

Covid-19 and the Lockdown: A Reflection

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Being locked within our own homes amidst the wild spread of Covid-19 is bringing in new levels of uncertainty. Locked up in our own minds, we traverse through parts that may have earlier been hidden, like blind spots.

Inside the quarters of our homes, much of our thoughts centre around uncertainty and its consequent relationship to uncertain times that we have already survived. Added to this is the experience of remote sessions, which mostly feel disembodied and strange. If the screen is off, it feels as though there is a voice coming from a box. If the screen is on, I have to imagine a body extending itself into full shape and form from this two-dimensional image coming out of a screen. The experience is rather primitive. Whose voice do I hear, whose body I cannot see? Who is this person who I can only see but cannot feel? The experience of the remote sessions in itself is reminiscent of an infant trying to understand what it sees when it sees the mother's face (Winnicott, 1971) – the baby feeling fragmented on not being able to put together the voice and the body of the mother; as though experiencing the mother in parts. Remote sessions can be a disturbing experience especially as we live through these uncertain and troubled times.

While locked down there is less chance for spread of the virus outside, but I think inside our minds we are getting familiar with a new darkness. Many of my patients speak to me from corners of their houses – locked in, trying to find a space which still feels safe. They must now do the work of finding and creating a safe space. It is not always easy. The consultation room and its warmth that I have carefully, over the years, mulled over and created, has been taken away from both therapist and patient. While I now provide sessions to my patients from a confidential corner of my own home, my belongings (paintings, books) that stood for warmth, care, comfort – and which also stand for me and hold me together – are gone.

My patients too feel attached to the consultation room – as extensions of me and their own mind – something that can also help them feel held together in moments of dread, in moments of silences. A room which has over the years become a room inside their mind that they can visit to experience their own disjointed and fragmented selves. But locked down in corners of our own minds, our own homes, the experience of the remote sessions is now completely different. We are reminded of times when we were bound to our homes, not being able to leave, mourning an irreplaceable loss, yet finding no words, falling into an inner abyss without finding ground. The texture of my sessions with my patients too is filled with these layers.

Some of us may have never spent so long with our own family. And so, there is a need to re-adjust and re-accommodate and find comfort. Intimacy can feel that much more threatening locked in our own minds – I begin to discover anew my own relations.

So do my patients. A patient calls me from a corner in his home. He speaks to me about the discomfort he feels while living at home with his partner who he has lived with for the past many years. Stuck now inside the quarters of his home, he feels forced to acknowledge a façade that he had been putting up while living at home. Yet another patient speaks about the experience of now living with her parents and how disturbing, how unsafe it all feels. The experience of my sessions too is filled with extracts of grim losses, of bitterness, of feeling alienated, alone and unsafe.

And all this, while a virus rapidly spreads across the world like wildfire. It is uncertain how the pandemic will taper off and the course that this virus will take. It's interesting though because with this pandemic, it feels that we are also getting intimate with our own anxieties about dying, about infecting another, about the capability to destroy something outside, like my own mother – that I can destroy her – that she is so separate from me and whose absence is so hard to survive, whose absence I cannot transcribe – that I wish to kill her (Klein, 1946). I think the fears that we are all surviving together while surviving the spread and containment of the pandemic are our fears that we can kill – that we can destroy – that we feel angry, we hate – that in our minds we may have lived through a day when we killed our mother inside our mind. These fears are poignant; perhaps this is why culturally-rooted madness is surfacing – where one part of the world hoards toilet paper, or another believes that cow urine can cure us!

Locked down with primitive anxieties and the load of remote sessions, shows not just that we are living through uncertain times, but also the distance that we feel: the distance we need to create within our own minds and the alienation we can feel within the intimacy of our own relations. Our minds feel burdened with the load of processing and meaning-making. A new black hole is being created and each of us – uniquely – is living through it while we are locked down and while we survive this global pandemic, together. I believe it is essential today, more than any other day, to remember once again that we are all essentially alone, but we are also together.

References

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