

Meditating in the Middle of Chaos

The wind and rain were swirling around me powerfully, as I sat in my mom's tropical flower garden in Guam and meditated.

A tropical storm was passing close to Guam, where I'm living at the moment, and I decided to go out into the strong winds and torrential rain to meditate for at least a few minutes. Don't worry, it was safe.

I actually stood in meditation, as sitting in a puddle of rainwater wasn't that appealing to me. The water kissed my face, the wind rocked my body into a sway, and I practiced being present in the storm.

I was practicing stillness in the middle of chaos.

Of course, we don't need to have an actual tropical storm (which turned into a supertyphoon after it passed us) to practice with chaos. It's all around us, every day. Chaos is the uncertainty of our daily lives, the constant barrage of information and requests and tasks and messages we're swarmed with, the uncertainty of the global stage and national politics, of our finances and global economy, of changing communities and our everchanging lives.

Chaos is all around us, and it can stress us out. It causes anxiety, depression, frustration, anger, procrastination, constant distraction, and the seeking of comforts like social media, food, shopping, games and more.

But what if we didn't need to run to comfort or fear the chaos?

What if we could just be still, and find calmness and stillness with the uncertainty swirling around us?

A member of my Fearless Training Program said he would like to "dance with chaos." I think that's a beautiful idea. Let's embrace the uncertainty. Practice with it. Dance with it, and let this practice be joyful!

A Joyful Practice in Chaos

So how can we practice mindfulness in the middle of chaos? How can we make it joyful?

For me, it looks something like this.

First, you give yourself space to be present with the chaos. I stood in the middle of the storm, because I was excited to see what it was like. I intentionally called it

“meditating” because my intention was to be as present as possible with whatever happened. In your daily life, that might look like just stopping in the middle of your busy workday, at any moment, and dropping into the present moment so you can feel what the chaos feels like.

Second, you find the courage to be completely present with the felt experience of the chaos. In the storm, part of that was feeling the wind and rain on my skin, noticing the dramatic light that was filtering through the storm clouds, noticing the amazing tropical jungle in the small valley below me, and the movement of the trees and flowers surrounding me. But there was more than that: it was also the feeling of excitement in my chest, maybe a bit of uncertainty about whether something would fly and hit me on the head, which showed up as a small bit of fear radiating in my heart area. It was also the feeling of my body swaying, my leg muscles tensing, my chest expanding as I breathed. All of this is the felt experience of the moment. Not just my thoughts about it, but how it feels in my body. We can practice this in any moment.

Third, you relax into the chaos, and embrace it. Noticing how the chaos feels, you might notice any tension you have around it. For me, in the storm, there was tension around my safety (again, it was actually pretty safe), so I noticed this tension and relaxed those muscles. Relaxing my body, I let myself just surrender to it. Embrace it, as if it were an incredible gift. Again, we can practice this any moment. Right now, in fact, if you’d like to try it.

Fourth, you dance with it, joyfully. Once we relax around the chaos, and start to embrace it ... we’re making friends with it. The uncertainty is no longer a thing to run from, or to resist, but is just a part of the experience of this moment. Of every moment. And so we can start to dance — let ourselves move through the chaos, in a loving, lovely, joyful way. What would it be like to play right now, in the middle of your uncertain life? What would it be like to be curious, and explore, like an adventurer? What would it be like to be grateful for this incredible moment of chaotic beauty? What would it be like to find the love, the openness, the swirling dancing musical movement in the middle of this storm?

We have the opportunity, every single day, even every moment, to be present with the storm of the world. To sit in stillness in the middle of the wind and downpour of life. We have the opportunity to be open to it, to dance with it, to even find the joy in the immense uncertainty that is our lives.

Let’s dance, my friends. Let’s love what is all around us.