

WHOLENESS DURING A TIME OF UNCERTAINTY

Flattening the Curve of Thought Viruses, Thought Marauders, and Anxiety

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HERE'S THE ISSUE

Our concerns about the coronavirus threat to our local and global communities are in the foreground of our experience. Before Covid-19, we were burdened with the political situation, international issues, climate change, and the economy. We were already primed for stress. But now, more than ever, this unfolding crisis—where loss occurs daily—the palpable collective experience is a devastating embodiment of stress and sorrow.

As we try to wrap our heads around these issues, we can go into fight-flight mode, where our systems are on high alert. With that, our perceptions can subtly or severely shift; our problem-solving part of our brain can change, that can lead to an exaggerated sense of doom, feel uneasy to the point of helplessness and hopelessness, or feel panicky, anxious, and overreact to situations. This leads to preoccupation with what-ifs, catastrophizing, and negatively futurizing, which can lead to loss of sleep and decrease in energy to function normally.

When we are out of focus, we impact our family members, friends, community, and the world at large, by what we think, what we say, and how we act, and *thought viruses* can add to the challenges we are dealing with, and can counteract intended positive outcomes. Yes, this is a global experience.



This process can compromise our immune systems by wearing down our natural defenses, exactly when we need to be centered, balanced, healthy, and resistant to viruses and bacteria, and make clear choices in our lives. This natural response that most of us on some level experience can be likened to situational trauma that needs to be proactively attended to.

WHAT CAN WE DO?

We can become aware of our responses and use easy, proven approaches to bulwark our commitment to get through this current situation intact and whole. Following various health organizations' recommendations for dealing with the coronavirus of course, goes without saying. Reach out for professional help if necessary. Many therapists, health practitioners and consultants (including myself) offer phone and online consultations, to help alleviate anxious thoughts related to coronavirus.

WHY A RUNNING LIST?

This compiled list will serve to reiterate and galvanize what you are already familiar with and add new practical possibilities to your equanimity toolbox!

This list is intended to support your efforts toward wellness and to direct your focus toward mental and emotional balance, which in turn, positively impacts even people you don't even know. These practices are to *support a healthy mindset to build resilience and optimism, and to increase wellness practices*. This will also be posted on my website, micheleroushphd.com. If you have any questions, please contact me for clarification. I'll be providing more information on each of these suggestions each week, so hold on to this list.

WHAT TO DO FIRST...

- ***Make a commitment to health, well-being, and vitality*** as your ongoing well-formed process. Solidify your commitment by writing a short statement down on Post-It Notes and placing them strategically in your environment. For example, "I commit to and have ongoing optimal health, wellness, and longevity." This is an approach to target a focused state. Even if you do not have evidence that the statement is true, you are working to get alignment with your deeper levels of consciousness to follow a trajectory toward health and resiliency. Repetition is the key here.
- ***Take action daily***, not just to defend against a virus, which is imperative, but build your immune system up as a life practice. Of course, get adequate sleep and exercise, and practice relaxation techniques. Drink quality water; eat organic whenever possible and take supplements.
- ***Realize that optimal health is an integral process***. We are systems, and layers of factors contribute to health and well-being individually and collectively. Make sure that you develop an overarching belief in your ability to organize those factors optimally to increase immunity and overcome illness quickly, develop and maintain health as a natural ongoing state of being throughout your life.

- ***Pay attention to rhythms and patterns.*** We are in and out of health all of the time. There is a rhythm to the health-illness-health cycle that may or may not be connected to the larger environmental cycles. Our natural defenses generally work to resolve health-related issues. We need to collaborate with all parts of ourselves to be in harmony and alignment, so that we can make viable healthy choices in thinking, feeling, doing, and believing.
- ***Realize that there is a health continuum or spectrum that is subject to change through your health choices.*** Even if you are experiencing symptoms, this does not mean that you are completely unhealthy, or that you won't get well. Continue to find ways to add to your health resources. Follow not only medically and scientifically proven guidelines but listen to your intuition—that gut feeling or internal voice that can lead you to right choices for your particular body.
- ***Shore up your belief system.*** I highly recommend the classic NLP book, *Beliefs, Pathways to Health & Well-Being* (1991). It provides a clear approach to using beliefs to support health. If you have one book to read this year, read this one. It will help you understand why the other strategies on this list are helpful. I also recommend Bruce Lipton's book, *The Biology of Belief*.

THOUGHTS AND EMOTIONS

1. ***Think encouragingly without being in denial,*** using counterexamples of health. For example, my great-grandmother raised five daughters (family originally from Sligo, Ireland), in San Francisco during the height of the Spanish flu epidemic. My mother was born in an SF hospital December 1918, after the flu broke out in September of that year. Hospitals were full. Not one family member had symptoms or caught the flu even though San Francisco was hit very hard with the illness. This healthy thought doesn't take away the seriousness of coronavirus but does provide a refreshing thought in place of anxious thoughts. So, catch your *thought marauders* and replace with encouraging thoughts.
2. ***Understand generalizations*** when you are worried about one thing and it comes out in another area of your life. Our minds are very creative. A person can be worried about coronavirus, but all of a sudden, that transitions into, for example, a fear of driving, fear of accidents, fear of flying, elevators, fear of heights, fear of not having enough, fear of people. Notice any tendency to overgeneralize a specific fear. Hoarding toilet paper is an example. Notice if your fear turns into anger, rage, or impatience. Acknowledge this as a reaction and resume to a more resourceful state.
3. ***Work with mental and emotional stockpiling.*** I'm not talking about hoarding toilet paper. This is where fear and leakages accumulate. It's like being a collector, not of stamps or coins, but of negative or catastrophic thoughts, which can create much stress. Separate the pile. Write them down separately. Prioritize the list. Imagine putting the list in separate boxes, neatly on a shelf. Promise to spend time with one item at a time per day. Use other techniques and pro-

cesses here to shift their saliency, or value in your perspective. Take a methodical approach and be curious about how you can shift these fears, dilute them, or eliminate them. They can be resourceful in that your fears are letting you know what to attend to.

4. ***Develop a relationship with the part of you that feels weak or overwhelmed***, that part of yourself that may be preoccupied with worry or fear if you are in a vulnerable category, such as being an older adult or have chronic health conditions. Certainly, it's important to take extra precautions in your health regimen. But a part within us can create exaggerated perceptions of vulnerabilities, which can impact our physiological response. Take mental hygiene action. Just name that part, "vulnerable part." Observe how it makes you feel. Sit with that perception. Have compassion for yourself; that you have been subject to a type of internal tyranny. Have compassion for the misguided part whose positive intention might be to protect you. Notice how it can wane, dilute, or disappear after sitting with it and being curious about it, and not try to change it. Often, it will change itself. If you want to change it, see if you can disconnect the thought, image, or feeling from whatever vulnerability you might have. As this 'thought marauder' reduces in value consider that you might be vulnerable under specific conditions but are essentially whole. Redirect your thinking to see yourself in the future as robust, healthy and even stronger than before this crisis, by not only practicing mental hygiene, but by incorporating an array of health-related actions. Be sure to acknowledge and encourage communication with the tyrannical part and collaborate to rename and reassign that part to be in service of you in a positive and affirming way.

5. ***Visualize***. Take five minutes in the morning and before bed to create a strong visualization/movie of yourself maintaining health and well-being, in-time and through-time, all the way through your lifetime and lifeline, thriving in all domains. This will help you make healthy choices and decisions by building your intuition of what to avoid and what to do to stay healthy. It activates your motivation to maintain health and builds confidence and trust in your health choices. If you are sick, use visualization to address the illness. Access the process of antibodies working in your system to overcome virus and bacteria in the body. See the **References** section below for animated YouTube videos of antibodies to apply to your visualization.

6. ***Embody a wholeness resource state***. The COACH State was developed by Robert Dilts, and is used to be present, connected, and focused. Practice this regularly. The acronym stands for:

C = **Centered**. Stand with legs shoulder-width apart and breathe into your belly.

O = **Open**. Be open to possibilities and ideas. Breathe into your chest and open your attention toward your whole body and your surrounding space.

A = **Aware, Alert, Awake**. Feel the three-dimensional volume of your body. Expand awareness to the space below your feet, above your head, behind you, in front of you, to your left and to your right.

C = **Connected**. Feel connected to yourself and to your purpose. Connect inwardly (including your head, heart, belly and feet) and outwardly (to Earth through your feet; to the cosmos through the top of your head, and to the environment around you). Feel

both being whole and being part of something larger than you.

H = **Holding**. Hold whatever is happening from a state of resourcefulness and curiosity.

Imagine projecting a sense of calm, confidence and curiosity into the space (holding environment) you sense around you.

BODY

1. ***Breathe***. Practice breath cycles 2-3x daily, or when you feel stressed. Dr. Andrew Weil and Stanislav Grof have been teaching the benefits and process of breathwork for years. Additionally, Pranayama is part of the yogic practices that increase integral health and has been using breathwork for thousands of years. It activates the vagus nerve to increase a sense of calm, giving you a parasympathetic response. Overall it positively impacts respiratory, cardiovascular, cardiorespiratory and autonomic nervous systems, “optimizing physiological parameters that appear to be associated with health and longevity, and that may extend to disease states.” (Russo, Santarelli, & O’Rourke, 2017).
2. ***Hydrate***. Pure water has so many benefits and I urge you to go to the link, below, to read a short article on how it is helpful. (McIntosh, 2018). Hydrating is one of the most important things that we can do to keep our internal organs healthy, and I’ve noticed with myself that drinking pure water positively changes my state. I feel, see and hear more clearly, instantaneously. Drinking 6-8 glasses of water is something that we have control over, and it certainly makes a difference.
3. ***Participate in qigong, tai chi, yoga, dance, walking, running***. Keeping active is vital. Qigong and yoga have been used for thousands of years as practices that optimize energy within the body system. Qigong, yoga and mindful walking coordinate breath, movement, and meditative states, and thereby provide attunement and entrainment of the body and mind, offering harmony, tranquility and serenity. It positively affects mood and relieves exhaustion and tension (Posadzki, Parekh & Glass, 2010). The mindfulness component of qigong (and tai chi), creates more benefits than from aerobic exercise. Multiple studies throughout the years have proven that qigong positively affects mood, reduces anxiety, depression and quality of sleep (Abbott & Lavretsky, 2014). Lee Holden, a master qigong practitioner, is currently offering for free an online qigong program called Immunity Emergency Kit. The link is listed below in References. I highly recommend it.

SPIRIT

1. ***Practice prayer daily***, if you pray. Read spiritual or inspiring books that give you hope and that are uplifting. Provide a time to internally center yourself and develop a sense of trust that there is something bigger than yourself that is friendly, loving, protective, and wants the best for you. Use the COACH State during this time. Pray for enhanced faith, harmony, strength, balance, protection, intervention/intercession in helping yourself, family, communi-

ties and the world to heal.

2. **Connect wiith nature.** Nature is nourishing and connects us with that which is greater than ourselves. Sunlight is healthy in reasonable doses, helping us absorb vitamin D. Fresh air, working in the garden, and being exposed to positive life processes and dirt are calming and healthy for the immune system. Research in this area is also pointing to decreased inflammation. Find a way to be in nature for a minimum of 15 minutes per day. If you can't get out, tend your houseplants.

3. **Practice meditation/mindfulness.** Observe your thoughts, feelings, and associated body sensations, and be accepting and present with them. Allow fear to emerge. Don't be afraid of your fear; sit with it, notice how it changes when you give it space while you consciously notice. Fear, doubt and anxiety are part of the process that can be used to redirect yourself toward your health commitment. A free online app is *Insight Timer* which has about 40,000 different free meditations and mindful processes.

4. **Use focused attention.** It can be calming to focus on one object. Mandalas have been used for thousands of years for this purpose. You can use a simple blank circle, or a complex Tibetan mandala. Make or color your own. Just focus, relax, and breathe for 5 to 15 minutes. If your attention moves away from the object, simply bring it back.

WORDS AND SUCH

1. **Repeat slogans**—very short, motivational statements that are easy for your unconscious to support—to support your health commitment. It stops the urge to overthink, and address incongruence, or a sense of uncertainty. You will find that you will come up with viable and creative slogans to being and staying well. These assist you when you might want to do something (go to an indoor concert) that may not be a healthy choice. During that choice point, you might repeat, "Health is primary." Regarding making a healthy choice, you might reinforce your decision by saying, "This is an easy choice."

2. **Use affirmations.** Create positive and nourishing imagery and statements for your well-being and the well-being of your family and friends, colleagues, community, and the world. Make an internal picture that is big and bright, with smiling, humor and laughter. Expand positive statements to include those people that you don't resonate with: "Yes, I wish them well too." Repeat to yourself, "I have a powerful immune system that keeps me healthy."

3. **Shift your thinking from "I-me" to "us-we."** If the time of coronavirus has taught us anything, it is that we are all connected. Notice when you use the *I-me* frame, and exchange for *us-we*. This broadens our perspective and is a way to hold grace and kindness for ourselves as well as others. It helps us help others in a collective manner. Use *us-we*—for affirmations, inquiry, and slogans. Notice how this affects you.

4. **Apply inquiry** as a powerful approach to transforming anxious thoughts. Notice what you say when you are in a state of contraction, then ask a question that relates to your anxious

thought. Turn the thought into a problem-solving context. For example, with “I can’t cope with being isolated,” shift the sentence into, “How do people thrive in a contained environment over a period of time?” How can I thrive in this situation?” Just saying the words creates hope and curiosity, which helps expand what is possible for you.

CHARTING AND TRACKING

1. **Use a Wellness Wheel** to visually track your life areas that need bolstering. This provides reassurance that there are many areas of your life that support your ongoing health and well-being, and visually indicates the areas that you need to be more proactive in. The Wellness Workbook, 2nd Edition, Travis & Ryan (1981) popularized the wheel and the Wellness Inventory. This is still relevant today.
2. **Commit to regular journaling.** Journaling is meditative, creative, and healing. There are many books written on how to journal, but the most important thing is to let that which is inside flow out of your head, down your arm, and out the fingers onto paper or on a document. It is freeing and calming. Journaling can be expressed through mind-mapping and drawing as well.

ART

1. **Engage in art, coloring, and music.** Using the right brain through these enjoyable activities is not only satisfying and stimulating but is very healthy. The right brain is creative, but it also is the part that processes emotion, compared with the left brain, which is more cognitively oriented. These activities can help reduce depressed and anxious states. Art therapy is process oriented, and not concerned with the finished product, so it isn’t about having a special talent. The idea is to gain insight from your creative piece and express yourself. Notice which pieces you make generate a feeling of balance.
2. **Watch uplifting films and read good literature.** Inspiring classic movies and literature are great. No doomsday subjects but rather adventures. I’m in awe of the Star Trek series, Indiana Jones, and Firefly/Serenity series or anything by Joss Whedon, and Laurie R. King. The message to take away is: Life is complicated, exciting, challenging—but we have the resources when we work together. Resilience is actually fun. Don’t get stuck; keep on keeping on by being flexible and not expecting life to be a piece of cake. Choose film and literature that make you feel good.

SMALL ACTIONS FOR BIG RESULTS

1. **Moderate your access to media** when it interferes with your commitment to health. Following the news can be addictive. The sympathetic nervous system (fight/flight) can be not

only aroused but can constantly need more reinforcements to maintain a sense of false energy and sense of control. You already know that coronavirus is a serious condition, and you know what to do to take care of yourself. Avoid overly vigilant media watching, and check in with news reports from CDC one time per day.

2. **Use the 3 to 1 ratio.** For every negative, threatening, scary, or overwhelming news item you see or read, commit to three positive items, again, not to minimize the issues, but to expand your model of the world, which includes a tremendous amount of positivity.
3. **Use the Law of 10.** If you experience a sense of being scattered or overwhelmed, practice chunking down your activities. Anxious thoughts can stop us from taking care of the mundane parts of our lives. But they have to be done, and they can give us a sense of accomplishment and relief. If you're straightening your home or office, pick up 10 items, then come back for another 10 later. Things get taken care of by small, continuous attention to items.
4. **Look up, smile, and laugh.** Looking up into the extrapersonal space actually creates states of positivity and even religious experience, meditative states, and states of creativity (Previc, 2009; Ellard, 2016). So—take advantage of this neurological process. Smiling actually lifts the facial muscles, which communicate to the brain to feel good. And laughter releases pent-up energy, stimulates the body, and releases feel-good chemicals.

CONNECTING

1. **Seek out models—exemplars** of people who cope with uncertainty, change, and perilous situations. Some people seem to be born with the optimistic, chill gene! Do not compare your current state with anyone. Rather, notice what they say, what they do, their body language, and words they use. I have a long-time friend who is a high school teacher. He inspires his students and anyone who is lucky enough to know him. He is absolutely exuberant about life and is the best authentic re-framer of circumstances that I've ever met. Positivity is contagious, so notice and connect with others and incorporate some of their thoughts, beliefs, words, actions and gestures. It is fun and can be learned and applied.
2. **Be a channel of healing energy.** Steve Nobel has many YouTube videos that have a New Age orientation, and I find them to be different than what I usually listen to. Try him out to see if he resonates with you. He uses symbolic language to connect people to something beyond themselves and he gives a different perspective on the cosmos. By listening to him over time, even though I don't share his map of the world, I've found his guided meditations to be mostly about expanding our natural healing energy to include others and the environment.
3. **Reach out to others.** You are not alone. Most people have some level of anxiety right now. Share your thoughts, feelings and sensations with others, and actively listen to them without judgment. Problem solve together. Commit to positive reinforcement for each other. Use mastermind or teamwork processes to increase optimal wellness and positive mindset.

4. *Practice and share forgiveness, gratitude, and love.* Actively wish the best for everyone. For now, more than ever before, we are reminded of the preciousness of life, and of us being part of the greater pattern. Being proactive by using this running list will help you and will help others as well to address the needs of *I-me*, as well as the *us-we*. Being resilient means to find ways to be flexible and responsive; to ignite the inner spark or drive to meet life's demands, no matter what the circumstances, and to thrive. With *us-we*, we create a resilient world beyond ourselves.



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