



Mindy Newman: Thank you so much everybody for being here. I am looking at the number of participants and I cannot believe how many people are joining us tonight. It is amazing that in your evening and in the middle of everything that's going on, you're taking the time to be here. I truly wish that I could see all of your faces. Unfortunately, I can't. But please know that I wish I could. And I know you're all out there. To tell you very quickly a little bit about myself, I'm a psychotherapist and a hypnotherapist in private practice and a meditation teacher that's taught with the Nalanda Institute.

Of course, what we're going to be talking about tonight is coping with the situation that we're all living in. But before we jump into that, I'd like to take a minute for us to all close our eyes and have a couple of breaths together to settle in.

So whenever you're ready, just go ahead and close your eyes. Take a couple of cleansing breaths, deeply filling up your lungs totally completely. Then when you exhale, maybe let it go through the mouth. And let's do that maybe two more times, or a couple more times. Feel the pauses that happen at the top of the inhale and the bottom of the exhale.

As you finish that, be aware of your body for a moment. Feel your hands as they're resting there. Feel yourself sitting and whatever you're sitting on. Feel the muscles of your face. Feel whatever part of the body you need to connect with to know that you are here right now. Not up in your mind, reading the news, talking to loved ones, or panicking—you're here with us together, meditating in your body.

Thank you so much. I was very glad to be asked to be part of this project that *Tricycle* is doing of offering meditation at this time, which is such an enormous gift to all of us. Because this is the time when our practice matters. It is no longer a hobby. Our spiritual practice, our meditation, is no longer a hobby. It's now a lifeline for us during a time that's very uncertain and very scary. And it's interesting to think how before the current situation, when we would talk about meditation and anxiety, it was as if we were using meditation to treat something that we think is like a pathological condition. Like there's something wrong with our anxiety. Like the anxiety is a problem that exists between us, inside of us, between us and other people inside of us.

And now we're in a situation where the anxiety is valid. It is appropriate to be anxious in this situation, the world is different. We don't know what's going to happen. But we do have everything we need to cope with this. We do have everything inside of us that we need to cope with this. I think that is the role that meditation is going to play for us right now. In the past,



meditation practice may have felt like something you were trying to accomplish, to master focus and concentration. Maybe you were focused on the number of minutes that you could sit and meditate. All of that is not important right now. What is important is for us to be able to take control of our minds. What I mean by that is, by reading the news all day and talking to each other, our minds are being taken outside of us—literally pulled out of us in all different directions. We're reading and processing so much information and passing it along.

Not to mention the fact that because we're living during this pandemic, every interaction we choose to have or not have, or every time we decide to step out of the house or not step out of the house, we're making a decision and weighing the pros and cons of what we think is going to keep us healthy and safe. We're in this constant mental negotiation with everything that we're doing in our day-to-day life. And that is tiring. That is a very tiring thing to be involved in. And I think this is where meditation is going to come in.

I've heard a number of teachers say in recent days on Facebook—and my teacher also said this last night—that we can treat this time like a retreat. We're literally retreating from the world and we're in our homes. We have this opportunity to focus on using our practice in the way that's most constructive to us. I don't think it necessarily matters what your meditation practice is. Different people enjoy doing different things. Maybe you have a mantra practice that you're doing, maybe you're doing mindfulness, maybe you practice Zen. Whatever it is that you're drawn to, now's an opportunity to use it as skillfully as you can. One of the things I mean by that is we're now in an opportunity if we're home where we can be meditating on the spot. It's not a situation where we need to carve time out and schedule it into our busy lives. Most of us are becoming a lot less busy, not through our own choice. So at any moment, we can sit down and meditate.

I think this is important because our own reactivity is one of the things we need to be monitoring throughout the day. Through reading the news or talking to each other, our energy can start to become jittery and scattered. Our heart can start pounding very heavily. Our thoughts are racing, we're thinking about our loved ones, we're worrying about what's happening to them, we're making lots of different decisions. These thoughts are going to come and go. In the days and weeks ahead, there are going to be moments where we feel very calm and grounded. And there are going to be times where we feel jittery and anxious. And because we have this time, we can stop and use our meditation practice in those moments. Our meditation practice can actually become this living tool for us that's no longer bound to a particular time in place.



In the practice that we're going to do tonight, this simple meditation on the breath, we're going to utilize focusing on how to use that meditation to calm ourselves down when we need to. To go back to this idea of retreat, we can use meditation on demand because we're retreating away from the world and we're in our home. Whenever we need it, we can sit down and start to use meditation for ourselves in a different way. Also, because we're away from the world right now, for the most part, we can start to operate in a different way.

I'd like to share with you a quote that I read online from the International Council of Thirteen Indigenous Grandmothers, which if you don't know about them, you should definitely check them out online. They're really amazing. But these words are from several years ago and they seem uniquely appropriate right now: "As you move through these changing times, be easy on yourself and be easy on one another. You are at the beginning of something new, you're learning a new way of being, you'll find that you're working less in the yang modes that you're used to. You'll stop working so hard at getting from point A to point B the way you have in the past, but instead, you'll spend more time experiencing yourself in the whole and your place in it. Instead of traveling to a goal out there, your voyage deeper into yourself. Your mother's grandmother knew how to do this. Your ancestors from long ago knew how to do this. They knew the power of the feminine principle. And because you carry their DNA in your body, this wisdom and this way of being is within you. Call on it, call it up, and invite your ancestors in. As the yang-based habits and the decaying institutions on our planet begin to crumble look up. A breeze is stirring. Feel the sun on your wings."

These words inspired me so much this week because I've come to realize that embedded in the nightmare that we're living in—it can feel like a nightmare from time to time—is an opportunity for all of us to change our way of being. That we can, in fact, emerge at the end of this because there will be an end. We know this. Nothing continues forever, there will be an end to this pandemic. We can emerge from it differently. We can emerge from it having coped, having learned how to work with ourselves, having learned how to be kind to other people, and we can actually emerge from it stronger and more resilient. I think the opportunity of the home meditation retreat we can all be in now is to cultivate the tools to help us now with what's difficult and also to prepare us for a new future where we're going to be different.

We don't have to think about doing these types of meditations as something that's only a selfish act. A lot of the time, meditation can feel that way. Particularly in our lives before this pandemic, we can feel that meditation is something that we're doing for ourselves—we're taking care of ourselves, we're sitting down on a cushion, or watching our breath, or whatever we're doing. We're feeling our nervous systems calm down, and we get to feel less stressed. We get to feel



better and happier. Now, we have the opportunity to sit down and cultivate that calmness in ourselves to use it for other people. Because there are going to be moments where we're the ones that's calm, and we can calm or soothe a friend or loved one. And there are going to be times where we are the one who's stressed and we need the support of someone else, or we need to use the tools for ourselves. The self-regulatory tool of meditation is something we can do. We can think of ourselves tonight—I'm looking at the numbers, there's over 800 of us right now together—we can use what we're doing right now as an opportunity to cultivate skills that will help us help others.

That is the practice of Mahayana Buddhism, using ourselves as a tool to extend compassion to all other living beings. But in order to extend compassion to all of other living beings, we have to be in a state where we can do that. We're not going to be in that state, as they said, every moment of the day, but as we cultivate it more and more—as we cultivate more inner calm the ability to rein ourselves in when we're stressed—we're cultivating the capacity to help others more.

The other level that I want to mention for us meditating tonight is as we're sitting here meditating, we can actually imagine that we are doing it on behalf of all sentient beings, on behalf of all of the numberless sentient beings. Not only are we trying to cultivate the calmness in ourselves so that we feel better and that we can be calm for others, but as we sit on our cushion or chair or wherever you are, we can imagine that we are generating calmness that is going to emanate out to the numberless sentient beings of all the six realms and provide them with healing and calmness that maybe they can't find for themselves. I mean, 875 people tonight meditating, what if all of us had some moments of calm together and what if all of us thought about this meditation tonight as an opportunity to spread calmness, groundedness, and peacefulness throughout the world? This would be an incredible thing, an absolutely incredible thing.

I'd like to start from that place as we move into the practice now. Before we even close our eyes, imagine that we are setting the intention that we are going to meditate on our breath in order to generate calmness for ourselves, but also for the numberless sentient beings. Particularly the people who are in dire straits financially, or in terms of their safety, or people who are not able to have the gift of meditation, or people who are too busy trying to get themselves to a safe place or get the medicine or care they need. We have this gift available to us, and we're going to meditate for them in their place and towards them at the same time.

Please come into your comfortable seated meditation position. It doesn't need to be anything particularly fancy, however you're going to be comfortable. If you're seated in a chair, you can



find a way to either use the back of the chair to be at ease and rest your back on it lightly or maybe it will be helpful for you to move away from the chair and sit upright. If you're seated on a cushion or cross legged on a sofa like I am, feel yourself sinking down into the support of the cushion or the chair of the sofa, feel your spine lift up, become elevated in light. Find a place for your hands. If you like to bring your hands into this, mudra, or simply rest them on your legs. I want to encourage you to abandon the need for a proper meditation posture at this time. This practice is about ease, it's about comfort, it's about calming down. So choose your posture with that intention. Whatever you've tried to do in the past to keep your spine perfectly straight, let it go and come to a place where you can sit comfortably for the next 15 minutes.

Bring your eyes to close. As we start, become aware of your physical presence. Notice how fast or slow your heart is beating. Feel your hands resting on your legs or in the mudra, however they're resting, feel your hands. Feel all the muscles of your face. Let everything soften. Let everything start to let go a little bit. Particularly notice any tightness in the heart area and see if you can let that soften. Give yourself permission throughout this practice to adjust and find comfort and ease when you need to. You're not doing this to do it right. You're doing this to find comfort and ease.

Bring your awareness to the breath. Notice where in your body you're feeling your breath most vividly. Whether it's the touch of air at the nostrils—cool on the way in, warm on the way out—or the abdomen rising and falling or the chest rising and falling. Anytime your mind goes elsewhere, it's no problem at all. Don't even criticize yourself, of course it's going to go a lot of places. Every time it does that, just tell yourself that's okay. It's totally okay. And soften back into your breath.

As we come to the end, take a moment to notice how your body's feeling now. Your hands, the muscles of your face, your eyes, your heartbeat, any shifts or changes that have happened. Any sense of calmness or ease, even if it's just a little bit, that you've cultivated. Then let's dedicate together that whatever calmness or ease or comfort we've cultivated for ourselves, may all the numberless sentient beings also experience this. May all the people who are sick receive medicine and healing. May all the people who need shelter find shelter. All of the animals, all of the beings from all the realms, may everyone get what they need. May all beings be happy and free of suffering. Thank you so much.

I know we have a period of time where people can ask questions, which I'm very happy to answer. If anybody has any questions, I believe Matt is going to facilitate those.



Tricycle: One person says, "Hi Mindy, I feel very drained, stressed, and overwhelmed by the amount of suffering in the world right now. My heart aches and I find it hard to do any meditation related to anything but mindfulness. Do you have any recommendations on what to do to bring healing to the heart when it feels too scary to address?"

Mindy Newman: And just to understand the question, Matt, they said they are engaging in mindfulness practice? That's the only thing they're able to do or they're not able to do?

Tricycle: Mindfulness is the only practice they're able to do.

Mindy Newman: I appreciate the question because this is what people experience from time to time. Whoever you are, thank you for your question. You are experiencing intense compassion for the suffering that's happening in the world. And you know, you should rejoice in this compassion that you have within yourself. In Buddhism, we talk about trying to generate compassion for all of us. And the great compassion, the compassion that Buddhists have, is for all beings with none left out, and it's a sense of unbearableness. The suffering of all sentient beings is so unbearable that we're moved to act. That is the type of compassion that we are trying to cultivate. It sounds like you are experiencing enormous compassion and there is a great deal of suffering that's happening right now. In addition to the virus itself, there's the social ramifications and financial ramifications with people losing their jobs, but the reality is people are shut up in their homes. Things like domestic violence and child abuse are going to increase. First of all, when you feel that way, I would remind yourself in the moment to rejoice that you have this compassion that is so beneficial. That compassion in and of itself is valuable.

At the same time, when it feels too much to bear, that's the time when we need to recenter ourselves. It's wonderful to hear that you're doing mindfulness meditation, because when you're feeling that way, that would be a wonderful time to sit down and do mindfulness meditation. Perhaps do what we did tonight—dedicate your practice to all the numberless beings that are suffering. We shouldn't underestimate the importance of that. From the Buddhist perspective, we are all interconnected and interdependent. So the actions we take in our mind and our bodies, we don't know the full ramifications of how they're going to affect others. By sitting down and bringing ourselves back to ourselves with mindfulness meditation we can become grounded. It's very valuable. It's also like that idea of when you're on the airplane, you put your oxygen mask on before you help the person next to you. Those are the moments where we put the oxygen mask on ourselves and try to take care of ourselves. And then at some other moment, we can help others more. I hope that's helpful.



Tricycle: I have another question from Deborah, who says, "I'm waiting for a COVID test result, and I'm not feeling well. How can I feel better while I wait?"

Mindy Newman: Thank you for asking that, Deborah. I will definitely be thinking about you over the next few hours and remembering you in meditation and thinking about what you're going through. I wonder if you're talking about how to feel well in your body or how to keep your mind at ease. I think these moments are a great time to rely on the support network around us. We've talked tonight about regulating ourselves and meditating and helping ourselves, and that's certainly something wonderful to do. But sometimes we need to borrow and receive the calmness and support of others. I am a psychotherapist so there is a part of me that wants to tell you right away to find some people that you can talk to if you haven't already and express your fears and anxieties so that you can receive their support and care as much as possible. Also take care of yourself, drink lots of water, rest, lie down, and really take care of your body. Because you're not feeling physically well, your body is screaming out to be cared for. Rest and sleep. Sometimes the best meditation is sleep. Do what you need to do to physically take care of yourself, but also reach out for the support of loved ones as much as possible. And there are moments where we need to let go of meditation and distract ourselves with some Netflix. We shouldn't totally throw distraction out if it's something that we need during this time. If you need some distraction, some comforting distraction, go for it.

Tricycle: "With more time spent indoors now, do you have any books or reading recommendations excluding *Tricycle*?" I would say including it [laughs], but that's a question from Dustin.

Mindy Newman: That is a great question. So many... I'm looking at my bookshelves while I'm thinking about this because I could just go on and on and on. There's some books I love, dharma texts are a wonderful, important thing to be reading at this time. And without knowing more about you or where you're at in terms of your spiritual practice, I can't suggest a specific title in that arena, because everybody is so different. That is one of the wonderful things about spiritual practice. So in terms of dharma or spiritual books, whatever you're drawn to, it's important to trust that intuition for whatever title grabs you or whatever feels right.

In addition to that—and obviously *Tricycle* is wonderful—there are a couple of books that I really like that are not dharma per se, they're more like biographies or recreational nonfiction that are about Buddhism. I find them great to read at these stressful times. One of them is by Jeffery Paine, and it's called *Re-Enchantment*. It's about the history of Tibetan Buddhism coming to the west. That's the tradition I come from. That's more of the reading that I know about. So



Re-Enchantment, and not only is it fascinating, but it has stories of practitioners from when they started out and when they met Lama Yeshe, or when they met Chögyam Trungpa, he's in it. It's a light read that also has a lot of wisdom and depth in it. Tenzin Palmo is in it and you hear all about her meditating in a cave for 12 years. It's easy to take in and I really enjoy it. That's one I would definitely recommend.

Also, there's some books by Victor Chan. Victor Chan is a Canadian journalist who had the good fortune to travel around with His Holiness the Dalai Lama and follow him and write about the Dalai Lama's daily life. I think one of them might be called *The Wisdom of Forgiveness*. There's two, I can't see them on my shelf. I can't but I know it's Victor Chan. There are two of them. The first one is the first book that I read about Buddhism. It's the first book that made me want to be a practitioner. You also get to read about the Dalai Lama having his meals and having his meetings with people and interspersing wisdom throughout the day. Somebody's chat is popping up—it's called *The Wisdom of Compassion*. Thank you, whoever just put that in the chat. It's also a “a light read” but it has so much wisdom in it. The Dalai Lama talks about emptiness and interdependence in it. It's very accessible and fun. Those are some books that I really love that I would recommend and think are really wonderful.

Tricycle: Casey says, "I appreciate the perspective of meditation no longer being a hobby. This is an important shift and I've noticed this helped sense that it's a bit feeling empty. Maybe a bit pushed out or squeezed by fear. Can you provide more advice on working through that?"

Mindy Newman: That's interesting. I'm not totally sure I understand the question. I'm wondering what squeezed by fear means, if that means during the meditation or in anticipation of meditation, or while meditating, one is experiencing a lot of fear? Is it possible to get an answer on that Matt?

Tricycle: Casey, if you're listening, can you type that into the chat? Perhaps to clarify?

Mindy Newman: If not, I'll start answering.

Tricycle: Casey answered, "Yes during meditation."

Mindy Newman: Okay. First, right now fear is entering meditation. Of course. There are scary things happening. I don't say that tonight to exacerbate the fear. I realized on some level, some people must have come to this talk wanting there to be a perfectly calm meditation teacher who would spread a lot of lovingkindness, which, of course, is important. But I want us to face



reality. Part of Buddhism is facing reality as it actually is. And I think we all have the strength to do that. Fear is going to enter into our meditation. That's not a problem. It is a time though, when you might shift in your meditation towards focusing on self-soothing. Whatever your object of meditation is, whether it's breath, mantra, visualization, whatever the focus of your meditation is, once you're experiencing fear, the one one thing to do is to assess the level of fear. If it's intense, if it feels overpowering, then the thing to do is relax and calm down. People have different ways of doing that. Sometimes you may even stop meditating and do some yoga stretches or breathing exercises, if you know some pranayama that's calming, or qigong. Take a break from meditation until you're feeling calmer, and then come back to it if it feels appropriate.

Another method could be while you're seated and you're noticing the fear coming, use a technique you know of in meditation. One technique is coming into the physical body. For example, if your object of meditation has been the breath, instead of meditating in that when you feel the fear arising, remind yourself: I'm here, I'm present. Sort of like we did at the beginning of the session. You might even do a body scan. Starting from the bottom up, I recommend starting from the bottom up because the bottom is the ground, the ground that we're resting on. It can literally help us feel more grounded. It doesn't even have to be a perfect scan, like going through every single body part. Just notice what parts of the body you feel easily and remind yourself that they're there. Bring your attention to the sensations of them being there. It might even be helpful to rub your hands against your legs so that you feel more sensation in your hands. Those would be my recommendations. Take a break and do some things that are calming and relaxing. Or, within the meditation focusing on the body, try to feel more grounded and calm.

Tricycle: We have a question about healing mantras from Pablo, "What do you think about repeating a healing mantra as practice in this situation? Like 'Om Benza Ratna Bhanda Duma Ting Kyol Ting Dzadza.'"

Mindy Newman: Yeah, great. Different people are drawn to different meditation practices and mantra is very powerful. In fact, I've noticed a lot of the Tibetan teachers online—like FPMT [Foundation for the Preservation of the Mahayana Tradition] and Chökyi Nyima Rinpoche—are posting different mantras and suggestions for students to meditate on. They might even recommend particular ones. So if there is a healing mantra that you feel drawn to, then absolutely. Sound sound is very powerful and soothing and you can imagine healing yourself. As you're saying it too, you can imagine that you're healing others. Yeah, that's a great way to meditate.



Tricycle: We have time for maybe one or two more questions. We have an anonymous question, "Any thoughts on being physically very far from loved ones? I'm an American abroad and we'll be hunkering down outside of the country for the foreseeable future. Everybody who was planning on visiting me will most likely no longer be able to come anytime soon. Sometimes I feel a bit lonely, knowing that it might be a long time before I see everybody, especially my girlfriend."

Mindy Newman: That definitely sounds extremely hard. Thank you. Thank you for mentioning that. I noticed in the news today that there are people who are abroad who are not able to be at home. I'm so glad that you joined this class and the first thing would be to stay in touch with people, loved ones, as much as possible by video in particular, so that you are seeing their eyes and seeing their face and they are seeing your eyes and seeing your face. As much contact as is available to you. Connection is very important during this time. We need each other more than ever. We need to be socially connected with each other. If you're on social media, there seem to be all kinds of online groups that are starting to form of different varieties. There are all different classes that are being taught—dance, qigong—all kinds of body-oriented things. People are having dance parties on Zoom. I just learned about that today. We're really looking for community online and I think it's important right now when people are away from loved ones.

Also, if you know something like lovingkindness meditation, or if you know self-compassion, those are two things to look up if you don't know them. Meditating on yourself and your loved ones might be something that you want to try so that you can feel connected to them. You can look up Sharon Salzberg's lovingkindness meditations, where you're actually visualizing your loved ones and imagining your connection to them. That might be helpful too.

Tricycle: We're nearing the end of the hour, so I don't know if you want to give any final words there.

Mindy Newman: Again, I encourage everybody to take care of yourself. Stay connected to loved ones, stay connected to each other. Do your practice. Be gentle with yourself when you're not doing your practice. Don't be perfect. This is messy. This is going to continue to be messy. Let it be messy. Let it be imperfect. And hang in there. That's what I want to say.