

My Time of Corona – A Bridge Between Reality and Imagination

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My name is Orit Even Shoshan–Reshef, and I am a bibliotherapist and psychotherapist. I have been an emotional therapist for over 20 years. In my practice, I mainly treat adolescents.

My Therapy Philosophy

I believe that treatment is based on communication between the two objects in the treatment room. I think that in the therapeutic process, the patient and the therapist create a common story based on the patient's story—his inner world and his connection to the therapist produces the realistic world. The shared story is in fact the bridge that connects the patient's inner personal world to the patient's interpersonal outer world—the reality.

Over the course of my work, I have repeatedly found the issue of the meaning of life to be a central issue in treatment. I find that the treatment space allows the patient to “make something out of nothing.” Many questions arise in relation to the meaning of life, and oftentimes, patients come with a great sense of despair and disgust in their life. I find that in the treatment room, we try to find possible meaning while giving an empathic place to the difficult feeling of emptiness and despair.

Changes During Corona

During Corona, I have had a number of individuals turn to me for help that would not be characterized as an emergency, as one might think, but rather requests for help because of a new insight. For example, parents can finally really see the adolescents who live with them due to Corona, quarantine, and unprecedented togetherness. The adolescents themselves have also seen the need for dialogue with their parents due to the circumstances. Patients will often come for emotional treatment following insights that always been there, but are blatant enough to handle them now.

In addition, during this period, I feel that there is much more room for treatment in the various art therapies and bibliotherapy.

Therapy takes place over the phone or WhatsApp video following a joint writing process between me and the patient through a writing exercise that I present following our initial conversation. The patient starts writing and uploads the text to Google Docs, where I am invited to connect to it and write together with the patient. This connection is the product of the Corona period, where people have been starving for interpersonal interaction. Therefore, I believe that there is even more room for a work and artistic partnership in treatment.

As a therapist who strongly believes in my own self-disclosure as an integral part of therapy, I had thought that the expression of my feelings during therapy and sharing of personal examples were enough. However, during Corona, I have discovered a new sense of exposure that had been unfamiliar to me and not easy to digest. Conversations through the computer using ZOOM has forced me to see myself as my patients see me: how I look, my facial expressions, and the movements I make during treatments. This exposure has compelled me to see myself as my patients see me and to work on it.

Treatment During Corona

I have two interesting examples of treatment during Corona:

The first example was a treatment that took place over the phone (not a video call) with a patient. Before Corona, during a session, oftentimes the patient would draw and create. Our discourse was made and sustained through works of art. During Corona, we continued to have a therapeutic process over the phone, and we had an art conversation when I did guided imagery therapy. The patient prepared a work of art at home, and ten minutes later, he sent me a picture of the artwork, after which I sent a text response. This created a very interesting and significant artistic connection between the patient's unconscious and mine.

A second example relates to a therapeutic tool I developed called The Kingdom Game: A tool that allows the creation of a realm parallel to the patient's realm, while collecting items from his real life and weaving them through an imaginary world. Typically, the kingdom is actually and metaphorically created for a number of encounters. During Corona, the kingdom was built through texts spoken in conversation. Sometimes I collected the items and created a text, which I returned to the patient, and sometimes it was built while having a conversation.

- What can be learned from it for treatment?

- How would you sum up the visit to the "Corona Kingdom" so far?

Insights from Corona

First of all, I believe that therapy is therapy is therapy. When the connection is meaningful and the togetherness created is unlike anything else, the same "magic" can be produced by other means as well. Secondly, the boundaries of therapy are infinite and need to be shaken up occasionally within existing boundaries, daring to step outside of them, developing new ideas, and awakening our souls.

I learned two main things from the Corona period, one personal and one professional:

The first one is related to the meaning of time. In the therapeutic world, the processes that take place in the "here and now" have great significance. Oftentimes, therapists focus on the content and processes that take place during a session, without engaging in what takes place outside the room. This is from a desire to produce an authentic discourse on the current situation.

During the Corona period, however, I have felt that engaging in the "here and now" has deepened my sense of helplessness and the feeling that most decisions or events that affect me are beyond my control. Therefore, the sense that I have difficulty producing a reasonable reality has increased. It is precisely in these situations that I have chosen, in both my personal and professional life, to look far beyond the horizon, to a future that cannot be grasped. The thought of a distant future has allowed me to deal with the bumps in the road more successfully.

On a professional level, when I have the feeling of a "dead end," I often aim for distant and even impossible worlds. Oftentimes, when I am in session with patients who feel meaningless and tired of life, I choose to enter with them into this pit of darkness, and together we throw a "lasso" towards a future distant point, so that we can get out of the menacing pit by using energies from the future.

Another insight I have noticed from this period connects to imagination. It seems to me that in "the first wave" we all had the feeling that we were part of a film, of imagination, of fantasy. At first, it

was quite pleasant enjoying the illogical sense of reality, seeing that the story was being told around us, and having no responsibility whatsoever. But over time, the fantastic reality began to become elusive and slippery and even threatening. It was precisely in these situations that I began to imagine situations that were pleasant for me and helped give me a sense that there are worlds parallel to the complex world in which we live. More than once my imagination saved me from sinking into despair.

Conclusion

I will end with an insight from Michael Ende's book, *The Never-Ending Story*: in this book, Atreyu is looking for a cure for an empress—the queen of the fantasy world. He understands that he must not go beyond the boundaries of the land of fantasy, but towards the end of his journey, he understands that there are no boundaries in the world of imagination. He was told that human beings who have lost hope cause imagination to fall apart and thus the world finds it difficult to exist. Only when human beings once again start believing in dreams and in their imaginations, will human beings begin again to be full of hope.

Imagination is an extremely important mechanism; it is the one that allows us to develop and flourish at any time, not just in times of crisis. So, I wish you all many hours of imagination and hope; if we have a hard time finding them in the real world, we can always find them in our minds.