

A World Disrupted by a Microscopic Being!



Courtenay Young

As I write this, we are in the middle of an almost worldwide, unique “change process” involving a virtual lockdown in many of our cities and in many countries.

A pandemic (a widespread disease epidemic) can be looked at in various ways: the word itself (in English) connotes “panic,” and there is certainly a lot of that around. We may be asked, as therapists, by our clients (now isolated) what they can do to help themselves. So, how can we, as body psychotherapists, work with someone over the phone or by Skype?

Other than using the phrase on the front of the legendary book, *The Hitchhiker’s Guide to the Galaxy*, “Don’t Panic!”, there is actually quite a lot that we can do. They may be very scared, and thus need our reassuring presence. Their present isolation may feel like an earlier abandonment or punishment, which can be worked through. If they live alone, they may be going “stir crazy,” and thus need grounding in their body and other forms of contact.

Some of the techniques explored in my writings about “Body Psychotherapy without Touch” (Young, 2007, 2009, 2018) can be utilized. We can, and should be – if not trained in, then certainly aware of – some of the differing factors involved in any sort of online therapy. These are more readily available now, and even people like Pat Ogden are giving webinars about online body-oriented therapy¹.

Many more people will be experiencing trauma, and this can cause panic, and increase its dramatic effects. Much more of our work as body psychotherapists will be dealing with people in trauma, and we may need to extend our understanding and expertise in this area. Luckily, a lot has been written about this from within our field.

There are a couple of broader aspects to consider: a pandemic has been increasingly inevitable as the world population expands exponentially and as world travel has also increased. Indeed, many scientists (epidemiologists) have just been waiting for that to happen. And this may not be the last pandemic; there have been several others, and there may well be several more – almost inevitably.

In such critical instances – and we are seeing many more human crises as global warming increases the incidence of extreme weather events (hurricanes, floods, wildfires, etc.) – everyone should, of course, “hope for the best and plan for the worst.” However, these events are often beyond any individual’s capacity to cope by themselves, and so we are also seeing many more people coming together and creating heartwarming community responses. This is a very welcome sight, especially in an increasingly narcissistic and material world culture.

As this present pandemic winds down, which it will do eventually, there are many lessons to be learned. and many people will have had their lives changed – often quite dramatically. There have been, and will be, many more people experiencing grief, many businesses will have gone under, there may well be more restrictions still imposed (similar to some “emergency powers” – but gradually

1. *Sensorimotor Psychotherapy from a Distance: Engaging the Body, Creating Presence, and Building Relationship In Online Therapy*. Pat Ogden. Zoom, US.

lessening), the refugee crisis is not over and may have become more intense, and these most vulnerable groups of people will need additional resources. We may see the military increasingly being used to assist – a humane use of military power – and (no doubt), this resource might also become abused by a military coup.

All these factors – once they seemingly pass – may cause people to become overly joyful or even complacent in the short term, but the next crisis or disaster may well be coming soon. Many people may well become almost continually scared – something akin to post-traumatic stress disorder. These are all external factors in this so-called civilized world.

Internally, our emergency response mechanisms – located deep within our autonomic nervous (and vagal) systems – will become increasingly triggered. This present-day overload must be treated first, before any further therapy work can be done. We may therefore need to teach our clients – and ourselves – many new “tricks” to self-soothe, stay centered and grounded, relax properly when we can, self-regulate, de-stress, and try to maintain equilibrium in both body and mind. Some of these techniques should have been taught in elementary school, as our children may now have to learn very different topics; understanding the history of our country takes second place to learning new survival techniques.

There are also broader aspects to be considered. On the TV news recently, one person quoted the maxim about what happens when a single butterfly flaps its wings far away in a forest; they followed this with the question of what happens when someone in a street market cuts up a diseased animal for food, and its pathogens mutate across to our species. Many of these “plagues” or pandemics have a zoonotic origin. Perhaps we need to consider a much wider perspective, like how do we (as humans) relate to other animal species and – indeed – to the planet itself?

Finally, there are some metaphysical concepts. We are not the “supreme” beings or “rulers” of the earth, or so scientifically advanced that nothing can harm us, or so “civilized” and cultural a species as we thought we were. A microscopic being has disrupted our world; it is almost ironic. However, a metaphysical crisis is generally considered a good thing, because it makes us look more closely at our lives. Some people believe that we can create opportunities out of such crises: this may be the way to do so.

We tend to see these plagues and viruses as something “bad” because they impact negatively on our lives and on our worldview; we forget that they may have, or there may be, a valid reason for their existence. Many bacteria live in our gut and undeniably perform very useful functions. Are there then some bacteria that are “good” and others “bad”?

Maybe we need to step back and consider such events from a more metaphysical perspective. I am not – quite – going so far as to say that such pandemics might be Nature’s way of reducing the impact of a virulent species (us humans) that is overrunning the health and wellbeing of its (planetary) host – but I did write a poem to that effect some time ago.

More recently, I posted on Facebook: *“I am trying to treat the CV-19 hysteria by staying in a Zen space: I am wise because I know that I know nothing; because I know nothing, there is nothing to get anxious about (i.e., it is all in my imagination); I stay calm because it is pointless to worry.”*

Stay safe!

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