

Attitudinal Healing and COVID-19

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“Fear can be the most virulent and damaging virus known to humankind.”

Gerald Jampolsky, M.D.

The above quote is from my 95-year-old father, a veteran of three wars, a Stanford trained physician/psychiatrist for close to seventy years including receiving the American Medical Association Excellence in Medicine, Pride in the Profession Award, and the World Health Organization (WHO) 60th Anniversary Award. I want to share how his lifework can help you mindfully navigate our current crisis of COVID-19. Via FaceTime, I spoke with Dad and Diane about their decades of work in Attitudinal Healing dealing with life-threatening disease and trauma in over 60 countries. What follows is a result of our discussion, along with reflections from my years of writing on Health Psychology. To inspire during this challenging time, I intersperse quotes from my father's many books.

“Fear does not bring about positive change, and it is always a mistake to provoke fear in an attempt to help others.”

Gerald Jampolsky, M.D.

Widely documented, long-term stress, fear, and worry, weaken our immune response. With the Coronavirus, in addition to the recommended physical precautions, it is essential to address the emotional reactions that can diminish us. At the heart of Attitudinal Healing, founded by my father, is the belief in the extraordinary ability of ordinary people to be of help to one another, and the idea that we have the power to choose our attitude in any given moment, regardless of circumstances. Our thoughts, attitudes, and judgments in response to COVID-19 can increase distress and inherently reduce our ability to stay healthy. During this crisis of the Coronavirus, Attitudinal Healing helps us not only cope with fear; it helps us become better people and more aware of our connection with one another.

“We can expand our sense of now, and dissolve the fear in our minds.”

Gerald Jampolsky, M.D.

Amidst COVID-19, every morning upon waking, I set my goal to bring more love into my life and the world rather than more fear. In essence, I remind myself that in the worst of times throughout history, some have chosen to act from love and compassion, focusing on what they can give under the direst circumstances. People such as my father teach us that in the face of illness and death, we can reduce suffering and even find moments of beauty and connection. Let them be our inspiration. Let them summon us now to reinterpret our fear to be a calling to be better, to be stronger, to serve the greater good.

“When viewed correctly, fear can be reinterpreted as our minds' invitation to us to rise to a higher level of freedom. We are not being called to run away from danger but toward safety. And there is a world of difference between the two directions.”

Gerald Jampolsky, M.D.

My father has devoted his life to helping others through similar challenges as we face today. From AIDS to children with catastrophic illness, community health to homelessness, hospitals to prisons, war to racism, Attitudinal Healing has helped; it is a cross-cultural method of healing based on the belief that it is not people or experiences outside of ourselves that cause us to be upset. Instead, it is our thoughts, attitudes, and judgments about what is happening that causes us distress. If not mindful, the fear and anxiety from COVID-19 can tear us apart and even increase our risk of infection. Still, there is another way, one that draws us together as never before: The goal to give and receive love and compassion during this most challenging time.

“It is frequently necessary to make a commitment to a specific goal even when the means for achieving it are not immediately apparent. This is a reversal of the customary logic of the world, and can be thought of as ‘putting the cart before the horse.’”

Gerald Jampolsky, M.D.

The late Len Brutaco summed his experience of Attitudinal Healing in a way I could not say better, “The remarkable thing is that we have a choice every day regarding the attitude we embrace for that day... I am convinced that life is 10 percent what happens to us and 90 percent how we react to it. So it is with all of us.” And so it is with COVID-19; 90 percent of where we end up--personally and globally--will be a result of our reactions stemming from our attitude over the next many months. To this end, below I have applied the 12 Principles of Attitudinal Healing to help us steer our attitude in a direction where we become a contributor to healing, reducing suffering, and making a positive difference in our life and the world during this challenging time. The original Principles appear in italics.

1. Use the time you may be at home or isolated to reflect on what matters most. Hourly sit quietly and breathe deeply, reminding yourself *the essence of our being is love*.

“Safety lies in ‘We can.’ We always choose between that which affirms life [love] and that which merely denies it [fear].”

Gerald Jampolsky, M.D.

2. In the uncertainty surrounding the Coronavirus, experts say to stay calm, yet few of us know how. The key to staying calm is being mindful of the foundation of health and healing: *Health is inner peace, healing is letting go of fear*.

“To be free of fear requires only one thing: a goal that is itself not fearful.”

Gerald Jampolsky, M.D.

3. Amidst the anxiety of others, do your best to find contentment, where you are, in this moment, with who you are with or alone, and remember *giving and receiving are the same*.

“Through our willingness to help others we can learn to be happy rather than depressed.”

Gerald Jampolsky, M.D.

4. Put worry in perspective by knowing *we can let go of the past and of the future*. When there is danger without a clear solution, a part of our mind looks ahead to preventing something terrible from happening. Though this has benefit, also remember to tune into the moment and how we can support one another today.

“True healing is a change of heart, not a change of circumstances, even though a change of circumstances may accompany it.”

Gerald Jampolsky, M.D.

5. In the chaos of the COVID-19 crisis, know that *now is the only time there is and each instant is for giving*.

“When we are centered on giving, we also receive, because our personal anxieties begin to dissipate from our thoughts. When we recognize that what is in the best interests of another is also of complete benefit to us, we gain inner tranquility, if only briefly, because for that moment we have left our personal hell behind.”

Gerald Jampolsky, M.D.

6. What is happening with COVID-19 is unprecedented in our lifetime, and tensions run high. Remember, *we can learn to love ourselves and others by forgiving rather than judging*.

“Love itself remains constant...Master the power of attitude and you'll live a powerful life.”

Gerald Jampolsky, M.D.

7. When the crisis of a lifetime falls upon us, we might focus on blaming and finding fault, creating division. Instead, *we can become love finders rather than fault-finders*, creating unity and the foundation for collaboration to find a solution.

“There is not a single thought that does not take us somewhere. That is why we must not leave our minds in a state of fear if we wish to walk toward health and peace.”

Gerald Jampolsky, M.D.

8. Too much exposure to the news and social media can create sleepless nights and tense days. Each day take time to remind yourself, *we can choose and direct ourselves to be peaceful inside regardless of what is happening outside.*

“It is not people or conditions outside ourselves that cause us to be upset. We are not victims of the world we see. Rather, what causes us conflict and distress is our own thoughts and attitudes about people and events.”

Gerald Jampolsky, M.D.

9. During this time of uncertainty, it is important to remember we are here to learn the power of love and compassion. *We are all students and teachers to each other on this path.*

“When we are occupied with helping another person, we do not experience fear...The essence of Attitudinal Healing is correcting the misperception that we are separate from each other.”

Gerald Jampolsky, M.D.

10. Few have gained lasting success at achieving a goal without first seeing it in their mind. Fear is magnified when we focus on soundbites of bad news or allow the fear and greed of other people to dominate our thinking. *We can focus on the whole of life rather than the fragments* and use the power of our imagination to see our way through this crisis.

“Through retraining of the mind we can learn to use positive active imagination. Positive active imagination enables us to develop positive, loving motion pictures in our minds.”

Gerald Jampolsky, M.D.

11. With the reality of people dying from Coronavirus, we face questions and fears about our mortality. Spend time each day contemplating the following: *Since love is eternal, death need not be viewed as fearful.*

“Wouldn’t our lives be more meaningful if we looked to what has no beginning and no ending as our reality...Only Love fits this definition of the eternal.”

Gerald Jampolsky, M.D.

12. It is essential to know how to protect ourselves from the Coronavirus physically. Equally important is how we spiritually react, including how to react to the negative ways people may respond. *We can always perceive others as either loving or fearful and giving a call of help for love.*

“We are always expressing either Love or fear. Fear is really a call for help, and therefore a request for Love.”

Gerald Jampolsky, M.D.

In closing, I am most grateful for the teachings of my father. He has shown us all it is possible to live a life where each day, you strive to increase love and decrease fear, and you trust the profound outcome of doing so. From here, we know how to respond to the unprecedented crisis we face. If fear and doubt begin to take hold, remind yourself you are projecting yourself into a future full of possible catastrophes and scaring yourself. Instead, ask the question, “how is this moment?” Once we remind ourselves that we only ever have the present moment, what matters and our purpose becomes clear. It is true that with COVID-19, there are real dangers on the horizon, but even with this, there are opportunities to love, to give, to be grateful we are alive at this moment to give and receive tenderness and what matters most, love.

“We can always learn from any situations we are currently involved in, no matter how undesirable it may first appear.”

Gerald Jampolsky, M.D.