

Protect Your Mind and Your Body Will Follow

You cannot be in fear and well-being at the same time. It is one or the other. (Alan Cohen)

The above quote may sound like common sense, but its implications are profound, and this month I would like to explore them with you in the light of the ongoing Covid 19 pandemic.

The world in which we now have to live is becoming more and more surreal. Shops, pubs and restaurants may now be re-opening after a long lockdown. However, the 'new normal' is anything but normal, as some shops require customers to wear masks, public loos are closed, and in some clothes shops, we are not even permitted to try on any clothes for goodness sake!

I know that businesses are trying to reassure customers that they are safe to venture out once again, but I seriously wonder whether all of these bizarre new safety rules are fuelling Corona phobia rather than calming it down. Whenever we become too concerned and anxious over our physical health, we inadvertently flood our body with stress hormones. These stress hormones then weaken every cell within us and thus endanger our long term health and well-being.

If each time you step out of your front door, you are now anxiously telling yourself that you are at risk from an invisible, but deadly, virus that is lurking on the surface of everyone and everything around you, you are placing your body under a lot of stress. Your risk of catching a nasty illness is then actually increased rather than decreased by your constant anxiety.

I am certainly not against all measures to protect ourselves from Covid 19. I am definitely washing my hands more often and much more thoroughly than I did in the past. However, I absolutely refuse to believe that the world out there is now a terribly dangerous place. I am quite happy to go shopping and to pass by people in the street without worrying whether or not they are virus carriers. (a horrible way to think about our beloved brothers and sisters on Planet Earth)

Normal human beings are notoriously bad at calculating risk. For example, so many people are frightened of flying on the grounds that the plane might crash, but the very same people take a much greater risk every time they go somewhere by car and yet car journeys do not frighten them in the slightest. Now we have all been scared by constant government health warnings about this new virus which has tragically killed many elderly individuals with pre-existing serious health problems and a very few younger people too. Children however are more likely to be struck by lightning than to become dangerously ill with Covid 19 and yet many parents are still seriously worried that their children will not be safe if they go back to school.

If we are ever going to get back to a life in which we spontaneously hug our friends and loved ones and go out to enjoy all the incredible range of life-enhancing activities that we were enjoying before March 2020, we are going to have to put most of our fears aside. If we cannot do that, we are going to have to bravely push through our anxiety about the outside world before we become frozen in a Zoom world that may be risk free, but not as fulfilling as meeting up with people in real life.

I am afraid that the longer this weird 'new normal' goes on, the more many of us will become like long-term prisoners who become so accustomed to their extremely limited environment that the spaciousness of non-confinement freaks them out.

There have been many blessings during this long lockdown. For example, the neighbours in our small estate have all been fantastically creative in transforming our alley ways into beautiful, clutter-free outdoor spaces filled with plants and bunting. I like to believe that the improvement to our local environment mirrors much larger improvements to the environment, as human beings simply slowed down for a while and gave nature a bit of a break.

I am certainly not suggesting that we should now all rush out to shop like mad in order to boost the economy - as some commentators have suggested. However, I do think it is time to ask ourselves why we are still so reluctant to go round to a friend's house for a cup of tea or a glass of wine. The risk of catching anything from doing this is now infinitesimal. But we have been so programmed to fear the virus that we may need to push ourselves beyond our new comfort zones for a while until we get used to our regained freedom of movement.

I know which fear I now have to push through; my fear of not being able to breathe whilst wearing a mask on public transport. I know that if I want to lead a 'normal' life in the near future, I will have to get over my claustrophobic panic when I put a mask over my mouth and nose. What about you? We are all afraid of something in life, but we can all be brave and push ourselves to overcome our fears step by step.

It takes 21 days for a new habit to become firmly embedded in our psyche. We have all now acquired a range of new habits during a lockdown that has lasted for over 90 days. So we do need to be kind to ourselves and others as we slowly overcome any fears we may have about returning to a more normal way of life. By all means let us leave behind some bad old habits, such as buying too many clothes, or eating too many cakes and pastries in coffee shops (well those are two of my bad old habits. You can insert two of your own here..... But let us not be cowed by Corona panic into giving up those things in life that really matter such as hugging our friends and loved ones closely to our physical hearts.

Let us also worry less about which 'bubbles' we are now permitted to create in order to meet up 'safely' with friends and loved ones, and focus more on creating bubbles of loving kindness and compassion. This is so simple to do. We just sit quietly for a while, tune into

our heart and generate some waves of loving kindness for ourselves. We then gradually extend these waves of loving kindness to our loved ones, our neighbours, our fellow citizens and then to all sentient beings living with us on this beautiful planet.

Let us then imagine that these bubbles of loving kindness and compassion merge together to create one planet wide bubble of really positive energy that melts away the paranoia around Covid 19 leaving us free to live our lives with ease and joy.

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