



"I need fewer friends."

"Why?"

"Because it is too much hurt to bear. Life is so imperfect and everyone suffers. So, the more friends, the more hurt."

"Are people you know hurting?"

"Yes, almost everyone I know. Some for very real reasons, and some for fears for the future. I know too many people with deep empathy."

"Well that's not healthy. Try not to think about it so much."

"That's just it. I can't. And believe me, I love that my closest friends have deep empathy. It's just that so much is affecting so many of them at once."

"So, sorry. Maybe you can explore your faith? Maybe there you can find some comfort."

"Seriously no disrespect, but think about it. Most of it consists of people made to feel unworthy, that they have something to be ashamed of and that they need to spend every waking hour seeking redemption through rigid rituals and unbending rules. Just how does one find comfort in that?"

"But it's not all like that, and there is a community."

“And I have friends from all, and I like them all. But globally as a whole they are persuaded to fear one another. Fractured humanity. Christian, Jew, Muslim, Buddhist, Hindu, Not Christian enough, not Jewish enough, not Muslim enough, not Buddhist enough, not Hindu enough, too Christian, too Jewish, too Muslim, too Buddhist, too Hindu. Then there are the much-feared Atheists, many just as intolerant of the religious or of others not committed enough.”

“There are lots of people who don’t follow it so strictly.”

“I know, and many fall under the category of ‘my friends’. They are all the ones who are hurting. They see the way that everyone is being pitted against one another. It became obvious who among them, said they cared for others, professed to be compassionate, pledged to help others, to be inclusive, to be humane, and those who actually were. It affected them deeply, and that in turn, affected me. It’s a collective effect.”

So, what can make it better?”

“I don’t know. You see how well it works for isolated groups to see others as outsiders. And all of it much easier contained within their own borders. They no longer have to feel empathy when outsiders hurt. It’s not their child, not their family, not their community. God blesses theirs.”

“At least your friends don’t feel that way, and it gets better.”

“I guess you’re right. For things to get better I need more friends.”