

Don't expect to Stay Calm - Stay Connected!!

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by Peter Bliss

Speaker, Author, Coach, Mindfulness Expert & Demartini Method Facilitator

Many leaders, gurus, even health "experts" are telling us to stay calm. I understand their intention but it's impossible to 'stay calm' in these turbulent times. 'Staying calm' is not the objective or the outcome.

Yes, you might have moments of calm but you'll more than likely notice moments of fear, anxiety, depression, panic, overwhelm and even aggression and guess what? These feelings and responses are normal. It's ok to be scared, it's ok to be anxious right now, it's ok to be overwhelmed, it's ok to panic, it's ok to be depressed.

The key is not to avoid these feelings of panic and fear etc. but to learn to self-regulate in the midst of all of these feelings and connect - internally. When we get scared we often orient outside of ourselves to get a sense of safety, and we look externally for the answers. But our sense of safety is not outside ourselves but inside of ourselves. Our ability to activate our sense of safety comes when we learn to activate our vagus nerve, the main component of our parasympathetic nervous system, our relax, rest and digest part of the autonomic nervous system, the system that controls our physiology. Deep down we all have this ability. To rest, to digest, to reflect, to relax.

Let's all take a deep breath right now, and initially longer out breaths to really activate the vagus nerve - it's that simple. Take a few more - right now. Deeper breaths, longer out breaths than in, initially, and then eventually balance the length of in and out breaths and you'll get a sense of balance, of connection - with self. When you learn to activate through the vagus nerve with the breath it puts the brakes on when we feel overwhelmed, anxious, depressed or we panic. So this very simple technique won't change anything "out there" or "outside" but it will change your own perception of safety inside. And the more you realise this the more you'll know with certainty that you are in control. Most of what is going on is out or your control anyway so your authentic sense of safety is an inside job. It's not what happens to you that matters it's your perception of what's happening and how you react to what's happening that really matters. And that's all an inside job. You in fact can only really control a few things - your perceptions, your decisions, your actions.....and your breath.

If you really understand and get this and practice this you'll also be activating your pre-frontal cortex, the most evolved part of your brain, and then the magic really begins. Mindfulness is, in my definition, the "science of paying attention". What mindfulness really is, is learning to "be with" all of yourself, your thoughts and feelings, "good" and "bad", "right" or "wrong" and not judging them but connecting with them authentically, on purpose in the present moment and then eventually learning to let some go and focus on the important ones to you. If you are continually activating your vagus nerve consciously and also activating your pre-frontal cortex through simple techniques like the breath, you also "over-ride" the amygdala, the stress response, the fight, flight or freeze response, the sympathetic nervous system.

Again, in these turbulent times, that's how the brain was designed, so these survival instincts and all the associated fears are completely normal. So if you're feeling anxious, overwhelmed, stressed, great, your mind and body are working perfectly. The body is always trying to get you back to balance though, a balance of sympathetic and parasympathetic, homeostasis, stability, regulation, but we misinterpret all the data and stimuli (stress, panic, anxiety, fear, depression) and judge them as "bad" and are even told to best get rid of them, without really understanding their true value as simply feedback to tell us we are out of balance. So take another few deep breaths and I'll sum up now with the real magic of learning this stuff.

When we learn to activate the most evolved part of our brain, our pre-frontal cortex (right behind the forehead) it lights up and as I've said over-rides the amygdala. But in times of stress like now the amygdala rules, it's the boss, as designed, for survival. There are many ways to activate this (including balancing the breath, true gratitude, mindfulness practices) and when you do you awaken the following: your true self, your presence, your certainty, your inspiration, your enthusiasm, true love, your vision, your intuition, your purpose, true meaning, your "executive centre" of the brain. You also learn to open your heart, you connect your mind, your brain, your heart, your voice, your vision and often they are all aligned. You have access to all your ideas, and strategies, all the answers, your wisdom, your reason, your sense of self governance, your self-belief and self-control. You're able to navigate even the most challenging situations and be your true authentic self. You grow and evolve no matter what is happening outside.

So don't stay calm. Experience all of your emotions, both sides. Learn from them, listen to them, keep breathing and stay connected during them and know that deep down you all have the ability to choose your response if you look and be aware of what's really going on inside. For those of you who have experienced my teachings, classes or coaching you will know that I call my breath my friend, my anchor. It's always with me, it's been here since my mother birthed me (a long time ago). Especially if you are in isolation on your own, you're never really alone. You have your breath, your best friend, your mind, your body, your heart. Please take the time to practice activating your vagus nerve and your pre-frontal cortex and learn to bring the mind back home and you'll be amazed at what you can achieve on your own.