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A way to deal with anxiety, whether you believe in God or not



By Trey Hall

This originally appeared as a Facebook post and has been edited for the website.

I've seen so many great posts about the need to stay non-anxious in the time of coronavirus, but I've not seen as many recommendations for HOW to practice that.

When I got sober in my early thirties, I was experiencing pretty extreme anxiety, and an agnostic friend in my recovery group suggested meditation and prayer. "It's a way to remember that you're not the headquarters of the universe," she said. "It's a way to remember that most of the time, you're not the solution to your problems."

The impulse to meditate may not be your natural default. Prayer may not be your ordinary method. You may not even consider yourself a spiritual or religious person. But coronavirus times are weird times, y'all. The other day, one of my devout atheist friends said: "I don't believe in any kind of god at all, but I feel drawn to pray."

So if that's where you are, here's just one starter suggestion for folks of any faith or no faith who want to experiment with a different kind of rhythm in these anxious times. Just to be clear: there are loads of ways to meditate and pray. This is just one that has been helpful for me.

1. Find a quietish place for a few minutes -- the beginning, middle, or end of the day are my faves, but any time can work. Take a few deep breaths, and then, speaking aloud, say hello to the headquarters of the universe (however you name it or don't name it). List aloud some of the pressing things that are on your mind. "Hello, God, I'm really freaking out about ..." And then simply ask: "Can I trust you with that?"
2. For this to work, I promise you that it actually doesn't matter if you believe in God or not. What matters is that you start to let your cares go into a space that is not your head. If you don't believe in God, you can start, "Hello, God that I don't believe in, I'm really freaking out about Can I trust you, whom I don't think exists, with that?"
3. If this way of praying becomes something you're doing more regularly, you may find yourself craving a little pattern to help you cycle through the list of things on your mind. I love the framework that writer Anne Lamott offers: "Help. Thanks. Wow." You can let each of those words guide a short section of your prayer. For example:

4. **HELP.** Help me, God, as I try to cope with this *****g anxiety that's eating away at me. Help the nurses and doctors and first responders who are sacrificing so much right now. Help my kids find wonder and delight in these confined days.
5. **THANKS.** Thank you, Higher Power that I don't really believe in, thank you that I woke up this morning. Thanks for the breath in my lungs. For bread on the table and coffee in the pot. For the way my dog cuddles up next to me.
6. **WOW.** Wow, divine HQ, that flowers are still growing and birds are still singing. Wow, that people who don't know each other actually give a damn about each other. Wow, to feel the sun on my face. Wow for life and death and somehow mysteriously life beyond death.

Again, this is merely a suggestion. It may or not be your cup of tea. I can only offer what worked for me: and tell you that as I began to practice this, from time to time at first, moving eventually into a daily rhythm, things began to change. I still noticed the anxiety: it didn't evaporate, but it did begin to lose some of its power. And over time my lenses started to shift to see the universe, other people, myself, and the headquarters of it all in a vastly different way.

Peace be with y'all in these anxious, beautiful days.