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*Corresponding author

Charles Ignatius, Graduate Theological Foundation, 7 Wainwright Avenue 1A Yonkers, NY 10710, USA

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Perspective

Reflecting on the Psychological Chaos in the Individual During the Pandemic

Charles Ignatius*

Graduate Theological Foundation, United States

Abstract

No one can deny that Covid-19, the Corona Virus has shaken up the entire world irrespective of color, creed, race, or ethnicity. All of a sudden in a twinkling of an eye, life has changed. Everything is locked down. There are very few cars on the road. Cities begin to look like ghost towns. During the first months of the crisis, protecting the physical health had been the main concern. But now we notice that it has placed a huge on mental strain people globally. Feeling of fear, feeling of uncertainty, feeling of panic, feeling of isolation, feeling of despair, feeling of frustration, feeling of rage, feeling of sadness, feeling of anxiety, and feeling of depression create chaos in the inner world of the individual. From being afraid of physically affected by the virus, people are affected internally in their emotional world. At this time the mind and the psyche require a good dose of emotional nourishing to experience joy and peace in our life.

Perspective

Have you ever wondered or wished that you had ten days away from your work and that you could just be at home, relax and do the things that you always wanted to do without any pressure or stress? Well, you got more than what you wished for. Probably you are one among the millions who are staying at home for nearly ten weeks either working from home for your company because your office is still operating remotely or you have been laid off due to the lockdown and your business could not survive during this pandemic. In any case, you may be among those who feel that they are stuck within the four walls of their homes looking through the window watching life pass by every day.

No one can deny that Covid-19, the Corona Virus has shaken up the entire world irrespective of color, creed, race, or ethnicity. Towards the end of the year 2019 when it began in China, some news appeared in the media and it became all the more manifested in January as the New Year 2020 unfolded. At that time no one on this side of the globe made a big deal about it. It was just news happening in a faraway country namely China. Everyone went about their business in America. But then the week after week news of the spread of the virus began to dominate the media. Countries like Italy, the United Kingdom, Germany, Brazil, and Spain began to be hit with the virus. By the beginning of February countries like Iran, Iraq, Israel, and Russia began to feel the spread of the virus. And soon Covid-19 started showing up in America. By the beginning of March, the leadership realized that the threat was real and started taking quick action in consultation with the Center for Disease Control (CDC) by enforcing federal and state regulations about lockdown procedures. The result, all of a sudden life has changed for all of us.

- Closure of business.
- Employees asked to work from home.
- Millions of people losing jobs.
- Banks and entertainment centers are closed.
- Restaurants are closed.
- Public transportations are either closed or function intermittently.
- Banks work only virtually.
- Schools and colleges are closed. Students are attending online classes.
- Mandatory social distancing, use of masks, and gloves enforced.
- Stocks have fallen.
- Sharp economic pullback.
- Record break spike in unemployment.
- Financial crisis.
- Airports are closed and travel bans are enforced.
- Lockdown orders rule the day.
- The sound of ambulances churns your stomach.

All of a sudden in a twinkling of an eye, life has changed. Everything is locked down. There are very few cars on the road. Cities begin to look like ghost towns. New York "The city never sleeps" seems to be in deep slumber. All businesses are closed except for essential services like gas stations and food stores. Within days people began to lose jobs and the unemployment began to soar into millions. Sitting at home everyone began to look at John Hopkins' pandemic tracking dashboard which actively kept squeezing out the numbers of those affected by the coronavirus and the number of deaths taking place in different parts of the world. When all this is going on in the external world, people are beginning to feel differently in their internal world. During the first months of the crisis, protecting the physical health had been the main concern. But now we notice that it has placed huge mental strains on people globally. The United Nations warned calling for urgent action to address the psychological suffering



brought by the pandemic. The UN Secretary-General Antonio Gutierrez has said, “Even when the pandemic is brought under control, grief, anxiety, and depression will continue to affect people and communities”. Let us look at some of the causes of this psychological chaos that this pandemic is creating.

Feeling of Fear: Fear is a dominant factor that is playing a role in creating psychological distress. Coupled with fear, there is uncertainty. With so much action from the Government, healthcare specialists, and scientists there is still uncertainty in the air. We are fighting with an unknown and unseen enemy. Even concerning its origination, there are mixed views. There are different theories about how this virus affects individuals. There is no actual medicine or vaccine as yet that can control this virus. Every country is trying to produce a vaccine that can cure people or protect them from this virus. Everything is in process.

Feeling of Uncertainty: Everyday people get up and ask each other “What next”? Uncertainty is looming in everyone’s mind. Uncertainty about when all this will end, uncertainty about the future, uncertainty about the schools and colleges reopening for children, uncertainty about the next paycheck, uncertainty whether one’s job will still be there at the end of the lockdown, uncertainty about the financial stabilization, uncertainty about the healthcare system and uncertainty about survival. This uncertainty is in turn creating anxiety which leads to depression.

Feeling of Panic: No doubt this pandemic situation has been creating panic among many. The hoarding of supplies is an indication of desperation and one can expect to see a rise in cases of panic disorders. Panic symptoms also show up in people who experience anxiety when they are constantly staying indoors and often feel claustrophobic. They want to get out and smell some fresh air. Many also experience panic when they are faced with financial stress especially when they have lost their jobs which means no paychecks will be coming in. When panic sets in, anxiety soars and leads to depression. The pandemic situation that has already killed nearly a million people globally is very scary and can affect immensely those who are already suffering from mental health issues or other psychiatric disorders.

Feeling of Isolation: During this pandemic and the lockdown, the absence of social interactions, lack of nurturing relationships with family and friends, the lack of usual contacts with neighbors can certainly lead to loneliness and it has an extreme consequence on an individual’s emotional and mental health apart from physical health. Dr. Julianne Holt-Lunstad, a professor of psychology and neuroscience at Brigham University says, “There is robust evidence that social isolation and loneliness significantly increase the risk for premature mortality and the magnitude of the risk exceeds that of many leading health indicators.”

Feeling of Despair: Feeling of despair refers to a state of mind caused by circumstances that seem too much to cope with. It suggests total loss of hope usually accompanied by apathy and low spirits. This is what the present situation of Corona Virus pandemic has created through lockdowns, daily increasing death rates, closure of businesses, loss of jobs, closure of worship houses, beaches and other entertainment centers, the financial crisis, and the loss of loved ones by Covid-19. When despair builds up, it can drive people to make hasty decisions even towards suicide to escape from this pandemic.

Feeling of Frustration: When you are frustrated it may look as if nothing is under your control and that everything is in turmoil. You feel overwhelmed. There is a surge in emotion and it is difficult to think straight. Under lockdown, people experience feelings of frustration because they are being prevented from doing what they want. They cannot get out to do stuff as they normally do. They are forced to wear masks and gloves that are even becoming rare to find. They are restricted from social gatherings and parties. Their shopping is restricted. Most stores are closed. They can’t get the products they want because of limited supplies. They can’t get their regular visits to their doctors because their clinics are closed. Our mind produces the emotion of frustration when it finds that our current actions are ineffective in helping us achieve our goals.

Feeling of Rage: When frustration continues with unfulfilled goals people become aggressive. When they see that there is no concrete solution for the end of the coronavirus and that no medicine or vaccine is in sight they slowly become angry. Their anger is directed towards the government leadership, the health care system, God, and with themselves. Frustration overflows into a rage and negative energy. One needs to release this energy in one way or the other. And so they begin to dump it on others for no reason. Now with lockdown, they are more likely to behave aggressively to their family members or those around them.

Feeling of Sadness: During the pandemic, everyone has been looking at the tracking dashboards of how many people have been affected by the coronavirus in the US and around the world. The growing death rate has brought sadness. Pictures of mass burial in several countries have brought tears. Those who have lost their family members due to the

Coronavirus during this pandemic are in deep sorrow. Although sadness is a natural part of our lives, it is very much connected with experiences of pain or loss. In this case, it is reconciling with the pain of separation and severing relationships.

Feeling of Anxiety: While many emotions mentioned above are mixing and churning the inner world, worry becomes more dominant than just a passing thought and gets fused with the feeling of fear and a sense of loss of control, an individual experiences the feeling of anxiety. Anxiety is an emotion that your subconscious triggers whenever it finds that you are unprepared to deal with an immediate crisis. This is what is happening in the present crisis of the Covid-19 pandemic. As thousands of people are getting infected every day and still no medication is available to treat it, and the daily changing policies by the government about reopening places and businesses contribute to the rise of anxiety in people.

Feeling of Depression: Depression is a kind of difficult illness in which people experience several feelings put together like feeling isolation, uncertainty, fear, despair, frustration, sadness, and anxiety. When you suffer from depression you think that there is a fundamental flaw within you. You would feel that nobody likes you.

You feel estranged even though you are interacting and living with your family. Often you feel hopeless. This pandemic situation can add more anxiety to people and drive them to depression. When we are unable to do what we want continuously in life over some time and when frustration and stress surmount and when we believe that all hope is gone and that the situation is beyond redemption, then depression sets in. During this pandemic situation, many cases of depression are reported in mental health clinics and hospitals. This also affects immunity thereby increasing the chances of people being affected by the Coronavirus or any other physical disease. People experience feelings of depression when they believe that there is no hope left to solve their problems. When millions of people lost their jobs and were going through a financial crisis, the stimulus check came as a point of relief and the unemployment check gave them some hope although they are short-lived and do not solve the financial problems permanently. The question is “What do we do about the psychological chaos that this pandemic is creating within us?” While attempting to find the right solution to handle the psychological chaos, it may be useful to see how we use our energy. Most of us are familiar with time management. Are you familiar with energy management? The famous management coach Gary Ryan Blair says, “Managing energy, not time is the X_{Factor} behind peak performance, personal renewal, and overall well-being”.

When you think about it, you will agree it is true. For every action, we are using our energy. The question is how are we using that energy? Misuse of energy can result in poor performance or no performance at all. Therefore focus on energy management while you work on bringing about a change within your inner self while fighting the psychological chaos.

Here are the ten tips to deal with your feelings during the pandemic:

i. **Be determined to ward off the feeling of fear**

First of all one must understand that although fear can be very debilitating, it has a positive side of responding to a situation to defend oneself and make a decision to be part of the fight-or-flight mechanism. Analyze and understand the reason for your fear. Put the fear in perspective. Believe that the pandemic situation will end one day. You are not alone in this situation. Although you may be experiencing it as an individual trauma, remember you are in collective trauma. The whole human race is going through this nervous situation. Look at the various causes of your fear. Is it losing your job? Is it the financial crisis? Is it the fear of being locked down? Whatever it may be, examine the issue closely. Think of the alternative solution. In case you have lost your job, you can file for unemployment to tide over the present situation. Remember you also got a stimulus check to help you out. The lockdowns are slowly getting released. Things are getting normal. Make a conscious effort and be determined to fight and ward off the feeling of fear, so you can focus on solving the issues one by one.

ii. **Be informed of developments to get rid of the feeling of uncertainty:**

When things go as planned, we feel that we are in control. But if they don’t we feel stressed and suffer dullness and depletion. But then people react differently to uncertainty depending on higher tolerance or higher intolerance they possess. Remember there are things that you can control and there are things beyond your control. Don’t imagine always the worse-case scenarios. Get facts and updates on the current situation of the coronavirus. You can pick and choose to watch useful information that will provide good and positive knowledge about the pandemic. The more knowledge you possess, uncertainty begins to fade away. In a way, we humans are tuned to live with a certain amount of uncertainty in our life. We do possess the ability to maneuver through unforeseen situations and events in our life. Therefore sharpen your skills and get rid of uncertainty and face boldly the



situations as they emerge. Start your day as a new day with positive affirmations.

iii. Become creative and involve in activities to replace panic feelings

Panic attacks may last between a few minutes to many hours and usually, they entail a feeling of extreme anxiety or fear. Mostly panic attacks occur in response to certain triggers. Experiencing a panic attack may cause one to hyperventilate. Therefore the individual has to take rapid breaths or inhale deeply and quickly. The individual may also experience dizziness which may lead to fainting and even loss of balance. Panic attacks usually feel very uncomfortable and cause significant distress. The victims often believe they are experiencing a heart attack. The present situation of the pandemic can be a trigger to panic attacks as there have been many fears and anxiety over jobs, paychecks, economic futures, children's education and future, travel, and so on. Those who are prone to such feelings of panic have to focus on relaxing. Take things easy. Breathe in and breathe out. Listen to soothing music that has a calming effect. You can use some light physical exercise and muscle relaxation techniques. Yoga and meditation help to have a calm mind. Another great way to redirect yourself is by entering into some creative modes like painting, playing the piano, and gardening or engage in some indoor games or computer games. Validate yourself saying that you are in a good place in life. Think about the positives and involve yourself in the daily chores.

iv. Be vibrant to strengthen your contacts and relationships to replace the feeling of isolation

Being locked up within the four walls of the house is something unknown to us. We feel being deprived of our freedom to move around and visit places that we want to visit or go to recreation spots to recuperate our energies. Unfortunately with the lockdown situation, we are constrained physically to remain within the house. But this does not mean you should suffer from feelings of isolation. Keep connected with family and friends through your phone, Skype, or Zoom where you can talk to one another, share your daily experiences of what is happening. Focus on exchanging happy memories. There are a thousand things to talk about and share. Meeting others through Zoom could be refreshing and can give you the feeling of being together for real. This may be a good time to connect with long lost contacts and friendships. Besides this is also a good time to focus on self-care. Try to eat healthily and sleep better to rejuvenate yourself.

v. Be motivated to be confident and tenacious to kill the feeling of despair

Those who are dealing with feelings of despair are almost facing a blank wall and they feel as if there are no options for a better life. With a lot of restrictions and sudden loss of jobs, many feel their future appears bleak. Lots of businesses have closed. As one of my friends described it "It is scary". So the feeling of despair drives you to hopelessness. But then think for a minute about all the things that you have accomplished in your life. How many times have you changed jobs? Think of the times you have come out victorious. So focus on your vision about life and the goals you have set to achieve something concrete in your life whether it is training or retraining, getting a promotion, a better salary, buying a house, taking an international tour, or completing higher education. You can design all this in your mind because of the confidence you have within you. Now it is time to tune up your tenacity to fight despair and through the immense possibility to recreate new life and see what else is possible. When your mind turns positive, hopefulness will begin to fill you by killing the feeling of despair.

vi. Empower yourself with optimism to erase frustration

When you feel frustrated the first thing is to calm down and do some breathing exercises. Breathe in and breathe out. Inhale and slowly exhale. Take a quick mental break. Go out for a brisk walk and breathe some fresh air. Look at the issues calmly that seem overwhelming. Break them into bits. Then they will seem like small problems. You can tackle them quickly with ease. Think through the issues and feel optimistic that you will solve the problem. As long as you are indecisive, the feeling of frustration will linger on.

But as soon as you decide and act on it, frustration will be fading away. The present situation of the pandemic will change. Businesses will open; the economy will bounce back; more jobs will be available; life will return to normal although in phases. Learn to understand your feelings and emotions so that you can keep them under check. As your optimism is increased and strengthened, the feeling of frustration will be erased.

vii. Change the feeling of rage to acceptance by letting go

The feeling of rage or anger can become cyclic and can damage our relationships. They are often linked with worries about negative consequences and dive into aggressiveness especially with memories of hurtful experiences. Aggression can be verbal, physical, or passive. As a first step, you have to understand your emotion of anger. Think about

the underlying feeling. Is it guilt or fear? What is triggering, influencing, and sustaining your anger? Once you know the source, think of an opposite action that can reverse your feeling. Think differently. Transform your feelings into thoughts. Reason out your anger. Concerning the pandemic, think about it as a global issue. You are not the only one to suffer. You may be upset about the present situation but what do you achieve by being angry or rageful? Acknowledge the happenings. Learn to let go. The more you let go of your feelings of rage, the more feelings of peace will fill you and clear thinking will emerge.

viii. Replace sadness by focusing on joyful living

During this pandemic when we are forced to stay indoors and listen to the news of the spread of the virus and the death rate growing every day naturally a feeling of sadness overshadows us especially when we are touched by the number of people who had died. Start the day positively with a big smile. Be happy and thankful that you are still breathing, standing, and walking. Find joy and happiness in little things like embracing and playing with a child, laughing with others, enjoying a good meal, listening to music, and being with a loving family. Little things can bring joy. Remember every day that you spend is not going to come back to you. So why do you have to spend it in sadness? Make good use of that day to make it productive by doing something that satisfies your passion. Consciously choose to see something positive in every situation and enjoy every moment. Every day when you get up you have the choice to make that day either happy or sad. When you make "happiness" as the motto of the day, sadness will be replaced with joyfulness.

ix. Focus on your goals and take bold steps to erase anxiety

One of the powerful anxiety-reducing techniques is deep breathing. It helps the body to get into a relaxed mode. Inhaling and slowly exhaling several times helps tremendously freeing one from the feeling of anxiety. Move from feeling level to reasoning level. Question and analyze your thoughts. What are you anxious about? What is the worst thing that can happen? If something unforeseen emerges can you handle it? Instead of a worrying focus on your plans and move forward to act and get things done. Involve yourself in meaningful and productive activities and those that fulfill your desire. This is the time you need to activate your positive attitude and visualize that you will successfully sail through this situation of collective trauma. Talk to positively oriented friends who can share with you some optimistic ideas. Immerse yourself in fun-loving activities like indoor games, painting, playing music, dancing, watching a fun movie or classical movies that take you into another world. Finally, focus on self-care. Sleep well. Learn to relax. These steps will help to ease anxiety.

x. Motivate yourself to rise out of depression

In dealing with depression you first have to understand what it is and take it seriously. It can affect your sleep, your personal, family, and social life. You may struggle with fatigue and sadness. You may find it difficult to focus on work or completion of projects. You want to be left alone especially when you go through mood swings. It is an illness that can slowly corrupt all aspects of your life. The first thing one needs to do is, consult a psychiatrist, and get the needed medication. It is the best start. You have to find the right medication and once you begin to feel better then you can put your mind to work. Good therapy along with medication brings greater relief because you can freely share your feelings to someone non-judgmental. Motivating yourself to do things is a key to slowly rise above your depression. Avoid dwelling on things. Move your thoughts. Get into action. Start doing little things. Get dressed, go out for a walk or walk your dog, visit the library, do a little gardening, watch a movie. Do things that are physical like exercise or work out which will reward your muscles. That will be refreshing. Take one day at a time. Do small activities step by step. As your motivation grows you will be energized to do more. Use positive thoughts to keep you optimistic. Pat yourself for accomplishing the little things which will strengthen your desire to feel normal. Think of it as a journey. Make stops, relax, and keep going. Although the pandemic situation can be depressing, there are things that you can still do. Pay attention to self-care. Be compliant with your medication and therapy. You will be able to swing back to normal life and work. Just as the body needs nourishing food, water, and exercise to keep fit, the mind and the psyche require emotional nurturing to live a peaceful and joyful life.

Conclusion

Although the physical attack of coronavirus on the humans is an undeniable fact and the number of deaths that occurred globally is startling, the psychological attack of the virus on the individuals is hidden. If not attended to, it can create chaos and drive people into greater distress and depression. Taking care of our inner world and creating a good emotional blue print will help us to survive this pandemic and move on to live our life with greater fulfillment.