

Learning to Rest in Uncertainty.

How are you coping with all this uncertainty? Lockdown is lifted –Oh no it isn't! You can now have a holiday in Spain or France – Oh no you can't! I must admit that I am getting pretty tired of all this 'not-knowing'. Thankfully, I am finding some really helpful strategies for coming to terms with it.

The human brain is designed to hate uncertainty because it has evolved to protect us from physical danger. Clearly, not being able to see what was just around the corner could have been catastrophic for a hunter gatherer about to unknowingly bump into a dangerous wild beast lurking just out of sight. So our ancestors' brains evolved to send danger signals whenever the immediate future was unknown and therefore potentially lethal.

Unfortunately, even though modern life is so incredibly safe compared to ancient times, we have inherited that hyper-vigilant brain that will not let us be completely at ease unless we feel confident that we can control our immediate future. Then along comes a world-wide pandemic and with it ever-changing rules about what we can and cannot do and the wonderful plans we had for 2020 were all blown to smithereens. No wonder rates of anxiety, depression and frustration are soaring all around the world.

We can rant and rail as much as we like about how awful it feels to no longer be in charge of our own destiny and about how badly our government is handling the pandemic, but complaining like mad will only add to our stress levels. When we rant and rave for a while, we do feel temporarily energised and self-righteous, but researchers have recently discovered that expressing anger really is not good for us because it simply reinforces the 'anger pathways' in our brain and thus leaves us open to becoming more and more angry as time goes by.

So, rather than constantly giving into the big temptation to have a rant about how badly or stupidly others, particularly politicians, are behaving at the moment, maybe we could focus our intention instead on cultivating our capacity to rest calmly in the midst of chaos and uncertainty?

How can we do that? Simple! All we need to do is to sit comfortably with a straight spine and open front (*definitely* no need to try and sit in a full lotus pose) and just watch our in-breath and out-breath for a while. As we do this simple meditation, we embrace all our thoughts, feelings and bodily sensations in unconditional friendliness and compassion for the part of ourselves that may be in pain or in dis-tress of one kind or another.

I have been practising this mindfulness meditation online with top tutors from the Mindfulness Association UK for over five months straight now and I can definitely see the benefits of this grounded type of meditating. I have always been someone who preferred to be lost in my thoughts than aware of my bodily sensations and I definitely used to find my first meditation teacher's grounding meditations quite boring. But since mid-March I have noticed that being more aware of the sensations of anxiety in various parts of my body, but

particularly my jaw, has helped me to soften around my anxiety, to comfort and soothe my anxious self and to open up to many beautiful moments of inner peace beyond all anxious thoughts and feelings.

Now I have been practising different types of meditation for over 30 years, and I am not suggesting that doing a short mindfulness meditation now and then will cure your long-standing anxiety or tendency to become frustrated or incensed with the world around you. But I am claiming that if you find the motivation to practise mindfulness regularly whilst paying particular attention to bathing yourself in unconditional friendliness and kindness, you will have more and more moments of inner peace and joy popping up in your daily life even in the midst of collective panic and chaos.

It is so instinctive and easy to say an angry or anxious 'No!!' when life seems to be dealing us a rotten hand. But in my experience, if we can learn to say a deep down 'Yes!' to whatever is happening in our life, even if our personality-self is screaming 'No!', we will discover totally unexpected blessings in the strangest of places.

If a psychic had told me at the beginning of the year that instead of going to Assisi four times in 2020 to meditate in the amazing energy there, I would stay at home and take an intensive online training course in mindfulness meditation, I would have told them they were nuts. But lo and behold this is how my life has weirdly turned out and I can definitely see that it has been a great blessing rather than a tragedy. Not only have I learnt some wonderful new meditation techniques, I have also made some lovely new friends on Zoom.

Of course, I still miss my old friends and my weekly tai chi classes and I definitely miss Assisi. But life is full of unexpected loss, and once we have grieved that loss, can we accept it and then simply look back with heartfelt gratitude for what we had, without trying to cling onto something we can no longer have? Then maybe we will be able to dwell more fully in the present moment with heartfelt gratitude for all the new blessings in our life that have miraculously replaced the ones that no longer exist for us.

By the way, you definitely do not have to practise any kind of formal meditation to cultivate an unconditional acceptance of what is happening to you day by day. Whenever you notice that you are resisting your current reality, you can just pause, take one or two deep relaxing breaths, and then say an unconditional 'Yes!' to whatever you are experiencing.

It may take some time and effort before you notice that your saying 'Yes' to life unfolding in the strangest of ways is having a positive effect on your overall well-being. But saying 'Yes!' to reality is always so much better than insisting that reality has to change before you can be happy, because as Byron Katie has so wisely pointed out, doing that is just like trying to teach a cat to bark.

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