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The pandemic is a springboard

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Appreciate our capabilities to re-energise the survival instincts and rise once again.

In the past four months, as COVID-19 has caught many of us in its vice-like grip, holding almost all of humanity hostage, social scientists have been searching through history to uncover a similar situation that human beings may have faced in “remembered history”.

Unfortunately, there are no occurrences that compare to what is happening now; nor are there parallels to draw inferences from.



When the Great Plague struck the world in the late 18th century or when Spanish Flu hurt our psyche around the turn of last century, the world as we now know did not exist or did in a far less intricate and interrelated manner than it does today.

This pandemic, even if attributed to human error, has surely overwhelmed all of

humanity in a way that its tentacles are spreading far and wide and at a pace that is difficult to contain.

If this is true and gains resonance with those who recognise the irreparable damage we have been caused or subjected to, what may we do as a race that will help us self-preserve?

Some of the simple lessons that life is offering may help: we have only finite time in this world and therefore procrastinating will numb us into believing we have endless amount of time for our projects. Recreating ourselves by how we wish to use our time and energies will distract us from self-obsession.

When an illustrious former Indian cricket captain, the Nawab of Pataudi, who scored a century against fiery pace bowlers of his time and with only one eye in which he had sight,

the other having been lost in an accident, was asked, “How he was able to bat and bat well with only one eye?” He responded, “I have lost my sight, not my vision.”

Isolation is impossible

Another lesson is that the novel coronavirus has unequivocally established the truth that we are in the world with others and isolation is simply impossible. So the requirement is to psychologically and emotionally cradle and embrace one another. We as human beings need a shared appreciation of what is going on, and we have to understand people through the eyes of those immersed in the tragedy, travails and troubles they are experiencing. Awareness of this is what we need to cultivate, nothing can be taken for granted any more. We cannot make claim to a static or fixed understanding of any phenomena, particularly one like the virus that is impacting us, and must preserve our own sane approach whatever is happening around us in a state of “unknowingness”, thereby helping us combat fear and anxiety.

We do not see things as they are but tend to see things as we are. Our options are limited by our existential situation. The assumption that we are “free” can only be exercised by taking a stand against what is meeting us in life. We have little control over the circumstances that is overwhelming us, and we can only respond as best as we can.

The antidote to combat our psychological brittleness may be available in a quote offered by the French existential philosopher Simone de Beauvoir, “Today we are having a hard time living because we are so bent on outwitting death.”

My mother who is 86 and house-bound owing to age and also the possibility of what health workers mean by “co-morbidity”, shared a thought with me kindling my belief that I can recreate myself If I so desire.

“A door is smaller than a house, the lock on the door even smaller, the key being the smallest, yet it is the key that unlocks the door into the house,” she said.

If we appreciate our capability and recall and remember crises that we have handled and overcome, perhaps we may be able to re-energise our ability to survive and with that rise once again.

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