

# **Pandemic points us toward more holistic ways to live**

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Emergencies interrupt our lives. We get so used to our habits, daily routines and busy schedules that any abrupt event becomes an emergency.

Something is out of our control: an infected tooth, a call from the school nurse, the speeding ticket, a blizzard, a pandemic. Emergencies often bring communities together to help one another, giving and sharing way beyond our normal interactions. When faced with serious emergencies like extreme weather, communities often reset their center and actually experience joy in being needed and useful.

The planetary pandemic we are now facing is similar to other extreme emergencies, though we are told to maintain social distance, not to connect. At the same time, the virus has shown how intimately connected we really are and we have great need to touch one another with our hearts.

The pandemic has interrupted our way of life in almost unimaginable ways. It is heartening to see how so many are rallying around a common and greater purpose – our health, the health of our families and communities. To our nation's credit, most seem to be accommodating this emergency with grace and cooperation in spite of feeling that almost everything is out of our control.

We may want to cast blame – China, a conspiracy, wild animals – and believe we have no responsibility for this pandemic. But, what if we do? Could we possibly be implicated? Well, we could if we unravel the origin story beginning with the fact that this virus comes from another species and found a new host – us.

The life and habitat of this to-be-identified animal and its virus has no doubt been disrupted in many ways. Humans have appropriated and destroyed the home of most wildlife by taking over 75% of earth's land for our use. We have brought wild species into our home space – "wet markets," forest cleared for industrial agriculture – while climate change is transforming habitats across the globe.

These acts and many others that support our way of life have brought many animals very close to human settlements and gathered the remaining wild animals into smaller spaces near us. Because of proximity, their viruses have become our viruses – COVID-19, SARS, Ebola, avian flu – causing illness and death.

Our response to the pandemic is growing wiser each day and will save human lives. If we attend, the virus may teach us about undoing the destructive parts of our way of life and open possibilities for action on the ongoing climate and biodiversity emergencies. These are and will exponentially cause even greater disruption, harm and death. Let us build on the global cooperation, our ability to make rapid changes in our lives, and our demonstrated willingness to protect life.