

For Chaotic Times

Guided Meditation

Date / Time:

So far today, have you brought kind awareness to your:

☐ Thoughts? ☐ Heart? ☐ Body? ☐ None

To begin this Meditation, please bring kind awareness to

- why you chose this topic
- how your belly, chest, and head each feel when you reflect on this topic
- the emotions that you can associate with these visceral feelings
- the positive or negative impact of any stories you believe in regarding this topic
- the fact that many others are feeling similarly about this topic as you
- how you might feel with increased awareness around this topic
- when you can apply increased mindfulness to this topic in your day-to-day life



PURPOSE / EFFECTS

I'm writing this worksheet a few months into the coronavirus pandemic. It's a time when pretty much everything about our lives has been turned upside down.

Most of our usual reference points that we took for granted are disrupted, from our jobs, to our favorite restaurants, to time with the people we're closest to. Many places around the world that have been more susceptible to major disruptions from natural or political upheavals. But, for most of us in Western societies, this is very unfamiliar territory.

So, I wanted to share a mindfulness tool you can use in times like this. Because, while the coronavirus is unique and extreme, difficult external situations we can't change will happen to all of us sooner or later. It could be something very personal, like the loss of a job or a loved one, or an environmental crisis we feel helpless to change.

This worksheet offers a practice you can use when there is something unpleasant happening that you can't control. Instead of looking outside to feel better or safer, you can try something different and turn within. You can look for a place inside of you that is ok, a place of quietness and strength that isn't dependent on any external factors.

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INSTRUCTIONS

This is based on a traditional mindfulness practice. The purpose is to make your usual unconscious stream of thoughts, emotions and sensations conscious.

The way we feel and act is often hijacked by thoughts and feelings that happen so quickly we're not even aware of them. All of a sudden we're upset or anxious or angry in a situation that needs our attention and care.

FIRST STEP • NOTICING AND NAMING

- Make yourself comfortable, either sitting or lying down, and close your eyes.
- Let your attention gently scan your body for physical sensations, like cold or heat, or tightness or relaxation.
- Then, start to notice any thoughts or emotions that may be passing through.
- Whenever you notice a thought or an emotion, you've already started the practice. You noticed. And once you notice, name what you noticed with one word, "Thinking" or "Feeling" or "Sensations."
- It's really important to notice any judgement or criticism of your efforts. Just add one of the labels, congratulate yourself for noticing and then watch for whatever comes next.

This seemingly simple step of naming and noticing creates just a bit of space between you and your experiences. You notice that thoughts and emotions begin and, if you let them be, they end. And you create a place where you can choose to follow them or not.

SECOND STEP • ALL THOUGHTS ARE JUST THOUGHTS

The next part step is to do your best to notice and name all thoughts as just thoughts, and all emotions as just emotions. A thought about forgetting to pick up dinner on the way home and a thought about your loss of income during the pandemic are just noticed and named. They're both just thoughts that come from somewhere and then disappear again.

Or if you remember the irritation at your partner not letting you know they'd be home late is treated just the same as feeling lonely because you can't see your family. They're both just emotions that come for somewhere and then disappear again.

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So, what good does this practice do? It will help you notice the acts of thinking and feeling themselves, instead of the content of individual thoughts and feelings. Thoughts and feelings, of all sizes and shapes, from mild to overwhelming, come and go.

Try it. You may find it a relief to see that the hundreds of thoughts you have each day are just one thing: thinking. And your thinking isn't you.

LAST STEP • NOTICING THE ONE WHO NOTICES

This step is hidden in the first two. When you notice and name, and do your best to treat all your thoughts and emotions the same, you begin to sense a part of you that is not in the thought. It is aware of your experiences, able to witness them, but not caught in them. There is a place of clear, compassionate witnessing of everything that's happening.

If you're someone who is sometimes overcome by troubling thoughts and emotions this really is a relief. With a bit of practice, this witnessing awareness becomes more familiar and has a kind of draw to it. There's a calm and peace to this place that is aware of your thoughts and feelings, but isn't part of them.

CONCLUSION

So the two wings of this practice can help you in challenging times. The first wing will show you how to have a lighter touch on your thoughts and feelings, to let them move rather than holding on too tight. And the second wing brings you into connection with a quiet, always present space of calm inside you that can be your oasis in hard times. And the more you practice, the more accessible that space will become.

REFLECTIONS

Did you notice a particular thought or feeling that was hard to label and move on from? Were you able to sense the witnessing space in you that noticed and named what was happening?