Being with the Stress of a Changing World: A Guided Meditation

6 MIN READ

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An invitation to gentle presence and self-kindness in the face of big emotions.

The news stresses me out more and more lately. I used to be able to stay informed and feel like I could process what I was learning and find ways, even if tiny, to alchemize what I learned into actions where appropriate. Now, I'm titrating news, trying to find a way to stay informed without overwhelming my system.

We live in challenging times, with seemingly endless torrents of upheaval, climate disasters, and social and political aggression. It's easy to feel overwhelmed, anxious, even powerless. It can feel like the world is shifting beneath our feet.

If you're feeling this stress, too, I want you to know you're not alone. And here's what I want to remind you: it's okay to feel uncertain, frustrated, or overwhelmed. These emotions are part of being human and natural responses to a complex world.

The question is: How can we *be with* these feelings in a way that doesn't burn us out or disconnect us from ourselves and others? How can we hold the tension of change while staying grounded?

How to Create Space for Peace in Difficult Times?

So often, we are conditioned to push pain and stress away. *But what we resist persists.* Holding skillful space for what feels difficult or overwhelming is a courageous skill we can all practice so we can expand our capacity to be with both difficult and joyful times.

Why would we practice being with difficulty? Being with what's difficult or painful doesn't mean surrendering or over-identifying with it or being consumed by your pain. It means making space for some honesty about what's really present, and becoming curious about what we're really experiencing, without overidentifying with it. We do this so we can move through our lives with skill and maintain our capacity to act in the best interest of ourselves and our community. When we become skilled at being with difficulty without overidentifying with it, we may begin to see that our pain points have edges, deep centers, and even holes, like eyes of a storm. Our pain becomes more porous, and this is where the room for compassion, peace, and even wisdom arises. When we recognize this nature of difficulty and pain, it loses some of its power over us, and we deepen our ability to respond with courage and care.

How do we practice being with our pain? The answer is found in present-moment awareness and self-kindness. When we take some time to steady our attention, become aware of what we're experiencing in a given moment, become more intimate with it, we can investigate our pain points without pushing them away. We can meet oursleves with curiosity, honesty, and compassion. Can you give yourself permission to feel deeply into this moment, without judgment? It's not easy to do because our judging mind can pop up, trying to "protect" us from difficulty. That's natural. But our pain points can be portals for deep wisdom, and we can only learn their lessons if we have the strength to be with what hurts without abandoning ourselves. It takes practice.

So, if, like me, the world has felt overwhelming and you're in need of some grounding so you can act with skill, start small. Breathe. Check in with your body. Move it gently. Offer yourself kindness. This is how the deep work of transformation begins, from the inside out.

How to Be with Your Own Stress

A Short Guided Mindfulness Practice

This is a shortened version of the meditation I offered to my class this week. It begins with a moment of mindful breathing and then offers a way to investigate your pain points with compassion. I hope it brings you some ease if you need it.

- **Sit comfortably**. Close your eyes if you like. Take a moment to settle your attention with a few deep, full breaths. Inhale and extend a long exhale. Do this two or three times.
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- **Feel your body resting here and now.** Settled in, wherever you are, so you feel supported and take a moment to scan your body. Notice if any areas feel tight, tense, or uncomfortable. Relax those places. Now, notice if any difficult emotions are here. You don't need to fix anything. Just take a moment to notice, honestly, what's present for you. And breathe.
- **If you find a spot that's calling your attention, invite a sense of openness and curiosity there.** See if you can soften around whatever feels difficult. Investigate lightly. No need to fix anything, just place some kind awareness on what you're feeling or thinking. Breathe here for a moment.
- **Notice if you feel you want to push away any discomfort or if there's any tension**. See if you can soften that feeling, even just a little, and invite a small message of acceptance for both the discomfort and the want to push it away. You could silently say to yourself, "Yes, I see you and you're welcome here, too."
- **Breathe through that invitation**. Allow your body to become a little softer with each breath, just allowing yourself to be safe and present in this moment.
- **If the feelings feel strong or overwhelming, bring your awareness to a part of your body that feels neutral or easy**, maybe your hands resting, or your feet on the floor. Breathe into this place of ease. This is your refuge. Your reminder that even when things are hard, there's space for ease and care.
- **Slowly, let your attention move back and forth** between the discomfort and the ease. Notice how the sensations shift as you do. Notice that both can be true at once.

- **Remember, you are not your stress or anxiety**. You are not your thoughts. You are the calm, steady presence that can hold these feelings with kindness and care. Breathe.

- **Now shift to offering yourself some compassion.** You might say some traditional loving-kindness phrases to yourself like: *May I be happy, May I be safe, May I live with ease.* Take some time here to nurture your body with compassion.

- **When you're ready, wiggle your toes, stretch your arms above your head, and take one more deep breath in, and exhale fully**. Gently open your eyes.

Carry this invitation to gentleness with you as you navigate this beautiful, complex world that needs your clear, open heart now more than ever.

If you are looking for more support, explore the meditations of psychologist and meditation teacher **Tara Brach**, and world-renowned loving-kindness teacher **Sharon Salzberg**.

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