

## **Fear of the Unknown - “We are Wearing More than Just a Mask”**

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In the midst of the novel coronavirus 2019 (COVID-19) pandemic we are all faced with the most challenging crisis since Second World War. We are facing a global health crisis, one that is killing people and spreading human suffering. This is more than just a health crisis, it is a Human crisis [4]. Human beings have passed the test of time and have become the most dominant species on Earth. As Humans we have been showing great adaptation skills to the environments around us for years. Over the years, we have adapted to healthy and unhealthy lifestyles. Our planet earth has survived numerous pandemics in the past, and survivors of these infectious disease outbreaks have driven the process of natural selection by giving their genetic resistance to offsprings [1-3]. We are here facing the most frightening, disturbing and fearful time, the one question we cannot help to ask is will the human race go extinct?

Fear is inevitable but it's doesn't have to paralyze us [5]. We are not taught how to recognize and deal with fear in schools. We are not prepared for what life has in store for us but we have everything in us to overcome and come out stronger than we were before. As the Virus mutates, the human species needs to change also. COVID-19 is here to remind us that maybe we were too comfortable with how things were, and as burdened as we are we need to rise above the curve. Together as the human race we can defeat fear and meet it face to face, because once we understand fear it will be better than letting it control us.

Out of the many African countries, South Africa has shown great control, great adaptation skills as seen by the strategies that the country had in place in controlling COVID-19 [12]. However, it's goes without saying that Fear is in the faces of many, as we are dealing with one of the emergent global challenge of managing infectious diseases and in dealing with COVID-19. Fear is seen in the eyes of the justice and protection services, in the health care sectors both private and public sectors alike, fear creeps into those living the urban luxury lifestyle and to a farmer in the deep rural areas. It is fear of not knowing what to do - and Technology is not saving us.

We are wearing more than just a mask, as there is a lot of uncertainties and we cannot hide or run away. We have no room for pretense, the one thing that will keep us all healthy and alive is to go back to basics. It will take more than just a mask to save us, as we need to carefully rethink the direction we were moving [13]. The lockdown period has made us to realize the important of family, friends and loved ones, and it has reemphasized the importance of taking a deeper look into our infrastructure and lifestyle living, our overcrowded cities defeat the purpose of social distancing, you yearn for a huge garden in the farms instead of a small balcony in an expensive complex. It made us to look at nature in a different perspective when everything came into a stand still worldwide. COVID-19 is not seen through the naked eye, yet has shaken us in all directions and at the same time is asking us to be brave.

Putting on a brave face behind that mask doesn't not mean we are not grieving or anxious. We are still human behind the masks, we have emotions, feelings and our behavior will be highly affected by such emotions of fear. Fear is a human emotion that is triggered by a perceived threat [6], it is a natural survival mechanism which signals our bodies to respond to danger with a fight or flight response. It is an essential part of keeping us safe. It is the survival of the fittest and those will sooner accept the new living conditions and adjust to the new environment will make it out of this wave alive and stronger.

We need to eliminate chronic fear as it has serious consequences to our health. In order to fight and survive COVID-19 you need a healthy immune system and chronic fear weakens the immune system. You need a healthy nervous system and chronic fear can impair formation of long-term memories and cause damage to certain parts of the brain such as the hippocampus [6]. With COVID-19 you need your memory intact and to serve you right, you have more things to do and to remember to do them correctly to stop the spread of the virus.

Fear can also interrupt processes in our brains that allows us to regulate emotions and to read non-verbal body language. With this process affected it will lead us to react unethically and inappropriately, which is one thing we cannot afford at this time.

We owe it to ourselves to wear more than just a mask, we need to wear courage, be zealous and unapologetic for our mission to live and survive this pandemic. We need to show the generations behind us that we conquered fear, we learnt from our mistakes and we are making changes to save our planet [9]. It will take more than just a mask on our faces, it is calling for us to swim against the current and lay out new foundations because we are all in this together. If there is ever a time for us not to suppress our emotions and seek out for help, governments to invest more on emotional well-being of the people, that time is now [7,8].

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