefit of all living things" (75).



So much of the work of our course, 199, is about research without attachment. We pose a question, and we must not just seek the answers we want, ones that fit the pre-packaged argument that reinforces our beliefs and values. We must seek the answers that prevail in the moment we live in. They prevail because experts worked hard to support and explain what they are seeing. Or they prevail because while unpopular or hard to hear, they are the most ethical, and they pull us toward our better selves. Having read your annotated bibliographies, I know that you have done research that has surprised you, that has challenged you, and that you are struggling to explain and come to terms with.

You have emerged safely from the liminal space of the annotated bibliography and into a draft of your researched essay. Congratulations on your journey. You are now back with your peer group. I have been speaking with so many of you over email and Zoom and Facetime, and many of you are struggling. Your other courses are consuming, it's hard to keep up with the new demands of each class, and there is a lot going on in your new home environment. **I want to simplify the work of our course even further to respond to what I am hearing.**

Here is what I had planned: two more peer group sessions.

4/14: revision plans due to your peers

4/21: full revision due based on peer feedback

4/23: revision plans due to your peers for the last time

4/27: final essay due, email due.

But, **I would now like to propose the following:**

4/14: revision plans due to your peer response groups (the same ones you worked with for the annotated bibliographies)

4/21: final essay due, email due. Please upload your final 199 essay on Blackboard Discussion board, and include a note telling us about the ways this project helped to develop your writing, reading and thinking abilities.

Please email me and let me know if you would like to take this option. It is safe because of the Pass/Fail option the college has implemented for the course, although everyone is on track to do very well in the course without that.

I hope this proposal, shaded in green, is the opposite of a sucker punch, but is a tether that pulls us toward a good and just end.

Be well, stay safe and stay home as much as possible,

Dr. Swiencicki