

## **COVID -19 and the Vulnerability of Children (0-5 years): A Question to Medical Practitioners?**

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What future generation will be there since the outbreak of COVID-19? Will those growing today be physically fit as nature without COVID-19 had intended it? How are we nurturing the young ones to make sure that as they silently fight the Corona virus disease no damage is done to their development? Will their cognitive development and memory be built up as it should be without COVID-19? What measures has there been to look at this?

These are some of the questions that have been going through my mind as we sail in the world of COVID-19. The Gestalt psychology that human attention is captured by all those phenomena known to human consciousness than those stimuli that are constant has been a reality for me today.<sup>1</sup> However, I do not intend to discard research on COVID-19 concerning children and babies that have been done so far. There is vast information from (UNICEF 2020), (WHO 2019 -2020) and other stakeholders who are dwelling mostly on secondary effects of COVID-19 upon children. In addition, recently the health researchers are saying “children are not currently eligible to receive the vaccine.”<sup>2</sup> Perhaps, one would ask a question whether the babies and children will not be affected in the near future. A minority have looked at how children are falling behind in their psychological and social development necessitated by the COVID-19 environment in which they are developing. My article is not meant to imply that the effect of COVID-19 can affect the health of uninfected babies and young ones nor is it meant to imply that the pandemic cannot be looked at by examining its current effects and infections as has been ably and tremendously done. I seek to present a pro-responsive perspective on the pandemic looking at children who are a vulnerable group in any circumstance. Consequently, this article seeks to raise an alarm to the readers to pay attention to this constant reality which is a fruit of my experience I had since March 2020. Possibly, it is focused in Zimbabwe, and probably Africa. I am concerned about children, especially the very young ones aged 0-5 years.

As I walk in the streets and in the country from March 24, 2020 to date, I see mothers carrying children on their backs, the child's mouth open, the nose not protected and the little one is innocently fast asleep. Fathers also walk around holding babies in their hands. Yes, babies should not put on masks. So far medical science is still researching and has so far with statistics proved that COVID-19 affects children and babies but to a lesser degree than it does to adults. Hence, as Gestalt puts it, can it not be that the medical practitioners and concerned stakeholders are relaxing a bit as we see mothers move around with babies at their back.<sup>3</sup> I would like to give reference to the 1918 – 1919 Spanish flu. It was in three waves. The infant mortality rate was different and increasing at each wave. If the COVID-19 is also coming in waves, are we waiting for it to affect children so that quick measures can be taken?

In addition, COVID-19 is a respiratory viral disease. Could there be any impact on the development and growth of the lung capacity and lung flexibility of these under-fives who are exposed to the COVID-19 environment and are constantly fighting this virus and remain negative. At present one can safely say probably their lungs are more resistant to COVID-19 than adults. Consequently, they are in the environment where at first the virus did not infect the under-fives. Now because of the increase in the number of adults infected, the children and babies are more exposed and prone to the virus hence the probability that the rate of them being infected may rise. Those infected are not of much concern to me but those who remain negative though they are in the environment of COVID-19. I am of the assumption that when the young ones are in an environment of COVID -19, they breathe it, but their developing system fights it in one way or another. My question and worry are, in this process of continuously fighting the virus is there no “damage or lagging behind” that may come as after effects to the natural development of the child?

Though lock down measures have been put in place, both at national and international levels, there are also circumstances in which the under-fives have to move with their mothers. What further measures can be put to protect them? Moreover, the development of the Coronavirus Vaccine research also presumes that since children and the young ones “have low rates of severe disease and deaths they will not be prioritized for

the vaccination during the early vaccine deployment.”<sup>4</sup> I also recalled Gelstat here when he alluded to the fact that our attention is captured by something moving rather than what is relatively still and that to all those phenomena that in this way attract our attention we attribute a higher degree of reality than the ones we do not know only because for the moment they are more important to us. I would like to imagine a ship’s radar scanner. It is a directional scanner used to scan objects in the space of the ship. However, the ship radar scanner is not able to see vast areas where there are no rocks. Hence with regards to COVID -19 and babies one can probably say human consciousness is prone to this myopic way of looking at things and temporarily screen away anything that is not immediately important to our scanning system based on sensing danger. In addition, a ship radar scanner does not see the state of the object whether it is empty or damaged. What it scans is that the route is not safe and can lead to collision. In reference to COVID – 19 and babies, is the Gestalt idea that human consciousness ignores constant stimuli and concentrates on troublesome things not an eye opener to the probability of setting up quick preventive measures for children and babies against COVID -19?

In conclusion, my experience of hearing the after effects of Covid 19 from those who have recovered is that there is loss of memory for some time and bodily weakness. If these are some of the after effects How assured are we as nations that the young ones WHOSE IMMUNE SYSTEM IS FIGHTING THE VIRUS HERE AND NOW AND REMAIN NEGATIVE, HAVE NO DAMAGE THAT IS DONE TO THEIR PHYSICAL FITNESS AS WELL AS TO THE GROWTH OF THEIR BRAIN ESPECIALLY THEIR MEMORY? WHAT GENERATION IS TO COME OUT OF THIS COVID-19 ERA?

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<sup>1</sup> [healthline.com/health-news](https://www.healthline.com/health-news)

<sup>2</sup> [healthline.com/health-news](https://www.healthline.com/health-news)

<sup>3</sup> Mads Soegaard, Gestalt principles of form perception, <https://www.interaction-design.org/literature/book/the-glossary-of-human-computer-interaction/gestalt-principles-of-form-perception> (accessed 8 February 2021).

<sup>4</sup> [adc.bmj.com/content/early/2021/01/04/archdischild.2020-321225](https://adc.bmj.com/content/early/2021/01/04/archdischild.2020-321225)

## **Coronavirus: A possible vehicle of paradigm shift in human consciousness**

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“The greatest souls are awakened out of suffering and the most impressive personalities endure many scars”.<sup>1</sup> The great Paul was awakened out of a massive blow, likewise, a Happy Easter Sunday came out of Good Friday. Or, “Can anything good come out of Nazareth?” (John 1: 46). In fact, “There is a season for everything, a time for every occupation under heaven...” (Ecc 3:1ff). There is a reason for everything! In the life cycle of the leaf, the leaf remains a leaf but with a different appearance in different seasons, and with a different mission at a particular given time. The question might be, is a leaf accepting the present moment, regardless of its status? Every stage can be more powerful if it accepts the present moment and also makes use of every stage of its life. I shall make use of this leaf-image as the article continues.

Now, the principal aim of this paper is a quest in trying to approach the reality of Covid-19 in a new prism. Thus, I think this deadly pandemic (Covid-19) can be a possible vehicle of a paradigm shift in human consciousness. To demonstrate this position, I have three points to present: (1) the deadly nature of Coronavirus particularly on the reality of death, (2) how this pandemic can be understood to be a vehicle of a paradigm shift, then (3) embracing the art of consciousness rather than compulsiveness. Does it mean we have to fight through the bad days in order to earn the best of ourselves? I think so! Thus, this article seeks to shift one’s consciousness from compulsiveness in these challenging moments of the deadly virus.

Covid-19 shall be understood as a deadly virus whose origin is still not clear and consciousness as a complete union of oneself with his/her intelligence. This shall be tackled in detail as the article unfolds.

### **The world gasps for breath**

To begin with:

...to live is to suffer, to survive is to find meaning in the suffering. If there is a purpose in life at all, there must be a purpose in suffering

and in dying. But no man can tell another what this purpose is. Each must find out for himself and must accept the responsibility that his answer prescribes. If he succeeds, he will continue to grow in spite of all indignities.<sup>2</sup>

Of course, life on this earth begins at B and ends at D, that is, at birth and ends with death. However, between these two letters, there is a letter C, which is the choice we make whilst we are still alive. Now, within our period of making choices, we are receiving a big blow from the deadly Coronavirus. And as the virus spread, new measures emerged, people donned face masks, sanitization of hands became a new norm, and staying in-doors has become a proper way to live but still, graves became our home. All these measures, however, seemed unsuccessful in curtailing the tide of the virus. The whole world has been threatened by death, families are broken up, every morning has brought shock and numbness.

In a simple sense, the world gasps for breath. Unfortunately, many passed on without making a choice that would have helped them to die peacefully. Who will comfort the living especially those who are concerned about their beloved ones who have died and were buried in a way that grieves them deeply? As this pandemic continues, it remains a pain beyond the cry, we can imagine those families who experienced the deaths of multiple family members, none of whom they were able to bury properly. Our absence during the death of our beloved ones can easily make our loved one's death feel unbelievable like it didn't happen at all. What we might expect from such an experience is simply a feeling of intense grief, instead of experiencing their absence in ambiguity. This has brought human intelligence into a cloud of unknowing.

### **Can this pandemic be a possible vehicle of a paradigm shift?**

Let us begin with the conversion of Saul. There are a few things we can reflect on about his life during conversion. And before his conversion, Paul lived a compulsive life, that is a life driven by ego, instinct and his uncontrollable desires. The Bible tells us that "It happened that while he was traveling to Damascus and approaching the city, suddenly a light



from heaven shone all around him. He fell to the ground, and then he heard a voice saying Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting me?" (Acts 9: 3-4). The point here is not about who is behind the Covid-19, whether it is Divine cause or human inflicted, that is not the point. The point is that the virus is a blow to humanity and the reality is that people are falling down, and even some to the graves. Now, can anything good come out of the blinded Saul, fallen Saul, darkened Saul...? Inevitably, our exposure to pain, grief, and death due to this deadly pandemic calls us all to grapple with an unbearable question of why, and no one can answer this agonizing question. And behind this painful question there is perhaps a lamentation "Why, O Lord, do you reject me?" (Psalm 88:14), "Why have you rejected us forever, O Lord?" (Psalms 74:1).

What could be the secret behind Saul's falling, "For three days he was without his sight and took neither food nor drink" (Acts 9: 9). Imam Ali says, "Indeed you are in the days of expectation that is followed by death. So, he who works in the days of his expectation before death arrives will benefit from his work and will not be hurt by death".<sup>3</sup> With this in mind, I think the Coronavirus has taught us to be humble, it might be a call to a paradigm change in human consciousness.

Perhaps, the time has brought us sorrow and distress of conscience so that we can "Get up and go into the city, and you will be told what you are to do" (Acts 9: 6). In fact, "...we may feel satisfied with things as they are; we may have a good job, kind friends and a supportive family, but all things are subject to change".<sup>4</sup> My point is, this could be a dark night so that we can have time to rest, time to dream, time to reflect, a moment of realizing, discovering, examining ourselves... Could this not be the same time as with Saul? Could this not be a vehicle for our fundamental change in approach to our consciousness? If darkness, blindness, or falling down became a moment of Saul's change to Paul, then there is also a possibility for this pandemic to change from our compulsiveness to consciousness.

### **Embracing conscious life**

Perhaps some few questions to begin with; is this pandemic bringing us to the point where we examine our way of life, our relationships, our attitudes to life itself... what value do we place on life, and what could

be the invitation in this dark moment? Perhaps, “I do not understand my own behaviour; I do not act as I mean to, but I do things that I hate” (Rom 7: 15). Are we not in many cases led by our instinct rather than our intelligence? There are many times we live in darkness; we get used to it, and we see it as normal. Now, I suggest we increase a certain level of our intensity, increasing the voltage of our lights that we may dispel the darkness, and this I call conscious life. Locke explains this process as “That with which the consciousness of this present thinking thing can join itself, makes the same person, and is oneself with it, and with nothing else; and so, attributes to itself and owns all the actions of that thing, as its own, as far as that consciousness reaches, and no farther; as everyone who reflects will perceive”.<sup>5</sup> This is a quality of understanding life beyond the physical, understanding the significance of being human. In other words, consciousness is a level of being open to life so that we may understand everything as one energy from the same Source.

For me, birth is a marriage with the Mother earth including all that she has and death is another marriage with the Creator. It is simply a shift of life from one dimension to another, and this should help us to treat everything consciously. The leaf begins with a very small icon of itself, a quality of its humility as it embraces new life on earth. It is not small in itself, but it is a quality of openness to growth. When we see ourselves as small and nothing in this Universe, we create a quality of accepting growth within and a quality of treating every creature with dignity. Further, as the leaf grows, it occupies a large space. This I think is not just occupying a larger space than before, but it is a quality of involvement, a quality of being alive, and a quality of spreading who I am, a quality of raising a certain level of vibration. Its shade increases meaning there is also something that we can give to all those around us! Is our quality of life increasing to provide shade to other people? A thing to reflect! Further, the leaf changes its colours (e.g., from greenish to yellowish, or brownish), why? Perhaps, it is because of its generosity towards one another, or perhaps it is because of the surrounding conditions. Who knows? Only the leaf knows better! But above all, however, the leaf remains a leaf in all circumstances. What could be the meaning of this dark moment that we face in today’s life? Surely, if this virus fails

to make us wise, it might wound us for the rest of our life. Dr Akong Tulku Rinpoche tells us that “The remedy is to act as individuals to halt the harm and begin healing and balancing. The first step in this direction is to start taming the mind through some beneficial training such as meditation”.<sup>6</sup> The choice is ours!

Finally, the leaf dies! A good number of people are easily forgotten when they die and few of them keep on vibrating even when they are no more. Why? It is because of the quality of the life we live. Incredibly, many people are afraid of death and this is the reason why we have very few vibrant people on this earth. What they miss is that death should be encountered even before encountering natural death. I am now speaking of the death of our pride, the death of our selfishness, the death of our ego, the death of our jealousy, etc. In simple words, the death of a leaf might symbolize the death that we should encounter before natural death. And I wouldn't call it death because many people are still alive even when we buried their bodies. We know them! Death of a leaf is a manifestation of its quality, a quality to provide fertile soil for other plants, a quality to enrich the soil, a quality to dissolve into another dimension of life. So, the main idea is not thinking much about death in its strict sense but death to ourselves so that we can resurrect as Paul, and encounter Jesus Christ, our Saviour from Nazareth.

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<sup>1</sup> Macalino, Eric. *Fantasy World: Love and Madness*. (Amazon: Lulu. com, n.d.) 60.

<sup>2</sup> Igo, Robert. *Making Sense of Suffering*. (World Council of Churches-EHAIA, n.d.), 1.

<sup>3</sup> Rayshahri, M Muhammadi. *The Scale of Wisdom: A Compendium of Shi'a Hadith*. (London: ICAS Press, 2009), 40.

<sup>4</sup> Rinpoche, Akong Tulku. *Restoring the Balance; sharing Tibetan wisdom*. (Cape Town: Orchard Publishing, 2005), 20.

<sup>5</sup> Locke, John. *An Essay: Human Understanding*. (London: William & Tegg Co, 1689), 227.

<sup>6</sup> Rinpoche, Akong Tulku. *Restoring the Balance; sharing Tibetan wisdom*. (Cape Town: Orchard Publishing, 2005), 97.