

Life Meditation Practice Attempts During the Era of COVID-19

By Glen, 4/2020, Under Quarantine

Will I, or someone I love get COVID?
How paranoid should I appropriately be?
Will the world descend into chaos?
Will life ever return to “normal”?
These questions echo in minds, on lips
across the vast sangha of humanity
at this strange moment in our history.

While I wait, and wait, and wait for answers to be revealed
the delivery guy appears
on the path to our front porch
his face reassuringly masked
his gloved hands set the package down
a safe distance away.
I lean out the front door, yell
“thank you bro! stay safe!”
Breathing in, I feel gratitude.
Breathing out, I feel guilt.
Should this guy risk his life
delivering what I hope is my new set of headphones?

Package Meditation:

I pull a pair of nitrile gloves
from the box by the door.
I put them on
one hand at a time.
Breathing in, I feel their plasticity silkiness.
They slide on nicely.
I feel protected from the invisible threat.
Breathing out, I notice the sensation of pressure
surrounding my hands and fingers.

I pick up the scissors that live in the
Package Quarantine Area (or “PQA” for short)
on the porch.
I open the box with great anticipation.
It is...
not my headphones.
Alas, it is merely toothpaste
and Dr Bronner’s soap.
I label the thought/
the feeling that has arisen:
Disappointment.
I exhale and release my clinging.
I let disappointment float away.

I dump the contents,
careful that the box touches nothing,

onto our indoor COVID Package Quarantine Surface (CPQS),
 that narrow slice of our dining room table
 where the tubes and bottles will sit in silence
 for a day or two
 theoretically allowing any traces of the virus
 to die off before handling.

And I am content:

I have enough toothpaste
 to last the quarantine
 and perhaps enough soap
 for the 10,000 handwashing meditations
 to come.

Sweet gratitude arises, yet again.

Peeling off the gloves, I breath in regret:

2 cubic centimeters of nitrile
 destined for the landfill.

Breathing out, I rationalize the gloves
 as a potentially life-saving sacrifice
 weighed against my normal, if flawed,
 environmentalism.

Morning Meditation:

What will it be today?

Jack Kornfield on lovingkindness?

Silence?

Some random dude with annoying flute music
 and shrill bells on Insight Timer?

It doesn't really matter.

I sit with my wife

in the blessed comfort of our home
 together.

Whatever it is

it is our practice

and we are practicing

together.

And it is lovely.

Work Meditation:

After the 5-step commute
 to my makeshift office space,
 exhaustion arises

with every new opening
 of a Zoom window.

I watch that thought

with my higher mind

I let it float past

and focus instead

on what must be done.

So very much must be done.

I practice compassion

for my colleagues
 who are managing their workloads
 with their spouses and children
 vying for their attention.
 I practice metta
 for my colleagues and for those they serve:
 those who society *has* neglected
is neglecting
 and *will continue* to neglect
 long after the current crisis has passed.
 The homeless.
 The prisoners.
 The immigrants.
 The marginalized and the underserved.

But I am no bodhisattva –
 I have no metta in me (yet)
 for those who spread distrust
 misinformation
 fear
 and hate.

I practice gratitude
 for having a job
 for the unmitigated blessing
 for the absolute privilege
 of having what feels like
 Right Livelihood.

Ant Meditation:

The ants are coming in.
 Curiously, absurdly,
 through the electrical outlet in my bathroom.
 Instinct kicks in -
 mindfulness completely absent.
 Hard-wired synapses fire, the lizard brain.
 I cannot share my bathroom with them.
 The ants must die.
 Breathing in, I realize: I am a murderer.
 Breathing out, my mind wonders if this one act
 will be the fabled straw
 on the camel-back of my myriad sins.
 Will this be the act that brings down the hammer of kamma?
 Will this destine me
 for example
 to one cycle of samsara
 in deep dukkha
 per murdered ant?
 Might I come back as an ant myself
 only to be crushed by some giant guy
 in his bathroom?
 Or perhaps as a dung beetle, and all that implies?

Or, God help me: as a Republican?

And yet, I must carry on.
 I check my heartbeat.
 Breathing in:
 in this moment
 I am sorta ok.
 I regret killing the ants, but
 I don't have to cling to these thoughts.
 / am *not* these thoughts.
 Hell, I don't believe in reincarnation anyway!
 Breathing out...
 Wait a minute.
 I may not believe in reincarnation,
 but I do believe in karma.
 Logically, therefore, am I destined
 to earn my karma in this lifetime?
 Might I get sick from COVID
 because I slaughtered some ants
 or from gloves tossed in the landfill?
 Reigning in the mind, slowing down its endless turning,
 I focus on my breath.

Breathing in, I practice equanimity.
 Breathing out, I know I am practicing equanimity.
 This too – all of this,
 like everything else,
 is impermanent
 and indeed, shall pass.

And so, in this peculiar way,
 the days pass under quarantine.
 My world, like the worlds of
 everyone conscientious or able,
 save the brave souls who serve
 and those who have no choice,
 has been shrunken to our homebound dwellings -
 some variation of 2 by 4s,
 stucco, wood, bricks, concrete, plaster,
 plopped onto a modest plot of earth.

We are, so very many of us,
 in our homes, making do,
 hopefully doing our best.

In this moment, our doors open in on the infinite,
 our windows look out on our temporary, impermanent limits.

Breathing in I know:
 Right now, it's like this
 Breathing out -
 In this moment: Peace