

## The Loneliness, Loss and Reflections Set off by COVID-19

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*"Nothing was as it seemed. I was not as I seemed...I was confronted by the possibility that perhaps the truest thing about me was a coiled identity, my unreal self, a might-have-been self that never really was but wasn't unreal for not being and might still be real, though I feared it never would"*

--Aciman, 2021, p. 111

The Covid-19 pandemic has brought experiences of loneliness, loss and isolation. The emotional, psychological and physical aspects from the pandemic have been destabilizing personally and collectively. The example of a woman in Jungian analytical psychotherapy is a combination of several who were replaying the early childhood loneliness and loss, memories exhumed from their repressions and denials and now being made conscious by COVID-19. The concept of precarity was introduced by the American philosopher Judith Butler [1] and here parallel those of lack and absence from French psychoanalyst, Andre Green. Dreams and her life situation viewed from the basis of Jungian analytical psychology highlight the search for meaning and personality expansion aroused by the emotional and physical losses and fears from COVID-19.

The emotional dilemmas from COVID-19 are reminiscent of the cycles through history and also have archetypal roots. Indelible traces, traumatic blanks and distortions appear in the personal and collective unconscious. They repeat trans generationally in similar yet different forms continually unraveling as opportunities for knowledge. These unconscious experiences remain so until they gain individual and collective awareness. These ideas, memories, feelings, and images are stored in the psyche and body.

Precarity references our current economic and political lacks in all spheres of life including the social, physical and psychological. It applies to those negated, vulnerable, displaced and insecure. Precarity mirrors the psychological destabilizing manifested by disenfranchisement and loss.

Without predictability or security, the COVID-19 pandemic shifted the economic, psychological and physical health of individuals worldwide. Precarity also references an existential state encompassing the stark realization of mortality and aloneness.

Loneliness is felt as excruciating, maybe one of the most painful emotions a person can experience. It is an intense absence or solitude, separated from others within oneself and outwardly in the world. It can be experienced as grief; an intensified loneliness occurring when in the presence of others. It can also be understood by its duration e.g., temporary or chronic or a feature of the human condition. It pushes the margins; something awful has happened and fallen into nothing, dissolved, decayed to its primeval self. This woman feels her world now destroyed and the familiar is no more. Julia Kristeva, French psychoanalyst described the feeling of falling into caused either by drive-related nonintegration impeding the cohesion of the self, or by disintegration accompanied by anxieties. Disintegration of the self is a thanatic reaction to a threat that is itself thanatic [2].

In a basic sense, without enough attachment and inclusion the sense of personal and collective sense of belonging becomes disturbed. Becoming who we are involves an affective connection with others. Individuality is not defined by isolation and loneliness but rather with the experiences from sharing an inner life and connecting. The desire for person and place facilitates overcoming self-alienation and is an achievement of consonance with one's wholeness [3]. Dreams refer to this with their recall of those objects, rituals and customs from the life we were attached to personally and culturally.

### The Example

Exploring what inspires growth, healing and transformation is the journey of analytical and depth psychological exploration. The pandemic and the threat of death and lack of protection

or safety changed what we rely on now and is evidenced in this composite example. As the pandemic progressed she was experiencing precarity in her psyche, social world and in her body. It reminded her of the isolated childhood, anxious and afraid, left alone a lot. Now, stopped her in her tracks by the pandemic, the terror forced her to explore her interior world and this in turn activated what in Jungian psychology is called the regulatory nature of the psyche.

However, she found the former resources relied upon to forget and deny worked no longer. In a similar perilous state, she could not avoid the former emptiness and loss now returning with an impact on her psyche. She exemplifies the former defenses failing in the anxiety and arousing the earlier interpersonal needs formerly unmet. Feeling very uneasy and insecure, she could not protect herself from the helplessness and perilous state of feeling disintegrated, disorientated and with shaky identity. The unconscious layers of precarity appeared in her difficulty in/of finding verbal expression.

There is occurring a more radical trajectory, not just inward and self-obsessed or a disconnected self but shifting to consciousness and bringing into dialectical tension inner states with social realities. The style of our era is characterized by mechanization with its droning monotony, dismemberment of the psyche and social body and views of women. All challenge our current modern cultural scripts shaping our compliant and ordered selves. This time of deconstruction involves psychological risk as it tears holes in the intersubjective network keeping the social order intact and static rather than vibrant.

When as a child she suffered the absence of parental attachment and correct attention emotional discomfort. This led to internal disconnection without contact to the whole personality. In childhood her fears and emotional isolation made her seem different from others who looked secure. The split in the self, occurring early in childhood, left no inner harmony nor was there life within an understanding of self and other because she did not know it [4]. Intimacy and trust remained undeveloped. The loneliness intensely worsened with others. At the core of her situation was her tasks for linking the personality aspects of known to unknown and conscious to unconscious.

A basic principle of Jungian psychology and of life in general is that each situation contains the problem as well as ways to interpret and understand it. Within the psyche is the principle of synthesis bringing order, balance, and cohesion, reestablishing security in different ways and over time. This is part of the search for psychological understanding of the disruptive inner and outer emotions. The emotional core of the therapist has to be available enough as a container to integrate the paradoxes. Self-discovery and repair emerges with the symbols appearing in life events and dreams guiding the relationship between oneself and others.

The former past cultural and personal traumas provide lingering memories and these become repressed into the psyche and body, often emerging much later. The personality follows the human desire to bring the ego into alignment with the unconscious. The search is for inclusion not exclusion, acceptance not rejection and love not hate. Amidst our world diversity, changing populations and beliefs, Jung commented, "No man lives within his own psychic sphere like a snail in its shell, separated from everybody else, but is connected with his unconscious humanity" [5]. Meanwhile COVID-19 has brought the personal and societal dissolution and is both separation from and emergence into the unknown and unfamiliar.

COVID-19 had shaken her former well ordered and planned existence. She found it almost impossible to speak about the destruction to her former ways of living and her personality verged on collapse. The experience of sorrow became all encompassing and defined her life. She could not rely on the former defenses, the denials, or the rationale as there was no means of escape. The inner dilemmas heightened with the worsening of COVID-19, creating upset. In Jungian psychology the libido or energy collects but does not just stand still. It creates a pressure leading to what Jung called the tension of the opposites. It occurs when the union between consciousness and unconscious and the opposing forces seemingly at odds require being held in concert to enable other attitudes to emerge.

### Liminality

*One does not become enlightened by imagining figures of light, but by making the darkness conscious. The latter procedure, however, is disagreeable and therefore not popular"*

*--Carl Jung, Alchemical Studies, par. 335*

The word liminality derives from the Latin limen and means threshold. It encompasses rebirth, birth and death as psychological transitions. These are the life transitions bringing up the? mourning the former ways and feeling alone, unsure where we belong or who we are. They are periods of being in between, as we are not who we were, nor who we emerge into. This can be likened to the snake, an ancient symbol of transformation. The shedding of its skin is necessary for growth, yet in the molting process the snake is most vulnerable and most open to harm.

Liminal spaces and times, like during COVID-19, are immersed in fears and the unknown is all that is known. They represent times of feeling naked and stripped, as the former personas are not working. Liminality is also likened to the medieval alchemical stage of the nigredo. This references a stage when life is darkened and confusing, overwhelmed by the sickness of spirit. Previous conscious values and self-image are outmoded and guide no longer. This represents a crossroads when we confront the shadow or the unseen, ignored, undeveloped,

and the potential. During liminal periods we do not know how to act or where to turn as the way is uncharted and our former identity is broken down.

This time is marked by intense nostalgia, as we desire the past ways of being. Nostalgia is a separation and is accompanied by mourning and loss. The word nostalgia derives from the Greek 'nostos' meaning the return home and 'algos' referring to pain. Nostalgia is a grief reaction to what is permanently lost. Felt physiologically it also encompasses identity and the need for continuity from the former self-concept, even though this is not possible.

With nostalgia, remembrance is often associated with security while at the crux is the recognition of its current absence. What was once possessed exists no more. The psychological and symbolic longing is for one's origins and times of warmth and security. Without attachment to oneself from within or to those one knew, there is insufficient containment and one feels even more vulnerability to what were unconscious and suppressed uncertainties or solidity of personality. French psychoanalyst Julia Kristeva described, "an abyss of sorrow, a noncommunicable grief that at times...lays claims upon us to the extent of having us lose all interest in words, action and even life itself...Within depression, if my existence is on the verge of collapsing, its lack of meaning is not tragic—it appears obvious to me, glaring and inescapable" [6].

The personality naturally seeks balance and will do a lot to avoid any pain or unease. During stress, material formerly put into the shadows exerts pressure to become consciously integrated and to expand the personality health and well-being. Jung said, "There is no change from darkness to light or from inertia to movement without emotion" [7]. We can align emotion with the symbol of alchemical fire as it brings change from the heat burning away all superfluities. And emotion is centering and a source for heightening awareness.

Jungian psychological treatment and thought addresses what is called the shadow or the previously denied. These are often associated with loss, anger, shame, and the sorrows of yearning. French psychoanalyst Andre Green perceived the fundamentals of analysis are needed to complete the mourning process. He [8] commented the background of loss and absence shape life experiences and influences our coping or not with the vicissitudes, absences, despairs and alterations throughout life. This woman expressed: "I only hear silence and wonder who I am. Where am I? I feel only stressed and panicked."

She says she has lost the bearings to herself and the interior places are absorbed with absence of thought or mind. The internal psychological divide can create unease and physical problems. She describes being in pieces in mind and body, torn apart, resources exhausted, and she felt emptied. She felt controlled by what seemed like a part of her personality

but cut off from her real self. She developed a persona or mask to cover the extent of her desperation, losses and lack leaving her in a state of ineffectiveness, inertness and malaise. Quite painfully, the world shut down and she became more isolated, deprived of personal or social meaning or connectedness.

Professional writing had been a way of addressing the adult wounds and losses as she previously transformed her private events into public reflection. She published her experiences, trying to feel some repair or sense of what happened through the act of writing. But now this woman who had been lauded for her intellectual and passionate nature, thoroughly in love with verbiage and thought was without her former energy for the creative and the intellect. Green described, "the work of writing presupposes a wound and a loss, a work of mourning, of which the text is the transformation" [8]. Exhausted and unable to care she experienced weight gain, malaise about movement and general lack of interest. As Jung said, "This struggle has something to do with creation, with the unending battle between affirmation and negation" [9].

The ability to develop or create, to find and express self-agency, and have love basically comes into existence and continues to need the rhythm of attunement and resonance. This takes psychic work and brings back the suffering from interpersonal relationships that were a disturbing source of pain. The complexity of trauma lives on in the psyche but as unassimilated and dissociated material. "For an individual to come to be, she needs freedom from certain internal and external tyrannies" [10].

Through a computer screen both therapist and client were facing the unknown, strange, foreign; those areas that can either limit or expand. She related an image, sitting alone at a religious retreat, on a rock, gazing at the stars and crying. Someone comes from behind to touch her arm and then asks to sit down where they remain in silence. In the following psychological treatment session, she recounted shame over expressing so much vulnerability. She desired this image of silence and the peace it conveyed to occur in reality. To her the image sadly illustrated the separation and lack of trust she has experienced and now felt again with COVID-19.

She was out of touch with what Green called, 'the reality of these interior places distinguished by their lack of structure or organization' [8]. The early truths now replicated in the current pandemic were frightening and unbearable. Green [8] interpreted this situation as "a person needing the container of the analyst for the content to be presented". To him [8] "both analyst and analysand witness how the distressing objects keep being resurrected and both face the emptiness returning as layer after layer of emotional neglect becomes unwrapped". Because the personality seeks balance and to be regulated, the therapeutic tasks gather the separated fragments into a/ the relationship with the rest of the personality.

## Dreams

In Jungian analytical therapy, "the self becomes conscious of itself in relation to another" [11]. The therapeutic relationship and treatment creates enough safety and connection for psychological expansion. The woman of this example said she had become absent to herself. Interest, curiosity, passion were gone. The subsequent grief, mourning and emptiness appeared in the return of the repressed facts and unaddressed emotions. During COVID-19 she dreamt, "I am lost. I find myself on a street with many openings. People on the street do not help. Where do I belong? I wander around increasingly disorganized. Where is the path? I am so upset and panicky. I remind myself that things will work out. It seems I have to go up and down some stairs. This seems familiar. Yes, now I remember I was here before. But this time I have to find the exit". The dream illustrates the hesitations and the quandary when confused about where to go and how to get there. The dream portrayed the lack of signposts and feeling of disorientation.

Dreams are both subjective and objective, illuminating aspects and memories of our inner and out worlds, people, situations, things, and events. The dream is a language of symbols and is more than the concrete and literal. "The mind has the capacity to bring something back again which has been related to an object, without the object being there [12]. Like in the dream the woman feels neither here nor there. Everything seems off. For her, this manifests as self-attacks with mindless eating and she suffers under the blankness of thought. She is assailed with fears when driving and unsure about a reason to live. She dreamt of a child dying whom she is trying to save and cannot. Was this referring to something new inside her? Or, is it her very life? She verbalized impoverishment of soul as the world has become poor and empty, like during childhood when she roamed the streets and no one seemed to care.

She reported a journal entry: 'This morning I once again glanced over what I had written a few years ago and it made me shiver. Something in this piece terrifies me. I feel it may open up some venues to the discovery of my own self-selves'. She no longer fit the self she had imagined herself to be. Now she is stuck at home, unable to do anything or go anywhere, lost from herself. She felt apprehensive, disliked and wondered if she was offensive or toxic to others. Her loneliness was incredibly painful yet also signaled the need for the discovery of her meaning. COVID-19 has brought forth this question about her life and its purpose. It replicated the early childhood despair and feeling of no one to help and no way out.

In Jungian analytical psychology the process of being oneself stretches beyond what we knew as we learn to get through the difficulties and stressors by grappling with the complexities and multiplicities. "Analytic work that encompasses relational as well as interpretive agents of change can bring about the

integration and increased connectivity between and within both hemispheres of the mind-brain that lead to a change in the nature of attachment which will then permit the self to emerge more fully through the process of individuation" [13]. Emotion and feeling its intensity moves us and requires an open attitude. From desperate circumstances and feelings we access willingness to engage with the unknown, the repressed. These emotions and personality parts are in the shadows and seem frightening and are repressed until they become known.

What makes people lonely? This psychological exploration entails admitting the precarity of life by relinquishing to the unknowable. By dealing with the emotionally distressing issues feeling alone in them, we can relate to the psychological complexes. In the process their paralytic hold on us lessens. Like many sufferings, the loneliness in isolation both physical and psychological brings messages to address the experience of mourning, lack and loss. The return to earlier feelings is in search of release from their grip on the personality. Engagement with the others inside enacts recognition of the total self. The series of challenges made apparent in therapeutic endeavors require a depth of introspection so the ruptures can eventually lead to expansion and growth.

## Summary

This paper illustrated the theory of precarity by philosopher Judith Butler with references to French psychoanalyst Green. The Jungian psychological process was used in the composite example. This woman entered Jungian analytic work due to the loneliness, fear and isolation from COVID-19 and her subsequent inability to function. All drove her inward to find her center and the support to develop her personality through re-balancing the loneliness, losses, grief, and emotions formerly negated.

*Hope is the thing with feathers -*

*That perches in the soul -*

*And sings the tune without the words -*

*And never stops - at all -*

*--Emily Dickinson #314*

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