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COVID-19: A Crash Course on â??The Art of Livingâ??!

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Mental health is more critical in tough times because it gives the required strength to keep us in good spirits and reduce the anxiety or fear



Most of our life time efforts are bound in securing a good future, but time and again it has been proved that it is not obtainable simply by having a healthy bank balance, good enough to give us a life full of luxury.

The pandemic times, we all are going through currently, further substantiates that there is no certainty in life. Life can be unbelievably cruel and even a non-living, invisible creature can create havocs. And those who have lost their jobs, unable to make ends meet, can very well understand what I mean. It is also true for those who luckily have not ended in crises, but feel retracted, isolated, frustrated or depressed due to the unmanageable state of affairs.

The purpose of this article is not to list all the problems, people have faced or facing due to COVID-19 but to remind us few important things, we all know but keep on forgetting their importance / values. However, if understood and practiced may help us stay buoyant in difficult times and most probably, always.

1. **There is no substitute for Good (MENTAL) Health:** Higher intensity exercise for at least 15 minutes or lower intensity exercise, like walking, stretching and stairs can not only help in keeping up mood but also in reducing the risk of major depression, is the finding of the research studies published by Karmel Choi in JAMA on Jan 23, 2019. This is the first study to show that exercise may benefit mood. These finding are further substantiated by the study more recently published by Jacob Meyer on Sept. 23, last year in Int. J. Enviorn. Res. Public Health 17 (19), 6949 (2020), which suggests that maintaining and enhancing physical activity participation and limiting screen times increase during abrupt social challenges e.g. Coronavirus pandemic, may mitigate the mental health consequences.

   COVID-19 has already taken a big toll on human life but the silver line in the dark clouds is that billions including nonagenarians and centenarians with comorbidities, who have either remained unaffected or have come out of infection without much trouble or physical

   discomfort and this is most likely because they kept themselves not only physically fit but more importantly, **mentally** healthy. *Naomi Osaka (2nd in the world ranking) and more recently Simone Biler, withdrawing from French open Tournament (May, 2021) and Tokyo Olympics 2020, respectively, citing the need to work on mental health as the reason for their withdrawals, speaks for its importance !*

> "Good Health and Good Sense are two of life's greatest blessings".
>
> – Pubililius Syrus

Mental health is more critical in tough times because it gives the required strength to keep us in good spirits and reduce the anxiety or fear. The latter if gets set, turns human immunity weak by several fold and renders body highly susceptible for catching infections and falling sick.

As I understand today, the best way to maintain a fine balance between physical and mental health is possible by becoming aware of, and making use of the followings in all spheres of our activities whether it's related to mind, deeds or words:

i. **Honesty and Yoga:** We can create a façade, which we often do, to project ourselves perfect / honest. **Honesty,** on the other hand, requires simplicity, unpretentious yet straightforwardness of our conduct and is more easy to practice and live with it than pretending, because any act of dishonesty / manipulation requires greater mental efforts and brain power and results in unnecessary wastage of energy, the main cause of fatigue, anxiety, stress or depressions, and overall poor health. And that's possibly the reason for the popularity and acceptance of the proverb **"Honesty is the Best policy". 'Yoga',** which simply means doing things with awareness, is complementary to Honesty, provides the best way to do things relaxingly by connecting mind, body and spirits, a proven method for conserving our energy and maintaining holistic health !

ii. **The True Self:** In general we look for happiness from external factors like physical appearance / health, name, fame, money, position, success, relationships etc. and work relentlessly to attain and maintain it. But it's also true that a large percentage of people with unlimited power, wealth, highest qualifications and / or positions are not really happy and live their lives which are full of tensions, worries, fear or depression. And it's solely due to the lack of understanding that the key to the holistic health and happiness, we are searching for externally, is lying in our **true self** (soul), the **power house,** which not only keeps our body and mind aligned but also in high spirits.

> "Success is not how much money you make; It's about the difference you make in people's lives".
>
> – Michelle Obama

There is nothing wrong if one goes for acquiring wealth and materials for comfort, and one should work hard to achieve this, however, one can enjoy the material world only till the body functions well. Once the body begins to detoriate or the situation becomes unfavorable the mind turns irritable and loses receptibility for the joy from the possessions, (Speaking Tree, TOI Nov. 2021), and this is when the understanding of the true self, that it's the body that's paining not the soul, helps us in freeing from the sufferings.

> 'Pain is inevitable, Suffering is optional'.
>
> - Haruki Murakami

iii. **Nurturing our True Self:** To remain healthy and transcendental, our **true self** requires to maintain its **'Satchitananda'** state, by keeping a perfect balance in its attributes, namely purity, peace, love, bliss and power. However, if disturbed, as it happens very frequently, may be several times in day, due to stress, fear, anxiety, or unhealthy practices like anger, it results in the depletion of its power by allowing mind to create negative thoughts resulting into disharmony in all our acts, including relationships which directly affects our emotional and physical health. In other words, if the 'soul' keeps on either consuming negative information or connected with negative energy, it results in continuing weakness and ultimately disempowering itself.

To avoid this down turn, similar to the physical rest (through sleep or simple relaxing) we give to our body to recoup the lost energy or repeatedly charging our mobile phones / car batteries before they get completely discharged, we need to continuously **recharge our own battery,** the **soul,** with quality thoughts because what we do, feel or have, is solely dependent on the quality of information we receive and

> "The happiness of your life depends upon the quality of your thoughts."

the way we process it. Noble thoughts always give us a feeling of being happy and also better quality life.

> "Attractiveness and magnetism of man's personality is the result of his inner harmony."
>
> - Yajur Veda

> - Marcus Aurelius

Medical sciences, in past few decades, have made tremendous advancement in providing improved quality of life to the diseased by giving comfort from physical pain and the feeling of relief but also in enhancing the average life span of human beings which, however, has a downside of increasing the waiting period for death, at least to the terminally ill patients in intense pain, having remote possibly to recover and enjoy the good health again.

It does not, however, mean that one should not take modern medicines when required and live comfortable life but it's better to couple Medication with Meditation. This combo will not only give symptomatic relief from the physical pain but also guide us to

realize our true self and ultimately understanding the true meaning of Happiness. Meditation simply means contemplation or deep thinking to analyze and understand the truth and is the key step in any decision making.

> "Pleasure and well-being is negative and suffering positive, the happiness of a given life is not to be measured accordingly to the joy and pleasure it contains but according to the absence of the positive element, the absence of suffering".
>
> - Arthur Schopherhaur

iv. **Humility:** We should learn to behave; should not feel very proud of ourselves, feeling unnecessarily important, powerful, superior or special, as we very often do. To make people getting locked down in their homes,

coronavirus has give us one of the best learning to not to feel high and mighty, but respect its cohabitants.

> "Real genius is nothing else but the supernatural virtue of humility in the domain of thought."
>
> - Simone Weil

v. **Living with Gratitude:** The fact is that most of us live our day to day life without being consciously aware and due to this reason we take life and its most beautiful gifts, such as relationships, friends, freedom to express, democracy, good health, our perfect body, the best design of nature as well as the Natural resources, for granted till we think we might lose them or ultimately lose them.

Just for example, we can't last for more than 4-6 minutes without oxygen, but nothing is more taken for granted than the 'air' we breathe, which can probably be better understood, *if we give attention to the feeling of a 93 years old corona patient from Italy who started crying when asked to pay € 5000/- Euros for the ventilator he used for a day (Let's not worry about the*

truthfulness of this story). When the Doctor, who took care of the old man asked him the reason for crying, he told that he is not crying because he cannot pay the bill, which he can easily afford, but for breathing Nature's oxygen all my life time free of cost but never felt gratitude for ! Similar to air, all the essentials supporting our life are available free of cost, and it's our duty of express our gratitude towards mother nature for providing us with good health and a life, full of blessings.

> " When you look at life through eyes of gratitude, the world becomes a magical and amazing place."
>
> - Jennifer Gayle

2. **Respect and Nurture the Family Values:** Survival is the topmost goal of all lives but it was fear of death which forced many choosing not to help the sick and needy and even not receiving dead bodies of their near and dears who died of corona infections; once again reminding the question from **Yaksha-Yudisthira dialectics** in the **Aranya Parva** of our great epic **Mahabarata:** *"Kim ascharyam (what is the most surprising?) to which Yudishthira replied that most surprising thing is that everyone sees countless deaths in their life time but always thinks and behaves as he is born to*

live forever."

We should not forget that human is a social animal and to maintain social fabric we need to understand the beauty of our family culture and values. As defined by our Vice President – Hon. M. Venkaiah Naidu, recently, Indian family culture is more an **Institution** which gives more emphasis to interdependence than independence, a non-existent dream or a mirage, and works for the overall interest of whole family by offering shoulder in time of grief and developing quality of respect, sharing and empathy among family members, the key to live happy and healthy life.

> "The only rock I know that stays steady, the only Institution I know that works, is the family".
>
> - Lee Iaceocca

> "There is no doubt that it's around the family and the home that all the greatest virtues, the most dominating virtues of human, are created, strengthened and maintained".
>
> - Winston Chruchchill

The **Great Resignation,** the ongoing trend of employees voluntary leaving their jobs, as seen in the US and some European countries (source: Wikipedia), is possibility the reason for the realization developed due to **COVID-19** pandemic that life is too short / unpredictable and maintaining **work-life** balance is more important than simply slogging and making more and more money to feel secured and satisfied!!

3. **Learning from my Personal Encounter with SARS-CoV-2:** Knowing the high contagious nature of **SARS-CoV-2,** I never thought I would be spared by the infection and in April this year I was diagnosed corona positive. Based on my experience, I would like to suggest few things to those who have not got exposure to this virus.

> "Don't run. Don't panic Face the situation. Just believe, you can do it."
>
> - Dorae Moon Mon

> "Only when we are no longer afraid do we begin to live."
>
> - Dorothy Thompson

> "Humble yourself or Life will do it for you" !

   i. Don't panic and be aware that it's less deadly than any other disease prevalent today such as Flu, Malaria, Dengue or Tuberculosis. The survival rate from **COVID-19** in India is higher than 98% and immune system of an average Indian is strong enough to counter its effect.

   ii. Be fearless to face it ! It's very well established that fear has significant impact on our immune system and is the major cause for the deaths of people by **COVID-19.**

   iii. Don't self-medicate and get RT-PCR / blood test done (with the advice of your Doctor) to know if you are infected, at the earliest, because once the virus travels down to the vital organs, it becomes more difficult to handle as the prognosis become worse.!

   iv. Maintain a healthy lifestyle because feeling of well being helps us in eating healthy food and exercising regularly. A Research paper recently published by A. Gschwandtner et al. (https://link.springer.com/article/10.1007/s10902-021-00440-y) titled **'Lifestyle and Life Satisfaction: The Role of Delayed Gratification'** in the Journal of Happiness Studies on August 2021, once again emphasized that the **Delayed Gratification** creates the space for better life-style choices i.e. eating fruits and vegetables, and exercises that helps individuals to give greater weight to the investment component of life-style decisions (Labroots, 22/9/2021). The finding, in other words suggest that the act of resisting the impulsive choices for having immediate rewards /gains take us a long way to keep us healthy and Happy !!

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