



Living Well through Uncertain Times

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The mental well-being of people is being challenged. A lot. And that has a lot to do with the level of uncertainty and turmoil around us. When Covid 19 hit us, and it arrived mostly at the beginning of 2020, we were all shaken and thrown out of our comfort zones. Those of us who had comfort zones to start with, which is probably not that many of us, the world being what it is. Then as the pandemic started coming to an end the war in Ukraine started, then the Gaza and Israel war, then a war with Iran and the concomitant economic upheaval that accompanies war. And that is not to mention all the climate catastrophes. If you read many peoples' social media pages, since 2020 they have been asking every new year to be more peaceful and a lot better than the previous year. Which has mostly not happened. As human beings we are bombarded with new developments in the world, often negative, on a daily basis. And the consequence is that most people are confused, uncertain, and quite shaken by it all. Anxiety is high. People are stressed and depressed in large numbers. And there is not a lot most of us can do to control what is happening in the world around us. We can only pay attention to what we can deal with and do that as well as possible.

What are some ways in which we can make things a bit easier for ourselves during such turmoil?

I am going to discuss what may help you deal with uncertain times using a hierarchical approach. The base of the hierarchy is your general health. Without that you have nothing. Then I am going to talk about what you can control in your life and what you cannot – assuming you have taken care of your basic health. And then, thirdly, I am going to look at how you can be proactive and a creator in building your own desired future despite all the uncertainty.

(i) Your basic health.

There are lots of things we wish for in life. When our health fails, there is usually only one wish we have. To have our health back. So right at the bottom of the hierarchy is your basic health. Eat well, exercise, remain hydrated, get enough sleep, have medical check-ups, take your medication prescribed for you as directed, and avoid toxic actions and substances. Now, having written this, I

am aware that although health should be a basic need, it is not something that everyone can afford to have. Even if you battle to afford healthy food, and have to deal with long queues to get state medical care, do whatever you can. Your state of health affects everything in your life.

(ii) Deal with what is in your control and let go of what is not.

Human beings differ in how much they need to be in control of their lives. Some of them are extremely anxious over anything that is not in their control. Unfortunately, no matter what is happening in the world around you, there are likely to be things you cannot control. And as much as people who love to have everything under control want it to always be like that, you do have to learn to understand that some things you just cannot control. You cannot control the reactions of another person. You cannot make someone think a different way. Most people do not have control over the laws in the country. If you need to get some help in learning to let go of what you cannot control, then get it. We all have to learn to accept that some things are just the way they are. Practicing acceptance is not easy, but it is something that you can do to make your life a lot less upsetting. And interestingly, if you can practice accepting what you cannot change and do anything about, you are probably going to be better at spotting areas where you can make changes. Acceptance brings calmness, which is necessary to overcome anxiety and spot opportunities for changing our situation or making the most of the situation we find ourselves in.

Some of the ways in which you can gain control in your life include 1) setting simple daily or weekly routines that you can stick to, 2) nurturing supportive relationships, 3) planning some fun activities to do and then doing them, 4) fixing small things in your daily space, 5) setting small daily goals that are easily achievable and then reaching them, 6) helping other people, 7) getting into nature, and 8) practicing mindfulness and learning to live in the present. Also, learn to regularly remind yourself that you have made it through everything that life has thrown your way up to now, and you will make it through this.

(iii) Creating the new

Once you have reached levels one and two you are likely to be in a place where you can accept, and possibly, dare I say it, embrace uncertainty. When you feel you are in a relatively safe place then you can start thinking about new possibilities, new ways of living, and turning a current situation you don't like into one that you love. In order to create a life they want and love, most people need points one and two above in place. Which is why that is where you need to focus your actions first. But to truly live your best life, you need to exercise your creative capacity which human beings have, to be proactive in deciding your life. Your circumstances don't define you, other people's actions don't define you, and your past doesn't define you. You get to decide you are going to make the best possible life for yourself and others.

Some people have more experience with creating the life they want. Others less so. Usually, the best place to start is to explore yourself and the world around you. That means do some inner work, and get out there and meet new people, travel to new places, read up on new topics, and attend new events. Get talking to people who are good at inventing great lives for themselves and learn from them. Human beings have an amazing capacity to turn their lives around and because of that

we can forge our own way to a better and happier future through the messy and sometimes scary world we inhabit.

Reframing a situation or event is a technique often used in therapy. It is not about denying what is real, or trying to pretend something horrible is good, it is a way of looking at the situation in such a way that something good can be seen about it. Now, for the people in the midst of wars, and climate catastrophes, and epidemics, the situation is not good. However, most of us are not in those situations. We do experience the societal and economic consequences of them, but our daily lives are not catastrophic. So, if the bombardment by the media is getting you to feel terrible, and perhaps even hopeless about the world, then reframe how you see things. With loss comes opportunity. With upheaval comes the possibility of something better. Acknowledge what is real, and then also acknowledge that you probably have the ability to make something better than it is. You don't get to choose the cards life deals you, but you do get to choose how you play them.