

COVID-19: Is there a silver lining?

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Madam, a few months ago the world felt the presence of an unwanted intruder in their lives. It was invisible and deadly and before we knew, it ended up creating havoc beyond imagination. People lost their lives, peace of mind and security. This disease brought despair and depression, as nothing good can seemingly come out this situation.¹ Only a handful of people actually saw through this situation to take a glimpse of the brighter side which is what is required the most at times of a pandemic.

The lockdown caused by coronavirus disease (COVID-19) has helped our environment.² The atmosphere has not been this clean since the Industrial Revolution began. The air is fresh to breathe and the sky is clear enough to allow stargazing. Pictures of clean rivers, lakes and seas with dancing dolphins and frolicking wildlife greet us every day. Noise pollution levels have reduced dramatically too. One can hear birds chirping during the day and listen to the sound of cool breeze at night, a blessing brought about by the lockdown.

Human behaviour is one area where this pandemic has brought out the most positive effects. It has made us pause in our rat race and introspect about the actual meaning of life. We are able to bond better with our families in absence of distractions which changed our priorities before this lockdown. Parents have actually started playing board games and card games with their children rather than handing them an expensive video game, which helps strengthen their relationship.

Social and mental health have also been taken good care of, with people learning to share resources as well as their problems with one another. They are able to explore new ideas, hobbies and trends while honing novel skills.³ People have learned to be mindful and have embraced essentialism as opposed to ostentatiousness and extravagance. Many have

engaged themselves in activities promoting self-sufficiency like home gardening and kitchen farming.

With all the temples, mosques and churches closed all over the world, families can pray together at home. Praying together brings families closer spiritually. This is a good time for them to do group activities like cooking a meal or playing board games. Activities are good for bonding and bringing people close to one another.

Governments across the globe have realised the need to spend more on healthcare. Good infrastructure and well-qualified health professionals are required to take care of our population. Even final year medical students have entered the battlefield and will benefit from this experience. The COVID-19 pandemic will hopefully shift focus to primary care, preventive therapy and behavioural change as opposed to tertiary specialist care with a focus on medication and intervention.⁴

Patients, and the public at large, have learnt the importance of health from the COVID-19 threat. The ongoing social marketing campaigns have increased acceptance of healthcare-related behaviours such as personal hygiene and social distancing.⁵ Hopefully when the dust settles they will have increased respect for health workers. They now understand the professional efforts and personal sacrifice that doctors and nurses make, as a part of their routine job.

The COVID-19 pandemic is an unexpected and unwanted intruder in our lives. However, with concerted and continued efforts, we will certainly defeat it. Let us not forget that this time period is a good opportunity for personal development and social growth. We must work hard and work together, so that our future generations can confidently say 'the COVID-19 pandemic was a silver lining for humankind'.

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