

# Coronavirus is the voice of the Earth.

## What lessons can we learn from this crisis?

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The year 2020 will be remembered as the year of COVID-19. The year of social distancing, lock downs and staying indoors even when the sun was shining, flowers were flourishing, and birds were singing their sweet songs in the spring. I was in the fortunate position to be able to take that time of self-isolation as a blessing, a time for spiritual retreat and a time for reflection. I read Rumi and Hafiz, I read Shakespeare's Sonnets. I read Rabindranath Tagore. I thought of the word, quarantine, with its association with Lent, I learned that originally the word was referred to the period of forty days which Jesus Christ spent fasting in the desert. So, for me this time of quarantine became a time of inner solitude.

However, I was fully mindful of the effect of the virus across the world and was sad to see so much suffering. Most of humanity was engulfed in an unprecedented crisis. I am 84 and I have never experienced such a drastic and deadly situation in my entire life.

Being in this COVID-19 crisis is worse than being in a state of war. Wars are initiated by humans and can be controlled or ended by humans. But Coronavirus is a show of nature's power and beyond human control. Many people believe that through science and technology we can conquer nature. But through Coronavirus nature was speaking to us loud and clear that the talk of conquering nature is sheer human arrogance. COVID-19 has reminded us in no uncertain terms about the reality of human vulnerability.

Human desire to conquer nature comes from the belief that humans are separate from nature and have superior powers. This dualistic thinking is at the root of our inability to deal with many of the natural upheavals, such as forest fires, floods and in particular climate change, global heating and pandemics like COVID-19. We seem to believe that one way or another we will find technological solutions to subjugate nature and make her subservient to human dominance.

Rather than looking at the root causes of Coronavirus, governments, industrialists and scientists are looking for vaccines to avoid the disease. Vaccines maybe a temporary solution but we need to think and act more intelligently and more wisely. Rather than vaccinating against the disease we need to address the causes of the disease.

Laura Spinney, a science writer asks, in the Guardian of the 26th of March, “Why the emergence of human infections of animal origin have accelerated in recent decades?” And answering her own question she says that, “The forces putting those viruses in our path are political and economic. They have to do with the rise of industrial-scale farming and the resulting marginalisation of millions of small holder farmers. They have been forced closer to uncultivable zones such as forests, where bats - reservoirs for coronavirus - lurk”.

If we are to address the causes of coronavirus, we will need to return to ecologically regenerative agriculture; to human-scale, local, low carbon and organic methods of farming. Food is not a commodity. Farming should not be motivated by financial profits. The purpose of farming is to feed people with healthy food. Money is only a means to an end. The end goal of agriculture is to produce nutritious food without depleting the health of the soil. farming for profit, or for making money directly or indirectly causes Coronavirus!

In order to address the causes of COVID-19, we need to learn to live in harmony with nature and within the laws of nature. Humans are as much a part of nature as any other form of life. Therefore, living in harmony with nature is the very first lesson we, humans, collectively, need to learn from this crisis. It is an urgent imperative of our time.

The second lesson is that all human actions have consequences. In the past hundred years human activities have been the cause of diminishing biodiversity, increasing carbon emissions and producing greenhouse gases which is causing climate change. Due to human activities the oceans are polluted by plastic, the soil is poisoned with artificial chemicals and the rainforest are disappearing at an unprecedented speed. All these negative human activities are bound to result in some disastrous consequences. Such as tsunamis, floods, forest fires and now Coronavirus in the short term and global warming or climate change in the long term.

Through the Coronavirus crisis, nature is sending a strong message, it is a wakeup call, a reminder that we cannot go on producing pollution and waste thinking that there are no consequences of our activities. Now we know that there is the force of karma and in this case, it is named Coronavirus.

Modern civilisations have inflicted untold suffering and damage on nature. Now we are harvesting the consequences. We have to change. We have to move on to build a new paradigm. In order to restore health to people, we must restore health to our precious planet Earth. Healing people and healing nature is one and the same. We need to do everything we can to heal the Earth. Only positive actions can bring about positive outcomes. This is the law of 'Karma'.

The trinity of Market, Money and Materialism has ruled the modern mind for far too long. Now is the time when we need to slow down and with humility listen to the voice of nature, the voice of the Earth. We need to replace this old trinity with a new trinity, the trinity of Soil, Soul and Society.

Nature is kind and generous, benign and caring. In nature everything passes. So, humanity needs to respond to this crisis positively and use it as an opportunity to redesign our agriculture, our economy, our political systems and our way of life. We need to learn to respect the wilderness. We need to learn to celebrate the abundant beauty and diversity of life. We need to realise that humans are an integral part of nature. So, what we do to nature we do to ourselves. We are totally connected and interconnected with Nature. Coronavirus has shown us that we are interrelated. We depend on each other. We are members of one Earth community and one Earth family.

If this understanding, this world view, becomes an integral part of our consciousness and an organising principle of the mainstream society then we will have different priorities and different values. Instead of economic growth at all costs we will pursue the growth in wellbeing of people and the health of planet earth.

Going back to business as usual, after COVID-19, should not be an option. Before this pandemic society was gripped by the pandemic of greed-virus. And due to greed forests have died, lakes and rivers have died, species have died, children have died, the poor have died, war victims have died, refugees have died. Death and destruction have been the consequence of the greed-virus.

Poet and novelist Ben Okri wrote, in the Guardian of the 27th of March, “The real tragedy would be if we came through this pandemic without changing for the better. It would be as if all those deaths, all that suffering would mean nothing”.

A crisis is an opportunity. In the evolutionary process of nature there have been many crises. Life has evolved through struggle over a long period of geological time. Who knows, maybe this painful pandemic can give birth to a new consciousness, a consciousness of the unity of life, a consciousness of caring and sharing, a consciousness of love.

We have already seen some wonderful signs of this new consciousness. Doctors, nurses and carers have put themselves in harm’s way. They have given their lives to serve the victims of the virus. They are shining examples of selfless service. Hundreds of thousands of ordinary people have volunteered to support the National Health Service. And countless number of helpers in local communities have been caring for the old and the sick. Even the British Government suspended all fiscal rules to help individuals, communities, charities and businesses. There has been an outpouring of solidarity, generosity, mutuality and reciprocity. People have experienced a sense of deep belonging, profound gratitude and unconditional love from many directions.

Simultaneously Russians sent planeloads of medical equipment to Italy. Chinese were doing the same for Serbia. Animosities have been forgotten. Nations have been co-operating, helping and supporting each other, in the spirit of mutual aid, rather than the usual competing and fighting.

If these spiritual qualities could be practiced in abnormal times, then why not in normal times? If we cooperate and collaborate, love and respect in normal times the abnormal conditions are less likely to occur.

In addition to this outpouring of the human spirit we have also seen a reduction of pollution and a partial recovery of the natural environment. Dolphins have been spotted in the canals of Venice and clear blue sky has been experienced over the cities of Bombay and Beijing. Carbon emissions have gone down, people are able to breathe pure air again. If we can have a good environment in abnormal times why not in normal times?

Can we dare to hope that individuals, communities and countries will learn to love each other, look after their environment and create a new world order after this dreadful COVID-19 Crisis has

passed? As the Indian novelist Arundhati Roy says, “Historically pandemics have forced humans to break with the past and imagine their world anew. COVID-19 is no different. It is a portal, a gateway between one world and the next “

The lockdown in so many countries, large and small has shown that governments, businesses and ordinary people can come together and take a big economic risk in the interest of greater good, in this case the health of the whole society.

This experience should give us the confidence and courage to take bold actions to safeguard the health of nature and the biosphere. We must remember that we are sitting on the branch of nature. If we cut the branch upon which we are sitting, we are bound to fall. Therefore post COVID-19, let us act together to care for the planet and for the people.

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