

# FROM BODY TO MIND

RACHEL ROSE YOGA AND MEDITATION INSTRUCTOR IN THE MIND AND BODY DEPARTMENT AT SHA WELLNESS CLINIC TALKS NUTRITION, KEEPING FAMILY VALUES AND SUPPORTING EACH OTHER DURING THIS GLOBAL PANDEMIC

BY LINDSAY JUDGE



**T**here's no denying we are all finding ourselves in unusual situations at the moment and the world has become a very strange place. Lives have become unbalanced and many of us are unsure of the ways to deal with this time of uncertainty. What's crucial is that as well as protecting our body from this terrible disease, we look after our mind. Rachel Rose yoga and meditation instructor at SHA Wellness Clinic in Spain specialises in using yoga and meditation to heal the mind. Here we discuss ways in which we can find the perfect calm in a global storm.

#### **What are the biggest issues we can expect to face when self-isolating for a long period of time?**

The biggest issue we face is the roller coaster of emotion that most of us ride over the course of a single day. Well-founded fears about health, finances, the future and so on. But so often we are unable to do much about the very things that frighten us. There is a saying that goes "If you have a problem and there is a solution, why worry? It seems simplistic but letting go of things that you cannot control is a key step to getting to your happy place.

Remember that the biggest issues arise from the imposition of restrictions of freedom. Voluntary quarantine provokes less overall suffering and fewer long-term effects. It is the loss of liberty and control that irks us the most.

#### **Are there any techniques you can suggest to keep the mind busy when not being able to leave the house?**

Absolutely! Self-care is the key. Take care of your physical, emotional and mental health. Eat nourishing food and stick to a schedule. Let your digestive system rest between meals by avoiding snacks and don't overindulge. Take time to enjoy preparing colourful, savoury meals and eat lightly, choosing things that don't overload the digestive system, which can become sluggish when we aren't moving so much.

Thought and emotion are tightly linked. Control your thoughts by meditating and by practising conscious breathing. Use ancient techniques like yoga, Qi Gong and Tai Chi to move the body slowly and purposefully. Prayer is also a very useful tool in these trying times. Even if you don't follow a particular religion, you can pray to the higher nature of mankind, the collective goodwill of humanity or the health of Mother Earth. Practice uplifting, selfless prayer for better, brighter days, and direct it to the whole world, but remember to include yourself and your nearest and dearest.

#### **What advice can you give to those who are already suffering from mental health issues like depression and anxiety to keep positive during this time?**

It is really important to keep in touch with your healthcare provider and keep taking any prescribed medication. Unfortunately, those who suffer from depression and anxiety are at risk of their condition worsening. So, if you need your medication adjusting, your doctor or pharmacist is there for you. At all times, mindfulness meditation and breath-based movements help to calm the anxious mind and to lift the depressed mind. If you're already practising these techniques, keep going and don't get discouraged.

For those with depression, it's best to use meditative movement like yoga, rather than sitting still for long periods of time. For those with anxiety, the same advice is offered – get rid of that shaky irritability by dancing, singing and moving. Body tapping using the EFT (Emotional Freedom) technique is especially useful, as is the bee-breath, Bhramhari.

#### **How can we keep our minds busy when we are at home all day?**

It is tempting to want to keep the mind busy, but actually, we are better off with a calm mind. A busy mind jumps from thought to thought, and many of these thoughts unchain negative emotions that only make us feel worse. By cultivating a calm mind through meditation, we are able to reduce our mental load, giving way to less emotional ups and downs.

We need to keep our minds occupied with healthy, calming activities. Artistic and creative pursuits help us to feel freer and to express emotion healthily. Cooking is a wonderful skill that we can develop. We make it mindful by paying attention to the smells, textures and tastes. We can even challenge ourselves to have pure and loving thoughts in the kitchen, thus blessing the food that will nourish our bodies.

Mantra, or the repetition of a specific phrase, is a useful tool. Choose a line from a prayer, or something self-penned, and just keep repeating this phrase every time you find yourself starting to worry. Singing also lifts the spirits, so hum a little tune, or challenge yourself to learn all the words of your favourite songs, rehearsing in the privacy of your home.



#### **What advice would you give to those who are finding frictions between loved ones when spending so much time together?**

Although we love our family, too much contact can spark friction. The key here is balance. In normal life, we see our loved ones for a few hours in the evening and weekend and parents strive to spend quality time with their children. This has all been turned on its head. We are in close contact for long hours, and sometimes we all fail to find harmony.

I have observed a strange phenomenon over my years as a therapist: very often we treat those closest to us the worst. In our workplace, shouting, swearing and insulting our boss or colleagues would get us fired or demoted.

But at home, we often engage in just these things. This is something we can really work with: treat our family members with a kind of professional respect and ask the same of them. Also, keep to a schedule. Just because the whole family is at home, don't put pressure on the situation by trying to make every minute count. Let your teens sleep in if their body tells them to and make the best use of your morning by practising self-care or creating content for your work or side hustle.

With little ones, take time to play board games and card games. It is amazing how much easier it is to communicate with them when it's built around play. With your spouse, take time to reconnect physically and emotionally. Lie in bed a little longer, hold them a little closer. For men who are struggling with their loss of status as breadwinner and provider, being out of work can be especially stressful. Also, men who are not primary child carers may find the constant interruptions of little ones frustrating. Take time to understand that childcare is a big commitment and give thanks to your spouse for all those unpaid hours. For women, being shut in can generate more of what is traditionally known to be "women's work" – cooking, cleaning and childcare. This work is never-ending and can easily generate new frustrations or awaken simmering resentments. Take a clear stance and negotiate boundaries. Remember, no one "helps" anyone else in the house as it is a shared endeavour. Use neutral language with family members, asking for "collaboration" rather than help.

And finally, don't feel that you have to Marie Kondo your life, although this could be a good time to put new systems in place. If you do find yourself sorting through boxes, do so in the spirit of play. When you pull out old photos, look endearingly at them, remember the good times, maybe even pick up the phone to say hello to friends or relatives. Scrapbooking and journaling are always useful, so as you uncover those old memories, make something new, shiny and beautiful of them.

### How do we find a work/life balance?

We find work/life balance the same way that we always have – through self-discipline. It is so easy to get sucked so deeply into work commitments that we push aside our passions. Now could be the ideal time to negotiate a new work-life balance. Various studies have shown over the years that home-based workers are more productive than those based in offices. Years ago, I had to work from home when my mother got sick. In the months I was home-based, I achieved the best productivity results of my whole team.

In many ways, working from home takes away a lot of stress. The daily commute, a sandwich at the desk, all these things have been eliminated and we are left with the essence. So, create a daily schedule that leaves chunks of time for work and chunks of time for life. Don't pressure yourself into working 9-5 if you don't have to.

If you're an early bird, get up at the crack of dawn and make best use of those quiet morning hours. If you're a night owl, save your energy for late evening and work in the silence of the night. A more flexible working schedule leaves time during the day for family or hobbies.

### How do we keep our children positive when we may not necessarily be positive ourselves?

Being realistic about our situation is important. Children are not immune to fears and most are well aware that something's up. Don't hide your feelings from your kids. Try to express them in a healthy way and make sure you don't make them feel responsible for your emotional struggles. We can reassure children by saying things like “even in these uncertain times, I am still your parent and I look after you, not the other way around”. Some children may want to help you out, so let them do so by giving them age-appropriate tasks like clearing the table or making their bed.

Sometimes, more than a positive mind, we need a neutral mind. Instead of always trying to be positive, we can choose to remain just “OK”. One technique I use a lot is not believing my own thoughts. It sounds strange in these times to say “believe in yourself”, but it really works. When I get intrusive or disastrous thoughts, I listen to them, then I choose not to believe them. I say “well, maybe this will happen, but maybe not”. It is a simple method and it really works. You can use this to stay calm and transmit that calm to your kids. But remember not to bottle up your fears. It's ok to have doubts, and you can tell your kids “mummy and daddy are feeling a bit worried”. Kids are amazing detectors of hypocrisy. They can tell if you're out of sorts and will respond better if you just own up to it without being over-dramatic.



### What can we do for time outs?

It is more important than ever to manage our time effectively. If you are working at the computer, stop once an hour to get up, take a few deep breaths and get your blood moving. If you are looking after little ones, ignore your phone or tablet as much as possible when with them, but then give everyone a few minutes of screen time at regular intervals. As much as we may react against the “electronic babysitter”, sometimes parents have to put sanity first!

For everyone, I recommend using Binaural Beats (BB) music. Binaural Beats help to focus the mind by tricking the brain into hearing a tone (a beat) that isn't really there. You don't have to understand the neuroscience to benefit from this amazing study and concentration music. You just need headphones. If you are able to really concentrate on your work using BB, your hourly breaks will become even more invigorating. Or, if you need a few moments peace after listening to a little one's babble, plug in your headphones and you will immediately feel calmer.

### What advice would you give to those who are anxious about themselves or others catching the disease?

The best advice is to abide by the rules set out by the government and the local services. It is normal to worry about infection and anyone with anxiety or OCD (Obsessive-Compulsive Disorder) may find it harder. It is important to understand the real risks of infection. Do your research, but strenuously avoid conspiracy theories and fake news. Listen to reputable sources, like your local health authority, clinic or government office. If you are in the high-risk group, your fears are real, but you can't let them take over. Overall acceptance of our mortality can be helpful. After all, despite our fear of death and illness, no single person was ever born with a sign around their necks saying, “this person will live 90 years in perfect health”. This disease is like holding a mirror up to ourselves and reminding us how fragile we all are.

If you are excessively worried about catching the disease, try to understand the basis of your fear. Is it fear of suffering? Fear of not realising your dreams? Fear about leaving your family unprotected? Fear of being alone when you are weak? Once you understand the root fear, you are in a better place to work with it. Also trusting a higher power is useful at times like these. Perhaps we don't believe in anything in particular, or maybe we have lost our religion as the song says. Whatever the case, now is the time to foment trust in your own existence, that you are here for a reason and that not everything is under your control. When you release the fiction of control, you become much freer. Just like a Tokyo skyscraper is built to sway with the seismic tremors, so we have to build a strong but flexible character that bends but doesn't break in times of stress.

### What about stress-reducing techniques for those who are stressed about the virus, finances etc.?

An ancient thought related to this talks about the “Two Darts”. The first dart is the one that life throws at you, the real situation. This is often outside of your control. The second dart is the one we throw at ourselves. It is how we react to the real situation we are living in.

Stress reduction techniques work with the second dart – how we think about what is happening to us. The name says it all – we cannot totally eliminate stress, but we can reduce it. Worries about finances and liquidity are very real and it seems like help arrives very slowly from the state or lending institutions. Stocks and shares have taken a dive, meaning that many people will have to scale back their spending. This is not a fun situation and it's normal to get angry, fretful or resentful about it. One of the best pieces of advice I have ever been given is this: When you feel anger bubbling up inside you, grab a pillow and hit the sofa with it as hard as you can until you feel better. Bottling up emotions harms us, but angry outbursts hurt both us and others. It's better to get the emotion out in a safe way, then keep calm and carry on.

### What advice would you give to those who are self-isolating apart from their family?

Loneliness and depression go hand in hand. Those who are cut off from their loved ones are probably the hardest hit, especially if the illness has touched them or their inner circle. Keeping in touch via email, messages or video calls is of paramount importance. Practising loving-kindness meditation, Metta, can really help us to feel connected.

### In the UAE in particular many of us are expats and therefore worried about those back home – what advice would you give to calm the anxiety?

Again, to calm anxiety and still the restless mind, we need to breathe through it. This simply means that we observe the breath coming in and out of the body and resist the temptation to overthink the situation. There is probably little an expat can do right now, and that loss of control is very hard to deal with. If we instil calm in ourselves, we transmit that to others. Then, we can offer the best support for our families at home. Use the rational brain, refrain from delving into conspiracy theories, stick to the official advice and advise your loved ones to do the same. In times of strife, the calm, compassionate voice is much needed. Be gentle and centred, relinquish control, but stay present.



### Are there any other issues you have seen so far in this situation arising related to mental health that you would like to make readers aware of?

We need to be especially careful if we are still processing or repressing an earlier stressful episode. Anyone with PTSD (Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder) may find confinement triggering. Keep watch over your emotions and take your medication in accordance with professional advice. Another key factor is the rise in domestic violence. This truly unfortunate prediction of the early days of quarantine has played out in rising rates of abuse in the home. If you or a loved one is being abused, you must reach out.

### Who should we talk to for advice?

In these times, it is ever more important to seek professional care. A grounded approach to spirituality is important. Some New Age seekers are secretly happy about this shift and this may not be a great approach at this time, even if, maybe, we really are on the cusp of a new day. Talk to your licensed psychologist or find one who does online consultations. If you already follow a religion, your group leader is best placed to help you make sense of it all. If you have older relatives, they may have lived through war or hardship as children. Approach them for their wisdom and listen to their words.

### What is a book you would recommend?

“War and Peace” by Leo Tolstoy. This timeless book, perhaps the best book ever written, is a meticulous study of human nature with a sweeping plot and set in changing times. It is long but engaging, and just the thing for time spent at home.

### Any podcasts we should be listening to during this time?

The originator of Mindfulness meditation, Jon Kabat-Zinn, has some excellent podcasts available online. Oprah's SuperSoul Conversations are wide-ranging and interesting. 🎧