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The Tablighi and the Hermit: Tweedledum and Tweedledee

The ardent practitioners of religion, irrespective of the supposed distinctions in their professed faith have more in common than they would care to admit. Among other things, the one is just as likely to be infected by the *Corona* virus as the other.

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The staunchly devout practitioner of faith (irrespective of the religion he may profess or denomination he may most identify with) shares an interesting universe of commonality with his type. He feels the insatiable urge to congregate, supposedly in the hope to better practice and profess his conviction. He considers himself possessed of the complete truth to the wholesale exclusion of the rest of us. He is prone to suspicion of the other sect. And you may expect that he trusts the world would be – a place better, if those opposed to his ideals would voluntarily cease to exist *i.e.* assuming, they prove themselves unworthy or incapable of accepting his set of dogma. Also, I dare say – that the pictures on the web and the *Youtube* videos¹ suggest that irrespective of religious denomination, the faithful has continued (or so, attempted) to assemble at the religious place of his choosing even in these testing times.

But the spread of the *Corona* virus has brought out the worst in us. Yet, some of the people I have most respected have come out to condemn the dastardly fashion in which we have sought to attack each other as well to disapprove of our trying acts of conveniently (though dangerously) placing the blame of spread of contagion at the doorstep of the other. But I fear them to be outnumbered. And so, this piece is in solidarity of those men and women.

A foolish liberal at heart, I have often questioned: why should anyone have the right to offend another? Well because, within the bounds of good taste, one must continue to take this risk in order to ensure that the right to freedom thought, of speech and that of expression is not lost. So for each of the most horrid and vile things, which we have said about and done to each other recently, I have continued to seek solace in this proposition. But the lofty ideals of individual freedoms aside, on a more rudimentary level, I have started to wonder if we will ever be able to forgive ourselves for these mud-slinging contests.

And the dreaded *Corona* virus, for all its unpleasantness has proved itself possessed of a virtue that is rather rare in our times. Much unlike our kind, it has treated mankind, as we all should – as one! This is as grand a reminder of our shared humanity, as ever.

Recent events should have us asking: why the need to undertake this expedition of ‘*ill-will hunting*’ to find a scapegoat? Well quite simply, because under all the supposed complexities, us humans, we are simple creatures. And we are suckers for a juicy conspiracy theory. There must be other reason, but these theories are most attractive because: a good one presents an easy explanation for our problems and it pins the blame squarely on someone that we don’t particularly like or at any rate, do not associate with.

Epidemic and Ostracism have had a close relationship through the ages. This is unsurprising, as contagion is a known bearer of tragedy and misfortune. It also furnishes as good a time as any to interest us in conspiracy theories. There are accounts to testify that when the *Black Death* of 1348 struck England, the Christians blamed the Jews. This was on account of the fact that initially the disease did not infect or at least did not instantly affect (something we have learnt to associate with the expression ‘asymptomatic’) part of the Jewish community there. But that is the good thing with history: as you watch it repeat itself coupled with its unpleasant details; you get to enjoy a little *déjà vu* – how unburdened by wisdom we still are, how passage of time has done nothing to change this, and just how unremarkably similar we are to our ancestors.

And so in these dark times, the *Corona* virus aside, the only other stellar instance of unprejudiced approach, which deserves notice, has been that of President Trump. He has, post-haste (*albeit*, with the carefully crafted exception of himself) blamed everyone and everything else for this fiasco. Alas, if only hate could fend off the virus!

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

