

THE EFFECTS OF LOCKDOWN ON HUMANS, ANIMALS AND THE ENVIRONMENT.

Coronavirus. I think all of us have heard this word more than any other in the last few weeks. COVID-19, a global pandemic, which has affected more than 2.4 million people all over the world. The first case of COVID-19 was reported in Wuhan, China on 31st December 2019. As the world was celebrating New Year's Eve, rejoicing the start of 2020, setting goals and resolutions, being hopeful for the year to come and grateful for the year that went, no one would have thought that in about three months hospitals would be flooding, doctors and health care professionals would be putting their lives at risk everyday, the economy would suffer and we would all be sitting in our homes, not because we wanted to, but because we had to. To fight this pandemic, The Honorable Prime Minister of India announced a 21 day nation wide lockdown on 24th March, which was later extended till 3rd May. India is putting up quite a fight and becoming an example for the whole world, from developing testing kits that give results in an hour to 1.3 billion people staying at home to stop the spread of this disease. As our country is on a lockdown, I would like to discuss the effects that this "home quarantine" has had on us, animals, plants and the

planet.

Humans are social animals. We have put labels on ourselves- introverts and extroverts. Be it introverts, who would prefer staying indoors or extroverts, who would love to go out, staying at home 24x7 is undeniably hard, both mentally and physically draining. But what we need to realise is that being in isolation has never been easier. We have social media, phones, laptops, netflix and YouTube. You could watch a movie, listen to music, play games, read, write, learn, meditate, without even leaving your house. Some people have been taking this time and utilising it effectively. Cooking, exercising, learning a new language, picking up a new hobby, drawing, painting, singing, dancing, there are so many things you could do! Some people realised that they had a talent that they didn't know about. For many people, both online and in real life, this lockdown has given them the time to focus on mental and physical health, as well as to 'unlock' the infinite potential we all have.

However, there are two sides to a coin. As I mentioned earlier, humans are social animals. We need communication, connection and contact. We are in constant need of being with people we love. A lot of people are lucky enough to be with their families during this tough time, but many are still far away. What about

the health care professionals who treat patients everyday and have to stay away from their own families to reduce the risk of infection? What about those, who don't even have a home? Staying locked in our house and not going outside makes us prone to developing stress, anxiety, depression, loneliness, trauma and even aggressiveness. A research showed that in China, after the quarantine ended, divorce rates were three times more than usual - many of them due to physical and verbal arguments. The number of calls to the National Domestic Violence Helpline in Ukraine shot up by 26%, in the first two weeks of quarantine. Closing of many businesses and offices has also caused companies to lay off a lot of low ranked employees, causing stress and panic in working class people. Not being able to meet your friends and family, and the constant fear of the disease, the fear of uncertainty has had adverse effects on people.

Isolation affects the three pillars of mental health: autonomy, competency and connectedness. No wonder complete isolation is one of the cruelest punishment for prisoners, as it has the worst psychological impact.

But what is surprising and even humbling is that the Earth, its environment, the wildlife, the flora and fauna are flourishing more than ever. Delhi, India's most polluted city, where particulate matter is found even in the placenta of

pregnant women, showed a visible difference in air quality. The air quality index in Delhi was about 200 on a good day (anything over 25 is considered unsafe by the WHO), and now it is regularly below 20. The Lesser Himalayas, the snow clad Dhauladhar range could be seen from the city of Jalandhar. This is all due to the reduced movement of vehicles causing pollution and the shutting down of highly polluting factories and industries. The quality of water in river Yamuna has also drastically improved because of the same reason. Not only in India, but this lockdown and reduced human activities have proven to be an elixir for the environment all around the world. Air quality is improving worldwide, carbon monoxide pollution is decreasing and so is the road and air traffic. The beautiful water canals of Venice are clearer than ever, and Dolphins are closer to the shore of Italy. There have also been fewer incidents of roadkilled animals.

However, stray animals are starving because of lack of food. Recently, deer were spotted roaming the streets of Japan because they were forced to search for their own food due to the lack of tourists that usually fed them. Still, wildlife is currently the safest it has ever been, free from human intervention. Looks like the Earth is recovering.

The lockdown has made us realise the importance of freedom, contact, communication and connection. The everyday aspects of our lives, as simple as going outside to buy vegetables or simply meeting our friends, have been taken away from us, if only for the time being. Even though we may feel upset, we should be grateful that we've had and will have again, the very freedom we underappreciated and took for granted . We should take this time to reflect upon ourselves, whether or not we as a species have the right to take away those freedoms from others. The freedom of seeing your friends, being with your family, the freedom of going wherever you want, of not being restricted. The freedom of being autonomous. After thinking about all this, think about the mother cow birthing her calf only to see it being dragged away by a human and put into an isolation pen. She cannot lick it, feed it or nurse it. The milk meant for her offspring is being taken by us, as she hears the cries of her baby from a distance. Think about the mother sows, trapped inside the tiny farrowing crates. Metal cages so small that they cant even turn around. Desperately biting the iron bars in an attempt to be free, of all the animals held captive in a zoo or forced to perform in circuses, what about these animals and their freedom? What about their desire for life? How would you feel, if you knew that the moment you

were born, your fate was already sealed? How long you're going to live and how you will die, and there's nothing you can do about it. In this time of crisis, as we humans show how interconnected we are, we realise our need of freedom, connection, family and autonomy in our lives. Then what right do we have to take all this away from others? Their suffering will continue as long as we allow it.

The fact that the Earth is recovering and flourishing, the plants and trees are still growing, the flowers still blooming, the rain still falling, nature still as beautiful, the skies bluer than ever, the water clearer than crystal and the sun still shining bright, is a proof that it is not the planet that needs us, rather we are the ones that need it. Maybe the Coronavirus is Earth's vaccine and maybe we are the virus. The Earth takes back what is hers. This is a reminder from her to all of us that if we don't get our act together, something much worse might happen.

Therefore, it is important for us to respect our planet and the life on it because we are merely guests. We are a species, and instead of asserting dominance we must learn to coexist. We all realise that this is a scary time. But we all can help our country and the world in defeating this disease if we stay strong together. We all should practice social distancing and home quarantine while keeping ourselves busy with something productive or something

we're passionate about. Now is really a great time to find what you're good at. Do something good everyday, encourage people to stay safe and strong, physically and mentally.

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