

Voices from Behind the Mask

Remembering How We Felt As the
Lockdown Began



Ban Mittal, Ph.D.

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Lockdown Began



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As the post-COVID world reopens and we enter the “new normal” world, we should use this experience to at least ask the question, *How should I rearrange my life to make it more fulfilling?*



No matter how irrational our ideologies, beliefs, and behaviors may look to each other, we share one common heritage: One nation. A modern, rational, and democratic nation. We can keep it so only if we do not fight a war among ourselves.

CONTENTS

Preface	viii
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GUIDE TO LISTENING SESSIONS

1. Survey Questions: Perspective, Plans, and Activities	2
2. What Type Is Your Voice	10
3. Thinking of the Person Behind the Voice	23
4. This Is Me. This Is Not Me.	35
5. Not Making Any Value Judgments	64
6. What Did You Do During the Lockdown?	84
7. Do Our Activities Have a Meaning?	96
8. What Will You Say to Them?	112
9. Your Own Friendly Powwow	151
10. How I Relate to These Voices	160
11. My Own Voice	161

SHORT ESSAYS

My Conversation with Patricia	72
Dear Josh	104
Retire Early?	120
On Work-Life Balance	127
Because We Share A Nation	140
My Letters to Our Vaccine-Hesitant Friends	148
A Manifesto	168

V O I C E S

Listening Session 1		
	Voices 1 -5	3
Listening Session 2		
	Voices 6 -15	12
Listening Session 3		
	Voices 16 -25	24
Listening Session 4		
	Voices 26 -35	36
Listening Session 5		
	Voices 36 -50	48
Listening Session 6		
	Voices 51 -60	65
Listening Session 7		
	Voices 61 -70	85
Listening Session 8		
	Voices 71 -80	97
Listening Session 9		
	Voices 81 -90	113
Listening Session 10		
	Voices 91 -100	135
Epilogue		162
Resources		170
Endnotes		175
About the Author		177

Preface

It happened on March 19, 2020. That day, the governor of California issued a statewide “stay-at-home” order. Within weeks most of the world was in lockdown. COVID-19 had turned our lives upside down. Across the globe, people faced the triple threat of contracting the virus, losing work, and losing freedom of movement. The lockdown meant we could not go out to stores, restaurants, even parks. And we had to stay away from strangers, even from friends. The pandemic had brought to all of us upheaval in personal, family, work, and social life. We had to rearrange our lives. For some, social distancing exacerbated loneliness and isolation. For some of us the lockdown had a silver lining—we thrived in the new ways of living. And we thought about our lives: What should life’s purpose be? And how should we live the rest of our lives?

To find out how people felt at the height of the pandemic and braving the lockdown, in May 2020, I surveyed people across the USA. I asked them questions about their life during the lockdown and about their feelings, living that life. They wrote down their answers, in their own words—telling it like it is, pouring out their hearts, sometimes in colorful language. A hundred of those answers—“voices”—are presented in this book. Voices that are sad. And sour. And sweet. And soulful.

Among these voices, find your own!

* * *

As destiny would have it, on June 28, 2021, Australia declared a new lockdown to contain the new Delta variant. On July 28, 2021, the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) issued new guidelines, advising all Americans to wear a mask indoors, even if vaccinated. Across the world, governments and public health agencies renewed calls for new lockdowns and vaccinations. Maybe you discovered this book soon after its publication, in late 2021, or maybe you are reading it in 2022 or 2025, it helps to read it with some psychological distance from the pandemic, well after we are out of the lockdown. As we enter the “new normal” world, we should use this experience to at least ask the question: *How should I rearrange my life to make it more fulfilling?*

When I myself re-read these 100 narratives—when I listen to these 100 voices—from each I find a thing or two to learn: something to avoid or abandon on the one hand; and, on the other, something to embrace and cultivate. In either case, from these voices I want to grow and enrich my own life and those of others whose paths I cross.

I invite you on this journey.

—Ban Mittal



THE
VOICES

Survey Questions

In the online survey, I asked people three questions:

Q1. How have you spent your free time so far? Did you undertake any new projects, activities, hobbies, etc.?

Q2. Has your experience of the coronavirus changed your perspective on life in any way?

Q3. Have you made or will you make any long-term changes in your life?

They wrote their answers—spoke their “voices.” Some were brief and to the point. Some wanted to say more so they “spoke” more. I edited them as little as needed. So, herein you will get their original tone.

Q1 serves as a backdrop, so I place it near the bottom. Their answers to Q2 and Q3 express their feelings, so I place them at the top of the page.

Let us “listen” to the first five “voices” and then I will tell you a bit more about the rest of them.

Listening Session 1

VOICES



The Prompt

- Q. Has your experience of the coronavirus changed your perspective on life in any way?
- Q. Have you made or will you make any long-term changes in your life?



- Q. How have you spent your free time so far? Did you undertake any new projects, activities, hobbies, etc.?

Yes, it opened my eyes to how quickly life can change.

Yes, to slow down and take time to really ponder on everything in life.



(Jane, 56-65, master's, salesperson, \$50-75K, MA)

Walking, yoga with Zoom, and reading to my children and helping them with lessons.

What Type Is Your Voice?

Did you notice how diverse the voices you just “heard” are? Such diversity exists whether we take a sample of people from across the globe or from within our own city or village.

To organize this diversity in my mind, I use a tool—I put the answers (“voices”) into one of the four categories:

Sad. People with this perspective are suffering—either themselves or they are sad from witnessing how others are suffering; or they are feeling helpless in the pandemic and under lockdown conditions. More broadly, they are feeling dismayed just to see the current state of the world.

Sour. These people are unhappy with the restrictions placed on them by the new circumstances or by those in power. They resent loss of control. Or they are resentful of those who are not cooperating toward improving the current state or helping the world get out of its current crisis.

Sweet. The threat of the virus has made them realize how fragile life is. So, they want to rearrange their life’s priorities. Also, the lockdown freed their time from many routine activities, and they realized those activities were unnecessary anyway. They now desire a better work-life balance and seek to spend more time on things they love or they think matter more. They are “retuning” their minds. For them, the lockdown had a silver lining, a “sweet” realization, or a blessing in disguise, so to speak. It was a wake-up moment that has energized them, going forward, to make their lives more blissful.

Soulful. The most direct meaning of *soulful* is “expressing deep feeling or emotion.” Often, that emotion is associated with sorrow but it can also serve as inspiration to emerge out of that sorrow. It also has overtones of spirituality. Here, I borrow this word and strip it of its undertones of sorrow, but I retain its spirituality element.

I define its central content through synonyms offered by the thesaurus: “meaningful” and “purposeful.” Thus, soulful perspectives seek meaning and purpose in life and they define their purpose in non-material (i.e., spiritual) terms. They cast their eyes beyond selfish gains and embrace the good of the world at large.

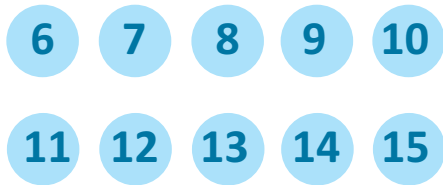
Now try to sort the next 10 voices into these four groups. Some voices may belong to more than one group. For those, you may mark more than one group. You could even use a stronger or a solid check mark and a weaker or broken-line check mark to show to which group a voice belongs more or less closely.

Some voices may seem to belong to none of the four groups. You may mark it as “other.” Try to use this option sparingly. As much as possible, try to mark each voice *sad*, *sour*, *sweet*, or *soulful*. Go ahead, “listen” to the next 10 “voices” now.

Sad Sour Sweet Soulful

Listening Session 2

VOICES



Everything seems to go by so slow now. Everything feels the same yet so different, and I don't know how to handle most of it. I've just been trying to occupy my time with more of what I already did, and some new-found interests.

I feel that now since I'm staying at home, I've realized a bit more about myself. For starters I have a bit of excess weight that I want gone, so I'm probably gonna try to take up regular trips to the gym when I get out, for now though I'll try working out at home.



(Amanda, 31-40, high school, cashier, \$31-50K, PA)

Sad Sour Sweet Soulful

Activities. I recently took up drawing. I always liked drawing, just didn't have the time for it with work and what not, but now I have a bit more time on my hands so why not pick up the pencil and paper again?

It has made me dislike people even more. I will still have more hate for the general population, even if things were to return to normal.

Going forward: I really do not know at this time. I do not know what to expect in the coming months and how my daily life will be.



(Jason, 25-30, high school, manager, \$10-30K, CA)

Sad Sour Sweet Soulful

I began learning ham radio communications and exercising more on my free time.

Listening Session 3

VOICES

16

17

18

19

20

21

22

23

24

25

Better to chill and stay the f*** away from others; so many people are out of control and won't shut it down.

(Going forward): (Stay) healthier at home; stay away; travel by car; don't shake the hands of the other people.



(Justin, 41-50, college, teacher, \$71-100K, AZ)

Sad Sour Sweet Soulful

Reading, TV, and nothing else; we haven't done much; I am Pelotoning more.

Listening Session 6

VOICES



Cherish the little things like being able to eat out.

Spend more quality time at home with my family and not worry about the materialistic things.



(Brooke, 41-50, some college, administrator, >\$100K, NY)

Sad Sour Sweet Soulful

I can relate to this *voice*: A lot Somewhat

This *voice* is opposite to my own outlook: Somewhat Totally

I started home-schooling my daughter because the schools and daycares are no longer open. I have also started doing more crafts and projects with her.



My Conversation with Patricia

Before moving on, let's chat with Patricia (Voice #56).

Patricia has a strong opinion about a class of people that make up about half of the political leaders and about half of our nation's population. Surely, she does not know all of them, so her statement relates to a few people she knows or knows of. Her speaking of all of the people in that class is merely a figure of speech, then, I would ask her. I would be sure also to tell her that there are just as many people on the other side who call Republicans horrible. They also do not know all of the Republicans, and they too group all Republicans in a camp based merely on the few that they know of or know about. This much truth Patricia will appreciate, I think.

My goal is not even to convince her of any point of view. I first want to reveal to her that I consider her opinions entirely understandable and that I hold her in good esteem. That I am enjoying talking to her, and that she can relax and feel comfortable in sharing her opinions with me.

I would like to understand the basis of her opinion of her state's governor. I will begin by asking her this question:

“When exactly did you come to liken the governor to Hitler, and do you remember what had happened just before that moment that made you view the governor in that way?”

“The governor had announced the stay-at-home order on March 16, 2020. Was it that day or a week later or two weeks later? Or was it only after May 4, when a state representative (who happened to be a Republican) called the governor a Nazi and you heard that statement in the news? In other

Listening Session 7

VOICES



I will become more resolute in my cynicism as it pertains to authority and those in government we have wrongly empowered and trusted.

Getting to know family better. Reconnections with family have been refreshing and have bolstered my belief that my best days lay ahead of me.



(Brett, 41-55, college degree, owner, \$71-100K, PA)

Sad Sour Sweet Soulful

I can relate to this *voice*: A lot Somewhat

This *voice* is opposite to my own outlook: Somewhat Totally

I spent time getting to know family better.

Do Our Activities Have a Meaning?

Do the activities people engaged in have any relationship with the perspective they reported? For example, consider the people who engaged in more new activities, especially new hobbies. Did their answers on perspective reveal a more positive vibe? More than the answers from those who worked as normal and did nothing new? Or who spent their free time in passive entertainment e.g., watching TV? Let's listen to the next voice set with this in mind.

Listening Session 8

VOICES



Yes, it has made me more compassionate, I've donated much more to charity organizations. Yes, I would learn to be more hygienic and helpful to others and also save more for emergencies like this.



(Gary, 31-40, master's, CEO, >\$100K, NY)

Sad Sour Sweet Soulful

I can relate to this *voice*: A lot Somewhat

This *voice* is opposite to my own outlook: Somewhat Totally

I used my free time for new projects, activities with my kids like playing video games and on new hobbies.

What Will You Say to Them?

Okay, for the next set, let's assume an even deeper role. Imagine you met these people. What will you say to them? Think of something positive. Write it down. Remember, we have to be nice!

If I met this person, this is what I will say to them:

(Memo to myself: I have to be nice!)

.....

.....

.....

Listening Session 9

VOICES

81

82

83

84

85

86

87

88

89

90

More jaded and critical of the government and our health industry and with less patience for selfish and entitled people.



(Daisy, 31-40, some college, freelancer, <\$10K, KY)

Sad Sour Sweet Soulful

I can relate to this *voice*: A lot Somewhat

This *voice* is opposite to my own outlook: Somewhat Totally

If I met this person, this is what I will say to them:
(Memo to myself: I have to be nice!)

.....
.....

Reading fantasy books, taking up quilting, and play more online games with friends.

Retire Early?



Dear Amy:

You checked the age group 41-55. If you are closer to 41, then it is really early. If you are closer to 55, you have earned it—almost. In either case, if you can afford to retire, good for you.

You still got 25 to 40 or even 50 more years to live. (Life expectancy for women in the US was 80.5 years in 2020—down from 81.4 years in 2019!). What will you do for the 40+ years of post-retirement life?

Doing “nothing” is not an option: If you do absolutely nothing, you will get bored of doing nothing. And if you plan on passive leisure (e.g., watching TV 24/7), you will get bored of that too. No matter how large our appetite for leisure and recreation, we need a break from recreation too.

Many people find ways of occupying their post-retirement time. Travel, learning new hobbies (e.g., music, painting, etc.), exploring the world of arts, history, cultures through reading and visiting museums; volunteering; babysitting grandchildren; practicing spirituality—any number of such activities will bring you new joy. Just choose what you like. Only, don’t say “nothing.” And don’t go into retirement without thinking and planning what you will do in your post-retirement life. Not knowing what to do will drive you insane. And also those around you.

But, first, why do you want to retire? Assuming, physically we are fit to work, why do we, any of us, want to retire, especially retire *early*?

I'm going to get a tattoo and get my nails done again, I hate not being able to do that right now, I used to get services done all the time.

I hope to get a new job, I wanted to before the virus, but it got put on hold due to the virus.



(Sue, 25-30, some college, store manager, \$31-50K, WI)

Sad Sour Sweet Soulful

I can relate to this *voice*: A lot Somewhat

This *voice* is opposite to my own outlook: Somewhat Totally

If I met this person, this is what I will say to them:
(Memo to myself: I have to be nice!)

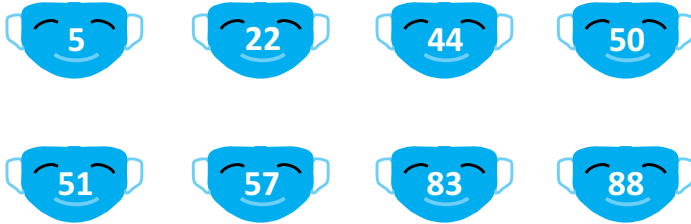
.....

.....

Activities: Sat on Facebook all the time, pretty much my usual.

On Work-Life Balance

A number of voices have spoken of wanting to reorient their lives toward more work-life balance. For example:



I want to share a few thoughts with them and with all of you who may also be wanting to pursue a greater work-life balance.

It is a good thing that the lockdown made you see what really matters and that you want to make some changes and live your future life differently.

Don't walk into the new economy, new post-lockdown world, with merely this generalized intention. Make it concrete. Identify five specific changes you will make in your personal life and in your work life.

To pursue work-life balance is inherently a good resolve but let us ponder why there is an imbalance to begin with.

Is it because you're working too many hours, sacrificing your family and personal time? If so, then you definitely need to find a job that will not overstretch you. In some cases, you may be able to reduce the need for overstretching by working more efficiently, by avoiding distractions, or by eliminating procedural excess from productive parts of your tasks.

Stop trusting the democrats 100%!!! Seeing the democrats blame & attack President Trump for everything is disgusting. The democrats MUST be investigated for the Covid-19 virus. No, I will not change anything. The democrats need to STOP their LYING about POTUS.



(Tucker, 56-65, some college, security, \$51-70K, CO)

- Sad Sour Sweet Soulful

I can relate to this *voice*: A lot Somewhat

This *voice* is opposite to my own outlook: Somewhat Totally

If I met this person, this is what I will say to them:

(Memo to myself: I have to be nice!)

.....

.....

Reading, Internet, phone calls, cleaning house, working at my hobbies that included gardening, photography, & coin collecting.

Because We Share a Nation

The previous two “voices” (#93 and #94) reflect the deep divide in America today and warrant our collective reflection. So, let me pause for a few moments here and speak to readers on each side of the divide.

This divide had been festering since the 2016 General Election with mutual political acrimony, but it intensified during the COVID-19 pandemic. The masking and lockdown mandates varied across the 50 states, as did the rates of infection, and public opinion coalesced at the opposite ends in blue and red states. This rift further widened with the arrival of the COVID-19 vaccine, as many a masking and lockdown protester joined the vaccine-opponent camp. Now the Twitterverse is replete with mutual diatribe and name-calling:

@SteveCameronPr1 (July 28, 2021)

Provaxxers are like rabid dogs these days. Could it be their unsafe experimental Covid injections making them go bonkers?

@AkilahObviously (August 2, 2021)

Petition to call anti-vaxxers “plague rats!”

Thus, pro-vaxxers and anti-vaxxers are spewing venom at each other. And this is no way to solve a problem, let alone survive as a prosperous and modern nation.

The root cause of the problem is the two entirely different belief sets: pro-vaxxers believe the vaccine to be their best insurance against threat to their health. In contrast, many anti-vaxxers believe the vaccine to be either unnecessary or in-

Exhibit

My Letters to Our Vaccine-Hesitant Friends

Dear Alex, Steven, Myrna, Hanna, and Sherman:

I am so happy to meet you (courtesy of Jan Hoffman and Sophie Kasakove of *the NYT*). I must disclose: I am a pro-vaxxer, but I have friends on both sides and I enjoy powwowing with them on this vaccine issue. I want to chat with you a minute.

[Alex Garcia, 25: “I’m just trustworthy in my immune system, that since I’m young and healthy, my immune system could fight it.”]

Dear Alex:

I see you in the photo, and yes, you do have a strong body. I am 90% sure, your system will fight it. I can’t be 100% sure, though, and nor can you be.

The chances of us getting into a car accident are much less than 10%, but we still get the insurance. The chances of any of us tripping off and getting a small bone fracture that needs medical attention are less than 1 in a 1000, but we are not worried because we have health insurance.

As you know, there are two consequences of getting the infection: (1) We will fall sick, sometimes severely; and (2) we may not know we have it and unwittingly infect others— people not as lucky as us and who therefore do not have a strong immune system. In this process, we could spread the infection not just to one but five or ten people who are not as blessed with a strong immune system as we are. Yes, our own immune system will protect our bodies, but do we want to live the rest of our lives as persons who thought only about ourselves?

I do suppose you are not concerned about any immediate reaction and side effects, as your strong immune system will no doubt brace it with grace.

I’ll see you on the other side soon.

Your Own Friendly Powwow

Okay, time for your own Powwow.

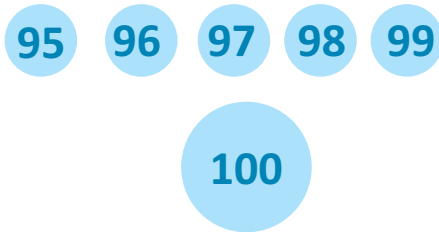
As a pro-vaxxer:

As an anti-vaxxer:

On either side: what will be your approach to keep the “voices” of both sides friendly?

Listening Session 10 (resume)

VOICES



I have a new respect for people who put their own lives at risk to help others. I will appreciate things a lot more and not take even the small things for granted. I will be taking better care of myself and those around me.



(José, 41-55, some college, unemployed, \$10-30K, CA)

Sad Sour Sweet Soulful

I can relate to this *voice*: A lot Somewhat

This *voice* is opposite to my own outlook: Somewhat Totally

If I met this person, this is what I will say to them:
(Memo to myself: I have to be nice!)

.....
.....

I have been spending my extra time playing games, reading, walking more.

History always repeats itself. We live and we learn, and we cannot let this affect how we live our daily lives.

We must make proper preparation to overcome future problems personally and as a society. Life goes on.



(Arch, 31-40, college degree, retail, \$60-100K, OH)

Sad Sour Sweet Soulful

I can relate to this *voice*: A lot Somewhat

This *voice* is opposite to my own outlook: Somewhat Totally

If I met this person, this is what I will say to them:
(Memo to myself: I have to be nice!)

.....
.....

I worked as usual.

Overview Session 11

VOICES
REVISITED

Worth Re-Listening?

This is actually a re-listening session. Let's go back to all of the answers. Not all of them at once, of course. But over several days.

We can simply re-listen to them selectively and see if we want to re-assign them to a different group. And then we can cull them together all on a single page, using a 4x4 crosstab shown on the following page.

Do you see a pattern in this crosstab? Do the voices fall more in one cell, less in other cells? Do you see yourself relating to one type (e.g., 'sad' or 'sweet') more? If yes, ask yourself why.

Finally, "speak" your own voice. How has your voice been affected by your listening to all these voices in this book?

CROSSTAB

How I Relate to These Voices

	Relate totally	Relate somewhat	Somewhat opposite	Totally opposite
Sad				
Sour				
Sweet				
Soulful				

- 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10
- 11 12 13 14 15 16 17 18 19 20
- 21 22 23 24 25 26 27 28 29 30
- 31 32 33 34 35 36 37 38 39 40
- 41 42 43 44 45 46 47 48 49 50
- 51 52 53 54 55 56 57 58 59 60
- 61 62 63 64 65 66 67 68 69 70
- 71 72 73 74 75 76 77 78 79 80
- 81 82 83 84 85 86 87 88 89 90
- 91 92 93 94 95 96 97 98 99 100

Write these numbers in the cells of the CROSSTAB above.

My Own Voice:

The activities I did during the lockdown:

Here is my new perspective:

Going forward, this is how I will live my life:



This is how this book affected my own “voice”:

.....

.....

.....

Epilogue

I did this survey in May 2020, right in the midst of the lockdown. It paints a picture of how people felt as they were learning to practice the virus safety regimen and managing everyday life without being able to go out. We will remember both the pandemic and the lockdown for a long time to come.

Some of you may have read about previous pandemics. The Black Death pandemic occurred from 1346 to 1353 and killed an estimated 75 to 200 million people. The Spanish flu, the last pandemic, occurred during 1918-1920 and killed an estimated 50 million or more people worldwide. We can read about the devastation these pandemics caused in history books. But how people at large (infected or not) felt, we will never know.

If 5 or 10 years later, when our five-year-old children will have grown up and ask, or 10 or 20 or 30 years later, the new generation of 10- or 20- or 30-year-olds, not yet born, ask what COVID-19 pandemic was like, give them some history books to read. Those books will tell them that COVID-19 had killed 4.30 million people worldwide (as of August 8, 2021). Help them visualize that number. That number is as large as the population of Oregon. Or about half the population of London (UK). Beyond the numbers, to give them a feel for the human experience, give them this book to read.

We are not out of the woods yet. On June 28, 2021, Australia declared a new lockdown to contain the Delta variant. The vaccination rate there had been only 15%. And on July 28,

2021, the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) issued new guidelines, recommending wearing masks indoors, even if vaccinated. Similar calls for masking and vaccination have been issued with renewed urgency in Europe and in countries across the world.

For all its misery, the lockdown did have a silver lining: It forced us to rearrange everyday life. For some of us, the chores of living increased. For some, there was more free time, and we found new creative ways of filling that time. In my own research, I found that people who spent their time in new productive and creative work (e.g., new hobbies, gardening, arts and crafts, or even DIY projects) or led more active lives felt less anxiety than those who spent their time in passive entertainment (e.g., TV and video) or just idling. If you re-listen to some of the 100 voices closely, you will see a glimpse of this pattern. Yes, it helps to find a new hobby, a new passion—where our bodies get exercised and our minds get creative.

In my research, I have also found that the pandemic made many people feel greater altruism or generosity—a desire to do something good for their communities. According to a Gates Foundation report, 56 percent of US households gave to charity or volunteered in response to the pandemic, with a 12.6% increase in new donors. And Charity Navigator (a tracker) reported that donations to Feeding America increased 1,980 percent year over year, and donations to Doctors Without Borders increased 131 percent year over year. I call this the “rise of a virtuous mind.” Glance back through all the voices you marked “soulful” and see if you don’t notice the rise of this virtue in many of the voices.

The lockdown gave us a taste of a life different from what we had lived our entire time on Earth. Whether we felt that taste as sad, sour, sweet, or soulful, it showed us new possibilities. New responsibilities. New opportunities. It made us think differently.

Those of us who felt the “sad” or “sour” taste in our own lives, let us use the voices of the “sweet” and the “soulful” types to feel the silver lining. Let us feel those same perspectives vicariously. After all, we don’t want to live with that sadness, and we don’t want to keep that sour taste in our mouths for the rest of our lives. The “sweet” and the “soulfuls” were face-to-face with the same pandemic and the same lockdown as we were, and yet they were able to see a silver lining; we too want to taste the same “nectar of life.” We want to look at life and the world through the same lenses of positivity.

On the other hand, if we are the “sweet” or “soulful” types, let us harness our positivity to understand the inner struggles of the “sad” and the “sour.” They had their reasons. Let us hope someday soon they will be able to come out of their current outlook of “sad” and “sour.” Let us help them in that transition.

We now have the vaccine, made possible by the resolute dedication of our former president, who marshaled all resources into harnessing the drug R&D companies. Science has come to our rescue. And the vaccine is available in every town and every village in the USA (and in much of the world), thanks to our current president’s resolve to bring it to the doorsteps of every American. Americans are getting the vaccine in droves (65% at the time of writing had received at least one dose)

because they believe it is the strongest self-protection one could ever hope for—99.5% of the deaths during the 6 months of January to June, 2021, occurred among the non-vaccinated! Or because they consider protecting others their civil duty, an act of patriotism. Let us welcome more and more people into the fold, the “sad” or the “sour” types and the “sweet” and the “soulful” types alike. Many will do it—take the vaccine—ultimately because they recognize that it is their patriotic duty. And in displaying patriotism, we Americans are second to none. Nor are the British, the Germans, the Brazilians, the Italians, or the Indians. Our patriotism, the patriotism of each of the four types, gives us hope the world will soon emerge out of the pandemic and out of the new lockdowns.

We—the “sweet” and “soulful” types among us—what are we going to do for ourselves? Let us cultivate those good feelings even more. It is a law of nature that time makes us forget. As the economy reopens, let us flock to the open world, to the marketplace, of course, to soak in the wonderful experiences we had once taken for granted. But with equal zeal, let us nurture our “sweet” and our “soulful” perspectives as well. Let us act on our newfound wisdom to pursue a greater work-life balance. Let us make our work more meaningful.

The “voices” in the book are just that—voices! They echo our feelings at the moment. Individually, they do not necessarily represent our complete selves. We are, at the moment, experiencing a catastrophe of a lifetime. We could not have imagined that a disease that is so invisible that the infected do not show symptoms for days and weeks could invade our world;

that we could get it from friends and family members and strangers alike; that it will forbid us to touch things, surfaces, pets, people; that we will lose the freedom to go to places to eat, shop, worship, and mingle; that we will be ordered to stay within the bounds of our homes. And face the possibility that we could still get the disease, and that if we got it, there may not be a hospital bed available to us. We experienced this period of catastrophe variously: for some of us, rearranging our work and personal lives became a hassle, even a nightmare; for some of us, more time at home became a blessing in disguise. The “voices” reflect this varied experience.

No matter what be the tone of our “voice” in this moment, each of us in our persona at large harbors a tinge of each tone. Each of us is therefore capable of cultivating the “sweet” and the “soulful” sides of our being. With near-universal adoption of the vaccine, we will soon tame COVID-19 and its Delta variant for good. Soon we will be fully free of the lockdown. Each of us can emerge with a “sweet” and a “soulful” voice.

The *Sad*, the *Sour*, the *Sweet*, and the *Soulful*, let each of us use this once-in-a-lifetime experience to take action to improve our material, family, social and spiritual life. And if we haven’t asked already, let us ask as well, *how to make our life more purposeful, more meaningful*. For ourselves and for the world we live in!



MOVING FORWARD

A Manifesto

A Sane Person's Guide for COVID Times

- 1** As a pro-masker, I will understand that some people may have genuine breathing problems with a mask. They do not necessarily oppose the mask and they do not secretly hold me in derision for wearing it.
- 2** As a pro-vaxxer, I will understand that some people may have genuine health factors that lead them to view the vaccine risky to their personal health. I should not assume they are not cool with my having had the vaccine.
- 3** As a pro-vaxxer, I will understand that people who oppose the vaccine are guided by their belief system. They have the right to hold those beliefs even if I disagree with those beliefs; I must respect them as independent-minded persons, nonetheless.
- 4** As an anti-masker, I will understand that I am free to not wear a mask when: a. I am alone by myself; b. I am in my own house; and c. when I am with friends and family members in a private residence or in open public spaces. I understand that strangers have the right to keep social distance from the unmasked me.
- 5** I understand that it is the right of a business establishment to set all policies related to how customers should behave inside their premises, as long as any restrictions they impose are allowed by the law of our land. The same law of the land does not condone my harassing other customers who may see those restrictions as serving the public good and therefore honor them.
- 6** Whoever be my opinion leaders that I follow, I will expect them to publicly declare their vaccination status. I respect their argument that it is one's personal matter. But if they choose to opine on vaccine, then it is not their private matter anymore, because if I follow their opinion, it affects my ability to stay healthy and alive. I must also consider that celebrities have privileged access to premium medical services that I may not have.

- 7 When a media celebrity or a politician offers an opinion, I must ask, is there a personal benefit motive for this person to broadcast that opinion. For example, they might try to echo my beliefs just to please me and manipulate me into giving them my “like” and my patronage. I must know that social media influencers do not know me and therefore will not know what is good for me; their main goal is to get a large following by spreading sensational ideology.
- 8 I am not gullible if an anti-vaxxer friend were trying to persuade me. I am not gullible if a pro-vaxxer friend were trying to persuade me. Likewise, when a media celebrity with no subject matter expertise and having a personal agenda expresses an opinion, I should not be gullible.
- 9 Whether I am a pro- or anti-masker and whether I am a pro- or anti-vaxxer, rather than believing just what I hear or read on social media, I will try to get the facts behind the effects of masking and the effects of vaccine; I will try to learn from independent expert sources that have no ambition of gaining a large number of followers. I should also try to learn for myself the trends in infections, overcrowding in hospitals, and COVID-deaths, and I must try to do my part in mitigating these sufferings in others by not aiding the pandemic to spread.
- 10 Before the pandemic came, we got along well. Now, we are doing what we can to overcome the pandemic. COVID’s toll on our fellow citizens is sad enough. We will not allow the pandemic to also ruin our relations, pitting us on opposite sides. No matter which side of the lockdown, masking, and vaccine we find ourselves, we shall not harbor disrespect and ill will toward the other side. We want to guard, naturally, our right to be treated with dignity. With equal zeal, we will guard the right of the opposite side to be treated with dignity. No matter which leader we follow, this is the God’s *Golden Rule!*

RESOURCES FOR MAKING EDUCATED DECISIONS

About the Covid-19 Vaccine

- 1 Johns Hopkins Medicine**
 Covid-19 Story Tip: Five Things You May Not Know About Vaccine Science
 12/15/2020
<https://tinyurl.com/Voice-Vaxx-1>
 Also a Video:
<https://tinyurl.com/Voice-Vaxx-Video-1>
- 2 The Ohio State University, Wexner Medical Center**
 “The COVID-19 vaccine is safe and effective”
 How do we know this? Because our experts have dedicated their lives to studying how infectious diseases and vaccines work. While the COVID-19 vaccines are new, the technology they use has been studied and refined for decades.
<https://tinyurl.com/Voice-Vaxx-2>

COVID-19 vaccine side effects: Should we be concerned?
 How does mRNA work?
 Carlos Malvestutto, MD, MPH
<https://tinyurl.com/Voice-Vaxx-3>
- 3 The Pew Charitable Trust**
 The Science Behind Vaccines
 Two Pew biomedical researchers answer common questions
 March 5, 2021
<https://tinyurl.com/Voice-Vaxx-4>
- 4 CDC**
 Understanding How COVID-19 Vaccines Work
 Updated May 27, 2021
<https://tinyurl.com/Voice-Vaxx-5>
- 5 The New York Times**
 letter 197
 As a Doctor, I Was Skeptical About the Covid Vaccine. Then I Reviewed the Science.
 How one emergency department doctor shifted her views.
 By Amaali Lokuge (M.D. at Royal Melbourne Hospital)
 March 4, 2021
<https://tinyurl.com/Voice-Vaxx-6>

Video

- 6 Business Insider**
The COVID-19 vaccine side-effects you can expect based on your age, sex, and dose
Aria Bendix (Mar 30, 2021)
<https://tinyurl.com/Voice-Vaxx-7>
- 7 Johns Hopkins**
How Do We Know a COVID-19 Vaccine Will Be Safe and Effective? (Dec 3, 2020)
<https://tinyurl.com/Voice-Vaxx-Video-1> (1:06) Video
- 8 American Medical Association**
How to defeat COVID-19 vaccine misinformation with facts, science
Len Strazewski, Jun 4, 2021
<https://tinyurl.com/Voice-Vaxx-Video-2> (56:12) Video
- 9 Science Magazine**
How do the leading COVID-19 vaccines work? Science explains
By Meagan Cantwell, Jan. 29, 2021
<https://tinyurl.com/Voice-Vaxx-Video-3> (4:43) Video
- 10 Texas Public Radio**
Think Science: How Vaccines Work
By Nathan Cone (May 14, 2020)
<https://tinyurl.com/Voice-Vaxx-Video-4> (58:50) Video
- 11 Union of Concerned Scientists**
Frequently Asked Questions about the COVID-19 Vaccine Apr 2, 2021
<https://tinyurl.com/Voice-Vaxx-Video-5> (3:33) Video
- 12 PBS.org**
Vaccines against the coronavirus will have side effects – and that’s a good thing (Dec 3, 2020)
<https://tinyurl.com/Voice-Vaxx-Video-6> (1:47) Video
- 13 TheConversation.com**
New COVID-19 vaccine warnings don’t mean it’s unsafe – they mean the system to report side effects is working
July 19, 2021
<https://tinyurl.com/Voice-Vaxx-Video-7> (10:55) Video

About Masks

- 14 University of California San Francisco**
 Still Confused About Masks? Here's the Science Behind How Face Masks Prevent Coronavirus
 By Nina Bai, June 26, 2020
<https://tinyurl.com/Voice-Mask-1>
- 15 National Jewish Hospital**
 The Science Behind the Mask
 Includes very helpful infographics
<https://tinyurl.com/Voice-Mask-2>
- 16 FactCheck.org**
 The Evolving Science of Face Masks and COVID-19
 By Jessica McDonald
 March 2, 2021
<https://tinyurl.com/Voice-Mask-3>
- 17 Science Magazine**
 Face masks effectively limit the probability of SARS-CoV-2 transmission
Science, 25 Jun 2021:
 Vol. 372, Issue 6549, pp. 1439-1443
<https://tinyurl.com/Voice-Mask-5>
- 18 PNAS Journal**
 An evidence review of face masks against COVID-19
 January 26, 2021 118 (4) e2014564118;
<https://tinyurl.com/Voice-Mask-6>
- 19 Nature (magazine)**
 Face masks: what the data say
 Lynne Peeples (October 6, 2020)
<https://tinyurl.com/Voice-Mask-7>

20 NBC Nightly News

How Scientists Test Face Mask Effectiveness
Against Coronavirus
Jun 21, 2020

<https://tinyurl.com/Voice-Mask-Video-1> (2:03)

Video

21 FOX NEWS

Scientific evidence for mask wearing
May 22, 2020
Dr. John Campbell

<https://tinyurl.com/Voice-Mask-Video-2> (22:00)

Video

22 University of California San Francisco

Still Confused About Masks? Here's the Science
Behind How Face Masks Prevent Coronavirus
By Nina Bai, June 26, 2020

<https://tinyurl.com/Voice-Mask-Video-3> (5:01)

Video

23 NPR.org

Yes, Wearing Masks Helps. Here's Why -
NPR

Mary Godoy (6/21/2020)

<https://tinyurl.com/Voice-Mask-Video-4> (3:29)

Video

24 CNN.Com

School openings so far reveal science is
right – masking works
By Jacqueline Howard, CNN
August 12, 2021

<https://tinyurl.com/Voice-Mask-Video-5> (1:31)

Video

RESOURCE

On Social Distancing

- 25 Johns Hopkins University**
Coronavirus, Social and Physical Distancing and Self-Quarantine
Lisa Lockerd Maragakis, M.D., M.P.H.
<https://tinyurl.com/Voice-SocDist-1>
- 26 HealthyChildren.org**
COVID-19: Keep On Keeping Your Distance
By Corinn Cross, MD, FAAP
<https://tinyurl.com/Voice-SocDist-2>
- 27 Jackson Laboratory**
What is the science behind the social distancing recommendations?
March 26, 2020
Edison Liu, Jill Goldthwait
<https://tinyurl.com/Voice-SocDist-3>
- 28 AARP**
Social Distancing: What It Is, Why It's Important, How to Do It
It's not the same as a quarantine, and it's not just for high-risk populations
by Rachel Nania, *AARP*, April 13, 2020
<https://tinyurl.com/Voice-SocDist-4>
- 29 The Conversation**
Why social distancing is one of the best tools we have to fight the coronavirus
Thomas Perls, Professor of Medicine at Boston University.
<https://tinyurl.com/Voice-SocDist-Video-1> (2:18)
- 30 Mayo Clinic**
COVID-19: Why social distancing, having a personal plan is important
Deb Balzer
March 13, 2020
<https://tinyurl.com/Voice-SocDist-Video-2> (2:00)

Video

Video

Endnotes

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Cambridge English Dictionary.

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