

## **ASSI ESSAY CONTEST 2020**

### **Tapping Opportunities in the Face of Adversity**

Author: Dr Rishi M Kanna

#### **The Incision**

As I start to pen this article, globally, there have been 41 million confirmed cases of COVID-19, including 1.1 million deaths, and the crescendo of the graph seems unabated. In a short span of 7 months, the world economy, livelihood, and human survival have been direly threatened by this pestilence. Due to lockdown and business restrictions, the global GDP has been forecast to contract by 5% by this year-end which will be five times worse than the last Great economic recession of 2009.

While dispensations across the world are finding ways to tackle the pandemic, we, the medical fraternity are facing a unique conundrum. We are at the forefront of fighting the disease but the healthcare industry is also facing a crisis in terms of our safety, economic sustainability, challenges in healthcare education and ensuring safe health care delivery. With a curative treatment at no avail and vaccine-at-no sight, we are facing a grim situation. As we cool our heels wondering about the gloomy future, I think this is the time where one needs to reflect on Sir WH Davies' polemic wisdom,

“What is this life if, full of care,

We have no time to stand and stare.”

#### **The Life before Corona**

It wouldn't be an exaggeration to say that before the onslaught of the COVID pandemic, we have been running around in pursuit of the elusive fame, name and perpetual happiness; The time spent in front of laptops staring at esoteric graphs, statistical charts and patients' clinical images; the mindless time spent on travels and meetings, and seeing a barrage of patients in the clinics; the long gruelling days spent on extensive surgeries – all these had literally taken away our interests in other activities of life, our childhood interests, hidden passions and the time we spent

with our family. We clapped at great talks on work-life balance and chewed over the TED talks about achieving happiness and contentment in life, only to return to our mundane business the next day. But dear Corona has put a brake on this, and has shown a mirror in front of us to reflect on our past. Have we been living the life the correct way?

### **Abundance of Time**

*“I have the choice to be angry at God for what I don't have,  
or be thankful for what I do have”.*

These are the sagely words of Nicholas Vujicic, a man born without both upper and lower limbs. An existence like a statue bust did not make him cower with depression and incapacitation. But rather, he pulled himself up to become one of the greatest motivational speakers of our times. At this moment of despair, we have one of the greatest resources in abundance, which has eluded us so far. **Time.** Never ever would we get so much time. Whatever that we have lost in terms of monetary resources during this pandemic, we can compensate with the abundant time in our hand. It is quite evident that tapping opportunities in the face of this adversity is all about managing our profuse time now.

If you had been a hardcore academic and scurrying for time before, this is the best time to compile your data and publish your research. If you had been feeling compunctionous about the extra pounds of fat around your tummy and the posterior, this is the time to jog around or bike your way to slimming. Have you been a proficient musician or a skilled artist as a child and unable to pursue it in your adulthood? Realise that you have just been welcomed into a wonderland of excessive time to take up your passion.

*You'll find contentment when your talents and passion are completely engaged in full force.*

As a surgeon too, you can polish your surgical skills now. There is no rush to complete the surgical list. Perform the surgical steps with the elegance of a musician and pass on a trick or two to your junior colleague.

For those high achievers who have been blinkered by their hectic schedules previously, there are other tall targets that one can aim at. How about writing a book – one that would stand the test of times? It could be your thoughts on Indian cuisine or Street cricket - there are umpteen ideas to

grab from. Or you can wield your photography skills and imagination, to shoot an educative or entertaining video! You can fancy your chances of becoming marathon runner, a six-pack specialist, a Zumba maestro or a power lifter to flaunt your ripping muscles.

Do not worry if you don't fall into one of the above boxes. This is the time to venture into the unchartered waters of learning a new language, a dear computer skill, keeping abreast of current affairs, learning our unknown history and geography, or solving crosswords and sudoku. Everything is available online at the click of a button.

If you are not keen at any of those 'materialistic' stuff, you just need 21 days to set-up a good habit or shed off a bad habit. This would be the ideal time as you are not under any work pressure, and time has become your new genie at your disposal. Get up early and be part of the elite 5AM club; Start a journal of everyday activities; Become a super blogger or a dapper vlogger; Improve your book reading skills; Try your hand at grooming a plant – watch it grow every day; Adopt a street dog and feed it daily – get immersed in its unbridled love; How about kicking off a bad habit, my sagacious friend? Just ask yourself – anger, laziness, vices, *gadgety*, gaming, reticence? I am sure that you will be amazed at yourself by becoming a better person at the end of this pandemic.

## **Lost Family Time**

*"Having somewhere to go is home. Having someone to love is family.*

*And having both is a blessing."*

The COVID has been a blessing in disguise. So far, we have been part of a fiercely competitive world of work force where we clamoured to be 'seen', 'noticed' and 'succeed' in our profession. We never had the time to peacefully enjoy a morning coffee with our spouse, crack a math problem with our son, listen to our daughter's soulful renditions or share a moment of laugh at the family dinner. We performed everything in a hurried and tired manner as if these glorious moments were another set of jobs to be completed in our checklist. COVID has kept us together for six months – everyone is at home, bumping into each other more frequently than ever.

It's time to catch up those lost moments! Pull out the family albums; cook and clean together; gossip with your wife; massage your mom's arthritic knees; discuss politics with your dad; tap

your phone and call people randomly from your contact list. When the lockdown was announced, I was perturbed at the fate of the impoverished and downtrodden. However, as the days passed, they have faced the odds with a smile while the cribbers and whiners have been the multi-millionaires and industry behemoths. That shows how much we have shifted our focus from the basic priorities of human life.

This testing time can be channeled into a time of opportunity to make ourselves a better person socially, academically and professionally. I used this time to complete my dream work of writing a fiction novel. I also tried my hand in cycling, table tennis, cartoons, painting, brooming and the list goes on. With time abound and soaring passion, the sky is the limit, isn't it? But a word of caution is pertinent here. In this endeavour, let us be careful to not convert this phase of our life into another rat-race of comparison and false glory. It is imprudent to compare your peers' success stories with yours. Let your friend become a marathoner but you can strive to publish research articles. Let your compatriot be part of multiple webinars while you can focus on strengthening your family ties.

### **The Closure**

We are facing multiple challenges now – restrictions in social movement, dwindling clinical practice, and safety of our dear ones. We are witnessing patients, friends, family members and our demi gods falling prey to this diabolical virus. But can we allow a minuscule organism (125nm) dictate terms to kowtow at its feet? Isn't it the time we raise from the manacles stronger than ever? If everything that happens around us is fine, then life is unchallenging. Is there a pleasure at success when things are hunky-dory? Of course not. So, we should make use of these adverse times to bring out the best in us. These are the “filtering times” for the entire world, where the bold and intrepid would come out happier and stronger than the meek and the pessimistic.

*“Adversity is a great teacher. Let us make peace with it and make use of it.”*