

## Guest Blog for Love My Dress - March 2020

These are unprecedented times. We don't know what is happening, how it will unfold or what to do.

When we are anxious, it affects everything. We cannot work efficiently and we make decisions out of fear. But there are things we can do to help ourselves stay calm and focused.

I know that many of you right now are facing difficult decisions around weddings, be you someone planning your own, or a supplier working with multiple couples now distressed if their wedding will be taking place in the next few days and weeks. Staying mentally and emotionally well at this time is vital and I encourage you wholeheartedly to try to find a little time every day to care for you. It can be as little as two minutes, but something that you do regularly to calm down and replenish your energy will be more help and support to you right now than you may realise.

One of the most annoying things to hear when you are feeling worried must be, "just breathe through it" or "have you every thought of meditation?". I completely get it – it all sounds so vague, like our worries are not being taken seriously ('who has time for this when we're got a wedding to completely reschedule?').

When Annabel asked me to put together a piece on mediation for her wedding community, I was a bit concerned that I wasn't the right person to ask. I'm not a daily habitual meditator, but you seek out your form of meditation where you can find it, something that works for you and fits with your life. Yes you have to make time to do this, but it certainly doesn't have to mean long periods of silent sitting and fidgeting.

People have the expectation that all yoga teachers are Zen and calm and at peace with the world at all times, never swear, get cross or feel anxious. Clearly untrue, however, what I do hear all the time from my students when I am teaching is how relaxed I seem to be. And they are right, in that moment, when doing something I love, in a friendly space I feel all is well in the world. Digging deeper, when I am teaching my breath is longer, slower and my mind is focused only on what I am doing at that moment. I am not worrying about the minutiae of life or panicking about the big picture.

I am a yoga teacher who does not consciously meditate. I do not sit down with an empty mind every day, cross-legged in a state of bliss. I have tried and it doesn't work for me. Here are a few things that I do personally to keep anxiety at bay and focus my mind:

**Morning journaling** – spend 30 minutes every morning writing a stream of consciousness. Put down all your worries, thoughts and anxieties and then get on with your day. Eventually this practice will help you move on to the rest of your day with a clearer mind.

**Slow controlled breath work** – you can do this anywhere. Breathing in and out through your nose, consciously slow your breath down and, when you feel comfortable, work on adjusting the breath so it is a lighter slightly restricted breath. This breath supports the parasympathetic nervous system and reduces the release of the stress hormone, cortisol, and adrenaline.

**Creative mindfulness** – take a walk, collect some items from nature and spend time making a mandala out of stones, flowers, feathers, leaves. This is a really nice thing to do with the children. Here are some ideas from Pinterest, though they can be super simple.

**Sensory meditations** – use your senses for short and effective mind resets. For taste, take a favourite sweet or chocolate and allow it to dissolve slowly in your mouth, noticing the taste and sensations you experience. Chocolate buttons work really well for this. Mix a blend of essential oils on your forehead, chest or wrists and spend a few minutes enjoying the smells, noticing how they make you feel. Listen to a piece of music that you love and absorb the sounds, rhythm and feelings generated. A gentle DIY hand massage or take a walk in nature and focus on the beauty around you, which is always there, we just don't notice it. All very simple and can be done in minutes.

**Yoga Nidra** – for relaxation I choose Yoga Nidra recordings. This is a mediation to encourage sleep and deep relaxation. There are loads available for free on YouTube and meditation apps (see below).

**Physical meditations** – this works really well for me, I find my yoga practice is a moving meditation. It could also be a bike ride, a walk, a gym session, as long as it gives your mind a break from anxious thoughts.

**Mindfulness apps** – again there are so many out there, free on YouTube or you can subscribe including Headspace. This recent article from The Independent reviews 12 of the best mindfulness apps to keep you calm in a crisis (I know that Annabel herself is a big fan of 'Headspace').

Choose something that works for you, that you can do every day and enjoy.

Stay calm and stay healthy.