A-tishoo, A-tishoo We All Fall Down

By Jonathan Sklar

Ring-a-ring-a-rosies
A pocket full of posies
A-tishoo, a-tishoo
We all fall down

The king has sent his daughter
To fetch a pail of water
A-tishoo, a-tishoo
We all fall down

The robin on the steeple
Is singing to the people
A-tishoo, a-tishoo
We all fall down

The wedding bells are ringing
The boys and girls are singing
A-tishoo, a-tishoo
We all fall down

All of Society does not fall apart at once. We are mainly used to being on the comfortable side of the equation rather than the other side. It can be very wretched being on the other side, living near the edge of a falling life, or worst, being over the precipice with no employment, very little money, cramped home conditions or living on the street. Those in some comfort can look over to the other side and locate the problem over there. We can split our thinking into a them and us mentality that can absorb any personal guilt and more comfortably blame the other. Trump now continually blames the 'Chinese" virus, giving it his particular innocent spin and covering his guilt for ignoring knowledge given to him months ago, leaving Great America very vulnerable. Yet we all have variations of this theme blaming others whilst we bask of our own sustained, steady, comfortable position in society. For so long the separating off of the Other from the self has existed in racist, anti-Semitic, misogynistic tropes trying to locate any undesirable function of ones own onto another group. In analytic parlance this is unconscious splitting and projection as defence mechanisms against the outside getting into us. Some of our undesirable qualities or phantasies are located onto the other, in order to leave us free and cleanly innocent.

Now it is we, all of us, floating in a global boat that is holed, as our world is falling apart-the country that we live in and our own complex lives within it. We all have the level playing field now with equality to share the possibility of catching Covid19 . So much of the World is in lockdown, with most of us be contained in our own spaces in apartments and houses. For others their fate is to be forced to be tightly packed together, like the refugees and those in Gaza with a significant risk of contagion . Whilst we can mitigate our chance we still live in the state of not knowing our fate, which is to quickly die. Worse is to die alone, without loved ones, our body carted off to be dealt with without family, who are left, alone, to grieve and begin mourning without the human expression of coming together for the dead. This is a terrible reality, which is very hard to know and face however intelligent and sophisticated we think we are. We sneeze and the whole world really is falling down. It does not even matter if our pockets are filled with posies.

In the children's poem the king loses his daughter. Those high up in the steeple of life will fall, as will the lovers too despite the ringing of wedding bells. No we are more in the territory of Hemingway's 'For who the bell tolls, it tolls for thee.'

A leading authority on nursery rhymes Peter and Iona Opie thought the poem's derivation back to the Great Plague of 1665 in England. A rosy rash being a symptom of the plague and posies of herbs were carried for protection. So it seems a strange tale, to find in a poem sung to young children. Winnicott saw it as the good enough mother unconsciously paying out the baby for having such an immense impact on her life, accepted without retaliation. With Covid-19 we have no way of getting revenge on the virus itself. This is very different to our usual range and panoply of tools to obtain revenge against the other. This makes us human beings even more vulnerable psychologically as we pull up the drawbridge to our homes waiting the arrival of the modern day plague.

So what do humans do about the impact of life catastrophic? We can regress in our thinking, which has many forms. By regress I am meaning to return to earlier and significant times in our life-babyhood, childhood and adolescence when our character is developing in relation to family life and later the world beyond. If the good enough mother of our early life is one who predominately held, fed and looked after, the baby imbibes an environment, a mental structure that is generally safe. It is not perfect and any gaps and calamities in ongoing care can create a storm leading to quickly reconciliation as the world is restored to its usual state of ordinary alrightness and safety.

And if the baby's state of fragmentation, that a feed is not instantly forthcoming and the wait is too much, what then? Then the baby has to manage alone and depending on the roughness of early life, surviving at the price of developing a false self. Those citizens who have had to deal alone with early collapse of their world when little may now fear its return as more dangerous than those of us, more lucky to have imbibed an internal mental holding that allows us a certain resilience. For the others, the repressed aloneness from early in life suddenly returns as a severe taunting as if they imagined they could really manage alone. The imposed isolation may well contain them for now, but in the aftermath there may be an eruption of overt psychic pain that will need to be understood and held.

For most of us this long enforced period of isolation may lead to a wave of adaptation and creativity that will aid our captivity. We will find that we can, surprisingly, manage the unimaginable and even enrich our capacities to survive.

And we will also have to all deal with the deaths and the desolation of mourning, most of which will have to be put off till later.

A recent news item on TV showed a forlorn football supporter sitting alone in his car outside his beloved club, Liverpool suddenly closed. Nobody else was around. All was deserted. He had come by himself to play 'Never Walk Alone', the club anthem. Strange behaviour and totally understandable as one means of coping today.

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