

Just a few days ago, it seems, Marilee and I were in Germany riding on DB (Deutsche Bahn) regional trains. I remember beautiful scenery along the Rhine, a mother and young son playing cards, friendly conductors, a young university student working on her calculus in a train station coffee shop. But also tucked into my mind are memories of other things: running to be on time, steep stairs to climb in the midst of transfers, wonderment at varying train numbers--in a word, anxiety.

In the middle of our trip, I ran across a [NY Times](#) column by David Brooks dealing with this subject entitled, "The Epidemic of Worry." Brooks writes:

Worry alters the atmosphere of the mind. It shrinks your awareness of the present and your ability to enjoy what's around you right now. It cycles possible bad futures around in your head and forces you to live in dreadful future scenarios, 90 percent of which will never come true.

Pretty soon you are seeing the world through a dirty windshield. Worry dims every sunrise and amplifies mistrust. A mounting tide of anxiety makes people angrier about society and more darkly pessimistic about the possibility of changing it. Spiraling worry is the perverted underside of rationality.

It appears that we in America are a pretty anxious bunch. Brooks points out an interesting disparity:

It's worth noting that rich countries are more anxious than poorer ones. According to the [World Health Organization](#), 18.2 percent of Americans report chronic anxiety while only 3.3 percent of Nigerians do.

Today, when you hear affluent people express worry, it's usually related to the fear of missing out, and the [dizziness](#) of freedom. The affluent often feel besieged by busyness and plagued by a daily excess of choices. At the same time, there is a pervasive cosmic unease, the anxiety that they don't quite understand the meaning of life, or have not surrendered to some all-encompassing commitment that would bring coherence and peace.

This last sentence really grabbed me with its many key words and phrases: *anxiety...the meaning of life...surrendered...all-encompassing commitment...coherence and peace*. That's quite a line-up; quite a progression. It's not what we do or how much we have to do. It's not all

of the struggles that we face in one form or another. What really matters is whether or not we are grounded.

AA advises, *Let go and let God*. Good words. Surrender to an all-encompassing commitment can indeed bring coherence and peace. Surrender opens up doorways and portals. It wipes clean that "dirty windshield" through which we anxiously stare at the world. Surrender to God frees us from ourselves and invites the perspective of wonder and awe, even while it provides an inner spiritual freedom.

I close with a paraphrase of Romans 8: 1-2 by Eugene Peterson that seems apt: *With the arrival of Jesus, the Messiah, that fateful dilemma is resolved. Those who enter into Christ's being-here-for-us no longer have to live under a continuous, low-lying black cloud.* The New Revised Standard version has that last sentence as "...the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus has set you free from the law of sin and death." There's a lot of death in the midst of worry; a lot of freedom in the midst of the healing Spirit of life in the anointed One.

~ Brian+