

Reflections on the “New Normal”

As we move into our second month of self-isolation here in BC, I am noticing the shift that many of us may be experiencing now: that subtle shift from the initial shock of the pandemic crisis and the adaptation it required from each of us, keeping everyone occupied, to the restlessness of waiting in the uncertainty of what comes next. This often plays out in our ego’s demand for answers, whether it be from anyone perceived to be an authority, or from ourselves – that we should be in charge of our own lives and take control. Collectively, we hear the strategies discussed on a global health level, on the world economic level, on the social policy level, on programs and services, on education, in communities..., while individually, we are all facing varying degrees of uncertainty in our own lives, which gives rise to fear and anxiety. We wonder if we will have the resilience to recover from whatever we may have lost when everything stopped and what the future holds as the weeks of self-isolation continue indefinitely.

One thing I do know as a therapist and as an older person who has been around a while is this: in this time of uncertainty what we most need to cultivate is a genuine connection with ourselves. There is nothing like a crisis to show us our vulnerability, and it is from this place of vulnerability that we have the opportunity to make this connection. At first, we might want to run from it – whether through reliance on substances or use of distractions, to “keeping busy”, to constantly being in touch with others....and having said this, I am all for maintaining social connections and indulging interests you’ve never had time to pursue. Rather, my hope is that we will spend more time in meaningful self-reflection, learn to be present with difficult emotions, and befriend ourselves no matter how we are feeling. When we can fully accept our experience, instead of fighting against it with admonitions to “be positive”, something wonderful starts to happen. Not only do we calm down, but we see how we are so much more than the feelings we have, that there is a presence within us that will lead us to the next step in our own life once we get beyond the clamour of the fearful and judgmental mind. We need the flexibility and clarity that comes with learning to live in the present, fully there for ourselves, trusting that as we do this, the next step will appear as we walk this unknown path. We will know our inner strength as we gain trust in ourselves and in our own unique process.

Admittedly, everyone is dealing with their own family circumstances, some of which perhaps do not leave much time for communing with your soul. It is a challenge sometimes to even find five minutes to simply breathe deeply and Be. (In fact I was recently in a zoom meditation group where a mom was live from her bathroom, where she was hiding from her kids – anyone relate?) My intention here is to offer encouragement on the path, to remind you that your larger self is always looking for a way in, and when you hear its guidance, life will begin to take care of itself as you follow what is “right to do” each moment.

In my conversations with people generally, I am learning that while there certainly have been major stressors and challenges this past month, there have also been personal epiphanies for them about their deepest needs. They are learning about what no longer fits for them, what they want to be able to change, how their actions have been aligning more with their values during this time, finding their creativity, connecting with their strengths, deepening their relationships, and on it goes. They are finding opportunities for personal growth amid the chaos of change and living a more authentic life.

In closing, I offer some links that can support your well-being through a practice of presence and acceptance of yourself, which extends toward others. I am also including some practical resource material. May you all be safe, may you be well, may you be happy and may you live with ease.

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<https://jackkornfield.com/> Psychologist and spiritual teacher who brought meditation practice to the west

<https://www.tarabrach.com/> Tara Brach is a psychologist and meditation teacher; useful and current guidance

<https://www.anxietycanada.com/> Lots of resources for understanding and working with anxiety.

<https://keltymentalhealth.ca/> An excellent website for mental health resources for youth

<https://www.afccnet.org/Coronavirus> A US organization which offers information and resources for separated parents

<https://www.mentalhealthfoundations.ca/> Recently updated, lots of great webinars about emotionally-focused skills

<https://lifeseminars.com/> Alison Rees now offering online parenting courses – I highly recommend her courses.