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CoViD-19 and Mental Health

If you don't mind your mind – someone else will!!

Mind your mind because a dilapidated one is worse than having none

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The Covid-19 times have affected MOST of us; whilst some have suffered loss of a loved one, the remaining are living with the most dreaded human emotion of today – FEAR making them believe, they are next in the line of the 'Yama'. Anxiety, despair, panic is making us all resort to those unthought-of tasks that a normal individual would never even dare to attempt. The Lockdown acts as an icing on to this cake of hopelessness; not that, it is not needed. Ideally, meant to stop us from stepping out and contracting the dreaded virus, it is also taking its toll on those 'isolating' at home by attacking their minds who are constantly glued to the 'idiot' box searching for an 'hourly' update in numbers and looking out for all possible negativity by flipping and watching every damn possible channel. A couple of days back; I had a talk with a dentist colleague who sounded so pessimistic (he just had a little cold since that morning) as if the next day was his 'D-day'. In spite of having so many hours at our disposal, we are still getting sleep-deprived, change in sleep patterns, difficulty in concentrating and worsening body health.

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Even a small seasonal cough/sneeze makes us shudder; we are going to hospital and we are going to die.

In Lockdown-I in 2020, initially everyone seemed so happy to re-discover their lost touch with old hobbies – cooking, music, gardening, sports (at home), painting etc. Un-Lock happened and everyone went back to the normal schedule with a renewed vigour as if to make up for that lost time in lockdown so much so that we all forgot to accept the Covid-19 second wave in the Western World as a looming possibility. Lockdown-II in 2021 brought about the world in India to a screeching halt. As the situation unfolds, the search for hospital beds, oxygen and what not is actually turning out to be yet another episode of the other human emotion/s – Greed and Over-stocking (Yes, the Govt.'s failed as well at places). Ideally, our hobbies should have also got a re-charge in Lockdown-II, but where have those 'Hobbies-II' gone?

In our routine hustle and bustle of life (read: normal times), we all yearned for that elusive Me-time (free time). When we were young and in schools, we all wrote an Essay – 'Healthy mind lives in a healthy body'; but now that we are having these 'free' times in abundance, we have just forgotten to exercise/play/utilize this time productively. We have stopped 'minding our own mind'. This is actually the time to tread the above suggested path seriously. The perfect solution to every such issue is to keep BUSY in any combination of various productive activities like education ('Knowledge is Power' for a reason), meditation, sports, talking with loved ones/friends, interacting with kid/s, cooking et al. We surely need to express our kindness, care, compassion, patience amongst other virtues along with creating new routines and healthy behaviours'. Start your day early, breathe in some fresh air, run, jog, enjoy nature, talk to yourself, motivate from within and stay away from alcohol, tobacco and other such malices. Remember, if the mind stays good, the body stays healthy as well; after all, a good mental status can win us not only small battles, but the big war as well.

Detractors or the naysayers would say it is easier said than done. They believe they are tired of all the expectations that we should be emerging from the pandemic with a toned body (exercise), armed with new skills, having read so many new books (strong mind) etc. I would actually call them MABP (mentally affected by pandemic) patients, rather than detractors or naysayers as their words reflect their psychology and true mental state which used to be normal pre-CoViD-19. The MABP patients believe they are somehow just getting through and that is more than enough for them. They rather feel disillusioned, paranoid, anxious & stressed. For

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them, no amount of positive thoughts and attempts to stay upbeat would change that as there is a looming responsibility of family, friends and all the near and dear ones and people connected and attached with (in fact, that responsibility is there for everyone). For them, the pressure to act 'OK' crushes their range of emotions; that they experience and give them the impression that they are weird when they feel distressed. Avoidance or suppression of emotional discomfort leads to further increase in anxiety, depression and overall worsening of mental health in them. Because of this negativity embedded in their mind, they strongly believe that the latest wave of the CoViD-19 has led to complete system failure in India in all aspects – a collapsed health care system with shortage of beds & oxygen & Doctors & staff coupled with vaccine shortage, unknown corpses floating in rivers & buried along riverbeds, overflowing crematoriums, priest refusing to perform last rites, people dying of never heard of fungal infection (mucormycosis), friends and family losing their loved ones, losing jobs and their livelihoods, broken EMI's, ever-piling loans, socio-economic stress, worry of elderly parents and young children for their safety from CoViD-19 and children education and career at stake. For them the biggest question is – What possible bright side could exist in a world where one couldn't even properly say goodbye to their loved ones? Although children have been affected very less with CoViD-19, the MABP mindset makes them believe that their children are going to be the next victims of this disease and the saying 'the smallest coffins will be the most heavy to carry' mentally starts becoming a reality and they further start feeling helpless. All these things have actually blurred the line between reality and dystopic fiction for them. For them saying, everything is going to be fine is very difficult as it would take a lot of effort for them to put their true heart into words and say it emotionally – 'I am ok and doing perfectly fine'.

Well, I am myself an eternal optimist and would again say '**Mind your Mind because a dilapidated one is worse than having none**' and I would pose a few pointers to these MABP patients, although agreeing with them partially but whilst showing them the other side of the sun:

~Yes, we all are currently down!

~Yes, we are having none of our expectations being fulfilled!

~Yes, the system has collapsed somewhere!

~Yes, the corpses are floating and overflowing at many places!

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~Yes, the only hope, vaccine is in short supply!

~Yes, there is a newly acquired mucormycosis (fungal infection)!

~Yes, the livelihoods are gone for many!

~Yes, the 'fear factor' of elderly and children getting infected even in the house is there!

~Yes, we are somehow 'just' getting through!

But, those who are feeling the above; please answer me:

~Who says everything is lost for us – our mind? (Every winter is followed by a spring and that is the unspoken Law of Nature)

~Who gave us expectations – our mind? (We choose to dream; sometimes wild as well believing in the filmy 'Happy Ending' which doesn't usually happen in life every time)

~Who says the health care system collapsed – our mind? (How many doctors have quit their lines of duty because of work pressure; hardly?)

~Who says the corpses were immersed by people because of the fear of being infected themselves and not poverty or other reasons – our mind? (Nobody has an exact data of why people chose to immerse their loved ones in sacred rivers like 'Ganga' et al – The human nature primarily is to the fore – Selfishness; Dead bodies will give us infection and wood is expensive – poverty is secondary here)

~Who says even vaccine is not good enough for us to be saved from this dreaded disease – our mind? (So many shots went waste because of insecurity in the first 3 months and now, we are crying over split milk of shortage and over-pricing – We can take Alcohol at MRP but want medicines at discount and vaccine for free?)

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~Who says mucormycosis is because of novelty – our mind? (Choose between a death and a survival because of medicines with side effects – of course, the answer would be latter)

~Who says all is over and businesses won't resume normally ever again – our mind? (The GST Collections of April 2021 were 1,41,384 crore – Highest ever and even when many states had a lockdown inserted in April itself)

~Who says elderly and children are not bound to recover even if infected – our mind? (102 years old and 1 month old babies – both have recovered)

~Who says, we are 'just' getting through – our mind? (It is a personal choice – how we choose to live (if not die?))

We always have a choice to have an optimistic or cynical attitude, no matter what obstacles are thrown at us. Even the hard dire choices are never as bad as our 'monkey' mind perceives it to be. We always have the choice to be fearless or fearful about the pandemic and the choice to have courage or not.

What is the point of not acting as if we are fearless and confident?

The opposite is surely a choice with us.

As male heads (Commander) of our nuclear family (that most of us are), doesn't our family look up to us to come out of all this – unscathed, unhurt because for them, our survival is the biggest thing. Ask them to choose; any of the above and our life – they would always choose us. The Senapati i.e. us has to put up a brave face at least for the rest of our family who rely on us, are dependent on us even if we might be shattered and broken from inside for what is happening in our country.

Ask yourself, inspite of being in that state of mind; do we need to transfer the same attitude to our family?

No?

Hell, No?

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People would have reasons to say – it is ‘easier said than done’.

No wonder, they are getting disillusioned, anxious & stressed and worse, paranoid.

I agree that this sense of all pervasive doom and helplessness is normal to an extent.

But why does this happen?

Because we deny our feelings and just push them under the carpet.

Acceptance is the first key to a change.

It is okay to feel a bit upset but then it is equally important to validate one’s feelings.

This change (pandemic) has brought discomfort; but we need to know – not everything has changed in this world for us.

Even if we easily get through this crisis but are mentally hurt in this process – Are we going to be at our full efficiency in the normal world?

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How can we do that?

In addition to what I mentioned at the start – trying to stay more active, even at home and keeping ourselves busy is the best solution.

Stay connected with people who bring us a smile, comfort and have our best interest in their mind.

Caution – If we still can’t manage the above, never stay aloof and trust HIM – The Supreme Power.

In the end, it always boils down to choices on how we choose to live?

If everything boils down to choices, why not choose to be fearless, joyful and happy at all times?

We always have one – don’t we?

But, the truth is we may not actually want to!

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