

Keeping a Cool Head and Warm Heart in Challenging Times

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The spread of COVID-19 around the world is being more than matched by the spread of information. Words that we had never or rarely encountered have become mainstream—“coronavirus, social distancing, self-isolation, pandemic.” Other words are increasingly encountered everywhere, “unprecedented, uncertain, scary, worry and anxiety.”

Cultivating good health education by understanding the very real threats we face is very important for preventing the virus’ spread. But as we educate ourselves we’re also creating understandable fear, worry, and anxiety. This is a double-edged sword that on the one side creates an appropriate call to action and on the other can create panic, reactivity and additional problems.

Clearly we need an international coordinated public health response to the COVID-19 pandemic. But we also need another type of response at the level of our psychological well-being.

Cultivating Equanimity

Both modern psychology and ancient wisdom traditions emphasize the importance of equanimity: a quality of inner balance and steadiness that is imbued with awareness, care, and compassion. Equanimity is neither detached nor idealized. Rather it is a very real engagement with what we're facing, but in a way that enables us to see clearly the changing weather patterns of our minds and the dynamic changes in the world as the pandemic runs its course.

Equanimity helps us understand that when we recognize and allow difficult thoughts, worries and feelings—when we don't over-identify with them or cling to them—they will change and pass. We begin to understand that difficult moods and thoughts last longer when we fight them or over-identify with them. This is not about clever words or ideas. It is about an attitude of mind, and more than this, an attitude of mind that we can train and cultivate.

┆ Cultivating equanimity is a resource that can help us navigate our way through life, with all its unpredictability and uncertainty, without losing our balance or becoming lost.

Equanimity is not a quality reserved for our inner life. Our external lives, especially just now, provide much grist for the mill. The news cycle is not unfolding as we want, people aren't acting the way that we think they should, each day requires more change than we feel we can manage, we want to know what will happen next week, next month, next year, but no one knows. Cultivating equanimity is a resource that can help us navigate our way through life, with all its unpredictability and uncertainty, without losing our balance or becoming lost. Compassion enables us to do this with care both for ourselves and others.

Of course, we urgently need a vaccine and treatment for COVID-19 and our best scientists will develop them. But we also need a response at the level of the human head and heart. Words matter. As well as words such as "uncertainty, worry and social distancing" I have also noticed other words and phrases being used increasingly: "creativity, courage, care, kindness, ingenuity, appreciation, connection and values." In the same way that reducing our carbon footprint is essential to slowing climate change, cooling the fires of reactivity in these challenging times supports our well-being and the well-being of those around us. Equanimity is not a surrender of innovation or action—rather, it is a wholehearted responsiveness that values human health and human well-being. It is the steadier ground on which we can stand and meet the challenges in our lives.

Cultivating Equanimity: A Guided Mindfulness Practice to Cool the Fires of Reactivity and Find Steady Ground

Cultivating Equanimity to Find Steady Ground

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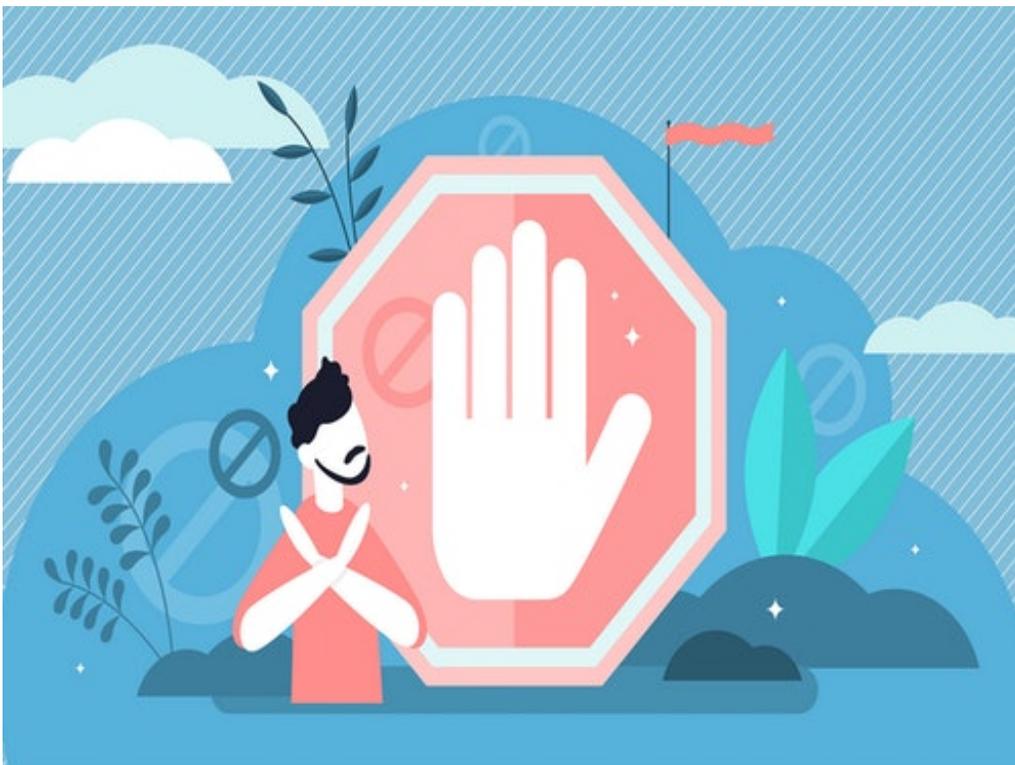
Take a few moments to steady your attention on your breath, anchoring and stabilizing your attention. Take up a posture that communicates a sense of wakefulness and dignity.

Once your attention is stable, bring to mind a mountain you know well, its base, its flanks, the way it rises up from its solid base.

Have a sense of yourself as a mountain, with a solid base where you're in contact with the ground, your body stable, and your head supported on the top of your body. Like a mountain through each day, through each of the seasons, through the years, having a sense of yourself sitting with dignity and wakefulness, your breath as your anchor, as experiences come and go, the mountain steady through it all.

As weather patterns move through, so your body and mind are steady, like a mountain as thoughts, images, bodily sensations, impulses, and emotions come and go. Open to the sense of the steadiness and enduring nature of the mountain.

During the day, bring awareness to moments of the day, as best you can, meeting everything with a recognition and allowing that is poised and balanced. Bring this same attitude, as best you can, to experiences, whether they are pleasant, unpleasant, or neutral. Recognize, allow, and embrace caring for each moment of your waking day.



Daily Practices

Rhonda Magee takes us through this simple portable mindfulness practice she uses to find calm when difficult moments arise. [Read More](#) →

- Rhonda Magee
- March 23, 2020



Daily Practices

We can support each during this health crisis by connecting with our essential goodness and compassion. [Read More](#) →

- Heather Hurlock
- March 16, 2020