

## **Virus as teacher**

Seeing meaning and purpose in the current crisis

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The global Coronavirus (COVID-19) scare brings out the worst and the best in us. It is a reality check. Notice how widely and quickly it spreads, practically the whole world. It shows how closely connected and mobile we are today. This applies to Buddhists, too. We are very well connected with the world, and with all kinds of people, bad and good.

Hence, the Buddhism we follow is also likely to be infected by them. We simply must keep our Buddhism virus-free and healthy. The safest and healthiest Buddhism is, of course, the Dhamma of the historical Buddha which teaches us to stay away from CROWDS, to thrive with those we care about, or even alone.

Then, there are those who, upon hearing talk or news of the Virus, panic. They have **money** and probably nothing else: no wisdom. They have never cared to learn how to keep the mind healthy, not to listen to rumours. They think money can buy anything, even Buddhism. So they stock **toilet paper**.

Many of us are still unclear why they fight over toilet paper. In Singapore we queue up for hours, even days, for Hello Kitty dolls, and other silly collectibles because we have a lot of money and a big flat with on one except us in it. So collectibles are helpful in filling up the void. But toilet paper is beyond me. Maybe they have a lot of toilets in their condo.

Apparently, the Coronavirus takes a toll of the weak and those with low immunity, that is, the aged and unhealthy. Some High-breed (is it spelt Hybrid?) Locals who are closet Social Darwinians smile behind their anti-virus masks that we are happily rid of society's burden. We fail to think of where we are ourselves heading for—becoming obsolete with age.

Our units may not be as small as those in HK, but our minds are about just as broad streetwise. (Please get out of my kitchen (or mind): it's only for one!)

As a result of the Virus spread, most social events and (thankfully) all Buddhist talks have been cancelled. Strangely, in Singapore, the virus seems to plague the Christians in Biblical proportions. This reminds me of the times when Cambodia was ethnic-cleansed by Pol Pot and Communism, and the tsunami washed away hundreds of thousands of people in south Thailand and Sri Lanka. Some virus-minded Christians thumped their sweaty fists disrespectfully on their Holy Book and pontificated: God is punishing the Buddhists! We will never say God is punishing anyone with the plague.

We don't even believe God invented it, much less would end it. We often read FB posts that proclaim: The virus will be gone in the name of ... (choose your Son of God, Holy Name or Mantra). My response is basically this. The Virus will be overcome by the diligence and sacrifice of doctors, scientists, nurses, health workers, volunteers and many others. They are the ones to thank!

Most corporations and companies are wise enough to tell their employees to work from home. Clearly, it's time to introduce the 3-day work-week here, and start taxing the monastics and priests (male and female), especially those who own or run their own outfit. We will have enough cash for the benefit of the less privileged.

The health authorities warn us against socializing and hugging (Sinhala monks in the US, take note!) (the Buddha has been telling us this since 2500 years ago). We now have more time to spend in some open sunlit space with a lot of big trees.

The virus (as teacher) is reminding us that life is precious (limited in shelf-life). A life-time here is merely a morning in the lowest of the sense-world heavens (the gods of the 33). Notice how quickly time passes, and every time we wake up, it's Monday!

The Coronavirus takes a toll on all of us. But one Virus will always remain with us, even after the COVID-19 has left (in a few months' time). That is religion, especially the mutated and cultured forms of Buddhism. The symptoms include strange repetitive and ritualistic behavior, mental delusion and fears, talking to imaginary beings to get rid of our problems and those causing us problems, pious bribery (donating pittance and supplicating for millions), praying for world peace and saving all beings when we cannot even help ourself!

Most of these Viruses come from overseas (but neither Wuhan nor Singapore). Once we are infected, we will believe anything told to us, and we will see what we are told to see (including past lives and atoms within us). Clearly, the Virus problem is draining our economy. A serious symptom is that victims no more see the value of hard-earned wealth but wildly remit it for future-life savings in a particular Sales Rep they silently admire. Sadly, these are futures that pay no dividends.

The Buddha teaches us the 4 noble truths. The 1<sup>st</sup> truth is that of suffering. Suffering is our First True Teacher. It has come in the form of the Coronavirus. We can get infected or we can learn a great deal from it for our greater health.

It's time to start reading the **suttas** before they are read to us as we lie supine or prone in some narrow uncomfortable spot. The Virus is saying: Treasure your life, do not run after Toilet-Paper, but for real paper with wise learning on it.

The Virus is giving me much more time than usual for working on the suttas, sharing teachings with you on social media, and writing this reflection. This is a time for doing things which are really meaningful and purposeful for us in a wholesome manner.

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