

FACING OUR GLOBAL CRISIS: A TIME FOR REFLECTION AND AWAKENING

Dr. Joanne Kong



Like so many others, I've realized that a new reality has set in, where we're facing threats to our survivability, unprecedented in our lifetimes. Yes, these are frightening times, not only because of the dire threats of the COVID-19 virus to our health, but because we're undergoing, out of necessity, drastic changes in our daily habits and the ways in which we interact with others.

More than ever before, this global pandemic has become a driving force for us to re-examine our place in the world.

This is not to minimize mankind's extraordinary achievements, the progress we've made in so many areas of human endeavor, and the immense advances we've made in science and technology. It's those very advances that have allowed us to remain, albeit remotely, connected to each other, and maintain awareness of the rapidly-shifting landscape of the crisis we're in.

But somewhere along the way, our society has lost a sense of connection to the natural world that surrounds us. I'm certainly not an expert on global health, life sciences, or the complexities of the earth's ecosystems. But it's just become more and more apparent to me how the collective actions, attitudes, and energies that we put out into the world do indeed reflect back to us, and become manifest. In these times, we're seeing the truth of that saying, "All things connect."

So I share here some of the thoughts, observations and reflections I've had over the past couple weeks. I'm sure that some of you have had these thoughts as well, and others of your own that reflect *your* own unique lens on the world. I think that sharing our perceptions with each other can be valuable ways to communicate meaningfully, as we grow and transform our lives through this difficult time.

- **A Clear Warning Shot**

If nothing else, the current global pandemic is a direct sign that humans must move away from exploitation of animals. In *not* doing so, we will continue to put our own lives in peril. It's not as if we haven't received warnings before – the Spanish flu, SARS, MERS, avian flu, swine flu, salmonella, Ebola – all stem from animal exploitation.

- **Exploitation of Animals and Nature**

I hope that the coronavirus pandemic leads us to conscious global awakening and awareness of how our actions are wreaking destruction on the planet. Industrialized animal agriculture, fossil fuel use, deforestation, pollution, urbanization, mining, decimation of sea life – all have led to a staggering loss of habitat and biodiversity. As David Quammen, author of *Spillover: Animal Infections and the Next Pandemic*, wrote: “We invade tropical forests and other wild landscapes, which harbor so many species of animals and plants – and within those creatures, so many unknown viruses. We cut the trees; we kill the animals or cage them and send them to markets. We disrupt ecosystems, and we shake viruses loose from their natural hosts. When that happens, they need a new host. Often, we are it.” Over 70% of emerging infectious diseases can be traced to animals. Our species cannot expect to survive if we continue to perpetuate our egocentric view of the world, that the earth’s resources are inexhaustible and its inhabitants expendable.

- **Our Response to Crises**

How successfully we deal with this challenge and the many more that are sure to come, will depend upon our ability to aggressively pursue *preventive* courses of action. This is inherently difficult, as one could argue that it’s a part of human nature to be more reactive than proactive; we can feel powerless and distant from being part of the solution, waiting until circumstances become so dire that we are then forced to address the problem. Once the challenge of the moment passes, will we only fall back to our usual habits and complacency, until the next crisis arrives?

- **The Greatest Cognitive Dissonance of Our Time**

The damage of animal agriculture is a symptom of something much deeper than its physical effects. For it is a denial, a contradiction and a betrayal in the most violent way, of our most precious and powerful instinct – compassion. Our ability to feel for others *is* at the center of our hearts. Certainly, many of us, especially those of us with companion animals, would say, “I love animals!” Yet in what is the greatest cognitive dissonance of our time, society turns a blind eye to the billions of animals who suffer a brutal death. It’s an invisible thread in our lives, so deeply embedded that most of society never questions, let alone gives thought to it. More than ever, it is time to open our eyes, our minds and above all our hearts.

- **Going Vegan is the Most Powerful Action You Can Take!**

As an ethical vegan and animal advocate, I can say that becoming vegan was the most positive, powerful and transformative decision I ever made. As many of you can attest, the plant-based lifestyle is so much more than making nutritious food choices; every time we eat whole plant foods, we’re choosing not only good health, but compassion, non-violence, empathy for other beings, a deeper sense of peace, and respect for all life and the planet. By refusing to exploit the innocent and the vulnerable, we can truly live the Golden Rule and spread veganism’s positive message that the world needs now, more than ever. *Every* individual makes a difference! As Margaret Mead said: “Never doubt that a small group of thoughtful, committed, citizens can change the world. Indeed, it is the only thing that ever has.”

- **A Time of Opportunity**

I believe that this crisis is a turning point for us, and that in meeting the challenges we face, it will be the best of our human qualities that move us forward: our intellect, ingenuity, inventiveness, creativity, compassion and determination.

- **A Time of Courage**

I like to imagine that a future society looks back upon our time and sees that we were the ones who courageously envisioned a new world. One in which we've moved beyond self-interest, material gain, division and conflict, to an elevated awareness that we are all connected as equals. One in which we've realized a new (even exciting!) future of food that is healing and not borne of violence to other beings. And a world where we've ended the ravages upon our planet, instead, regenerating and preserving its beauty and many gifts.



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TEDx talk:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=eZWzNfOpbCQ>

YouTube:

https://www.youtube.com/channel/UC1MPyy3PoIISF_2JEsIRWwg/playlists

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