

What COVID-19 Can Teach Us About Mindfulness

The power of presence in the face of uncertainty.

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Source: 'Zoe Weil'

Last year, the organization I work for was [gifted](#) “A Year of [Mindfulness](#)” course. It was deeply meaningful for our staff, board, and faculty.

As the course was winding down, we implemented a practice at our weekly staff meetings, and now we begin our check-ins by answering two questions:

1. How are you feeling emotionally and physically?
2. How are you bringing mindfulness to work?

These questions have been very powerful for our team. We connect with one another and address each other’s challenges with [empathy](#). This not only builds a supportive team, but also allows us to identify feelings that may potentially impede strategic thinking and action so that we stay clear, efficient, positive, and collaborative.

During the [COVID-19](#) pandemic, such questions can serve a very important purpose. They offer the opportunity to bring our [attention](#) to our mental and physical states and to

mindfully observe in order to be less reactive and more responsive in the face of such uncertain and frightening times.

I invite you to take a moment right now to ask and answer these questions for yourself.

1. How are you feeling emotionally and physically in this moment?
2. How are you bringing mindfulness to your mental and physical state each day so that you can make wise, responsible, caring choices during this disease outbreak?

If you're like me, these questions will be helpful for creating equilibrium and equanimity during a time when you may feel out of control.

If you are someone who hasn't been affected by closures, work changes, or loss of income, life might be proceeding largely as usual, even if things aren't quite normal. But you may still be experiencing dread about what's coming.

For others, life is anything but usual. You may be a college student who's been told to leave campus, but you can't afford a ticket home. You may be a parent whose child's school has been closed, but you still have to go to work. You may have a job in an industry dependent upon people gathering, and with social distancing your livelihood is on the line. You may be elderly and relying on a [retirement](#) account that has plunged in value. You may be an overwhelmed healthcare worker on the frontline of care. And you may be coughing, feverish, and scared that you have a case of COVID-19 yourself.

You may also be someone in relatively secure circumstances whose empathy for others is causing you great apprehension.

Panic and dread can accompany uncertainty, and these are among the most uncertain times that many people have ever experienced in their lifetimes.

So how can the questions above help you?

They won't stop the spread of COVID-19. They won't ensure your income remains stable. They won't make groceries (and, yes, toilet paper) appear on the shelves of your local supermarket. They won't give you the hug you need during a time of social distancing.

But they can help in these important ways:

- *Noticing* that your heart is racing with [fear](#) can give you enough distance from that fear to take some deep breaths and find an outlet that soothes, calms, and interrupts the [anxiety](#). This outlet might include contacting a loved one, listening to a favorite song, going for a walk outside, doing something creative, or exercising.

- *Bringing awareness* to the source of your fear allows you to take whatever steps are possible to address it. Is your fear amorphous, fueled by uncertainty, or is it specific? If it's amorphous, try one of the suggestions above. If it's specific, write down concrete actions you can take. Problem-solve. Obviously, this is easier said than done, but [thinking like a solutionary](#) is proactive, leading to better mental and situational outcomes.
- *Planning mindfully* for the future by staying in the present moment helps you to make good decisions now to better prepare for future uncertainties. If your mind begins [catastrophizing](#) about your uncertain future, bring it back to the present, to what you are doing in the moment, to your breath, and to your thoughtful planning.
- *Shifting your attention* from “me to we” will help you immeasurably. If you are healthy and relatively secure, focus on what you can do for others to relieve not just their imagined dread, but their very real hardships. This might mean bringing food and essentials to leave outside the door of sick, elderly, or immune-compromised neighbors or calling people to connect during this time of [social isolation](#).

Mindfulness is not a panacea. It will not protect you from COVID-19 or an uncertain world. What it will do is allow you to move through uncertain times with more grace, calm, spaciousness, and [generosity](#) of spirit. Collectively, these will pave the way for wiser choices and more secure communities.

The other side of this pandemic can be a more generous, kind, socially-conscious, community-minded society. Be mindful of this possibility and lean into its unfolding.