

COVID-19 AND THE INTERNAL PERSECUTORY OBJECT

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It is bad enough to fear all the intangible and inchoate aspects of the awful boogey man, the very real virus, COVID 19. It is even more overwhelming, potentially mentally engulfing and even paralyzing, to fear all the persecutory voices within our internal worlds through the projected lens of the Corona Beast. However, if we can see what we project onto the unseen ghost and its potential pandemic threat, maybe we can better deal with our mental health, during this time of continual terror and death. Something very real can be the focus of whatever we project onto it, enlarging the threat beyond its very real proportions. If you have a terrifying abusive judge and accusatory assaultive parent inside of you, you may very well be projecting this Hamlet's ghost and persecutory scourge onto the often unseen virus enemy. How can it help you to know what you are projecting?

When we are flooded with statistics about hospitalizations and death rates from the Corona virus, our instinctive reactions is to cringe, and to pull away from the news and the media voices conveying facts. We may turn the channel to another station, or shut up the flood of escalating statistics by turning the radio or T.V. source. However, what does go on in our unconscious minds when we divert our conscious minds to another focus? We may suddenly become obsessed by some pragmatic concern or by rituals of sanitizing ourselves and our objects. We may not realize – as we become absorbed and obsessed with repetitive cleaning rituals or with sorting out new masks and latex gloves – that at another level we are fending off deep primitive fears, fears that may have lay latent areas of our minds for a long time. When we are obsessed with how much toilet paper we can get at once, or with buying enough food at grocery stores, we may not realize that we are warding off ancient terrors that haunt the more primitive areas of our brain, terrors which always threaten to leap out at us with life and death consequences, even though we are doing well to steer clear of the actual COVID-19 contamination threats. What haunts us may be more than the external reality of the pandemic, despite how ominous and global the actual external threat is. What haunts us may be some

mixture of the actual threat, as we unconsciously envision it, and a projected psychological threat from our internal world. When we can sort out what is truly more inside, differentiated from what is more outside, we have a chance to temper the avalanche of impending disaster fantasies that come from the inside of us, and to modify the external threat, so as to see the outside reality more clearly: for example, we can see the threat of running out of toilet paper in a very different perspective. When the fear of outside threats is not enflamed by the dark nightmares that we already carry in our unconscious minds, our sense of helplessness and our obsessions around our sense of helplessness may be greatly modified.

Beyond a persecutory, punitive, and accusatory being inside our mind that can be projected onto the threat of the outside virus, we have the most primitive terrors – what Winnicott called the “unthinkable anxieties” and Christopher Bollas called the “unthought known.” These are terrors too inchoate and amorphous to be differentiated through language, those terrors that come from the most fundamental abandonment and annihilation anxiety threats, from before words emerge in our conceptual cognitive minds. We just have reactivity then, when these threats come “unthought” or un-conceptualized, and the internal pandemic of the mind engulfs us from within.

Primal infant trauma plays a significant role here, but even prenatal traumas can threaten to wrap their suffocating auras around us. For example, in my own prenatal history lies the very real, but very internal trauma, of having been 10 months in the womb before I was induced by the doctors of modern medicine to be allowed my birthing process. It was only within my own psychoanalysis that I came to encounter the devastating fact that I could have been entrapped, drowned, and suffocated in my mother’s womb, if my birth was not finally “induced” – at ten months prenatal age. Imagine the virus of the mind that could haunt the unconscious from such a threat of asphyxiation, when one’s whole being is just on the verge of its realization through birth in the outside world! So inevitably, I had dreams of engulfment by parts of myself, represented by clothes, being flooded with water in a combined toilet/washing machine. Here, I can be cleansed and annihilated at once. I would lose myself in an overflowing womb again, as my unconscious psyche creates the narration of my nightmare dream! My very sense of *Being* and *Self* is threatened with extinction, just as it once was very really threatened in external reality. But now that external reality re-plays itself in the dark waters of my unconscious mind, I

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face the ten month of prenatal threat, which lives on in the present now, within my internal world psyche.

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