



YOU'RE NOT alone in feeling a sense of doom and gloom. (Christopher Ott/Unsplash)

WE ARE at our best and most resilient when we act together, united. (PublicDomainPictures.net)

We really are OK – and often, much better than OK

Navigating the holidays this year



THE DOCTOR IS IN
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How are you doing? Feeling a sense of doom and gloom – yet again? Wondering how to prepare for the holidays when you feel zapped of all your energy and with little or no joie de vivre? Having trouble deciding who to even invite because the thought of fighting at the dinner table is not how you

want to envision the holidays?

If this sounds at all familiar and you have absorbed at least some of this stress, then read on because in this continuing world of uncertainty, you are definitely not alone.

These are very, very challenging and difficult times, with people perceiving existential threats to our country from multiple directions, both inside and out. Of course, the ever-present threat of nuclear weapons from Iran continues and feels as if it is closer with each passing day. On top of this, our society is deeply polarized – divided, with extremely strong opinions about the current political situation.

There are those who are of the belief that the government's proposed judicial reforms are catastrophic and life-threatening to our country, and those on the other side who feel that it is in fact those who oppose these changes that are threatening the future of our country. In each situation, people have very strongly held opinions, and there are massive demonstrations around the country which affect our lives on a daily basis.

In addition, both around the dinner table and in conversations with friends, discussions on this topic get quite heated, all of which threaten to rupture the very fabric of our society. People are truly worried as to whether our nation will survive, and if so, in what shape it will be.

On top of this is the increased presence of terrorism and the inability to feel secure. With increasing numbers of terrorist attacks and deaths, all of which come suddenly and with minimal or no warning, and little that can be done about them, there is a heightened sense of insecurity and fear. Following this with revenge attacks has only served to add more fuel to the fire and further demoralize us, in one way or another, as individuals and as a nation.





What can we do to cope?

The number one common variable in all of these issues is, unfortunately, a feeling of *fear*. People are depressed and anxious about the country, whether it be in relation to its physical security or the nature of our country itself, and whether it will suffer from moral or economic collapse, or both.

While it may feel as if this could happen, the reality in this moment is very different, as our government and economy are, for the most part, stable.

There too are issues of how we get along, with one another on both a macro and micro levels. How do we even begin the conversation with respect to social change and work to get along as a nation? People now more than ever have very strong feelings and believe that it is necessary to demonstrate en masse. While not problematic in itself, everyone must remain respectful toward one another and their beliefs, regardless of how they feel. This is critical.

More importantly perhaps, on a much more personal level and in one-on-one discussions, is how each person chooses to navigate these discussions at the table or with friends when each person holds differing but strong opinions. If individually and collectively we can maintain civility and calm, and move ahead together, we can demonstrate our ability to work together while handling anything that comes our way. While polarization pulls us apart and divides us as a country, we are at our best and most resilient when we act together, united.

As a nation about to celebrate its 75th birthday, we can't help but remind ourselves that we have been through so much. In spite of this, we have managed not just to cope but to cope well and grow beyond our pain. While acknowledging that many of us are "lightly injured" and jump more than we might think we should, we are nonetheless strong.

While it is not at all easy to be present-focused, we have learned to cope best by being in the moment – this moment – now. And in this moment, we remind ourselves that we really are okay and often much better than okay. We can be proud of our great nation, an economic marvel and a hi-tech wonder that has been a "light unto the nations." This is huge, and we have so much to be proud of and grateful for in the present and in our past.

INDIVIDUALLY, IF we do feel higher levels of stress, simply practicing breathing techniques and mindfulness work well to reduce anxiety and help us notice that really all is okay in our life. Furthermore, by adopting the mantra "We can only be in control of what we can be in control of," we can stop worrying about what might happen, let go of stressors that we do not need to worry about, and focus instead with appreciation on what is within our grasp.

Corona, recent earthquakes and previous episodes of conflict and terror have served as a necessary reminder to not get caught up in "stuff" that we cannot control. You, and only you, can choose what you would like to worry about and when. If it is not relevant to this minute, hour, or day, you actually can make a conscious choice to decide if and when it is worth your time to worry.

If, and only if, you choose to make this a legitimate worry (and not to let it go), then put it in your imaginary file cabinet under the appropriate date and time to worry. When the thought pops up uninvited (because you are human, it will), pull your imaginary rubber band on your wrist which serves as a reminder, give it a tug, and say "Not now" as often as you need to.

When you reach the appropriate date and time to worry, you may just discover that you have less to worry about than you thought. Remember, you can only worry about those items that are relevant now, in this minute, today.

Another technique to help you cope on both a daily basis and as you look forward to the holidays is to adopt an "attitude of gratitude." My readers know that I strongly suggest, before putting your feet on the floor in the morning, to say out loud five things that you appreciated or were grateful for that happened yesterday.

It's not easy because we often forget what was good about yesterday as we move onto today. If you need extra help, just look to nature, which can always generate positivity. You might also ask someone close to you what happened "good" for them. You might be inspired by hearing their perspective.

REMEMBER, NOW more than ever it is important to look after your body. Practice good eating, sleep, hygiene, relaxation and breathing techniques. Whether you enjoy a bath or a book, a dinner out with a friend or a quiet movie with your children, if you are doing okay, the rest of the family will do so much better.

Take a break from the news and social media, even if you don't think that it increases your stress. You

truly don't need to know everything in real-time, and less exposure will help you better focus on what is important. If it is truly important, it will still be important later.

Don't be afraid to ask for help if you feel that you or other family members are having difficulty coping. You may be experiencing so many losses of different types, and sometimes just having a conversation with a mental health professional can be just what you need to move forward from your "funk." They too can help you with mindfulness, relaxation, breathing and other somatic techniques.

Remind yourself that this difficult time too shall pass. Think back to previous strategies that worked and incorporate them into your daily living.

Now, with Purim just behind us and Passover on the horizon, it is a good time to focus on your values. Hope too that your children and grandchildren will someday appreciate all that you do as a role model for them. As you start to think about reorganizing your cupboards, spring cleaning, menu planning and more, reflect on the importance of the holiday itself.

Rather than arguing about politics, remind yourself of the values you hope to transmit at the Seder table this year. If you were leaving Egypt in a hurry, what would you consider important to take and why? Rather than argue the pros and cons of specific political positions, what values can you all agree on, and how are they reflected in your stories and in your behavior at the Seder? Steer conversations to more positive topics and things people can all agree on or at the very least, agree to disagree.

As we have collectively been dealing with terrorism, a war elsewhere with global consequences, earthquakes, a post-COVID world, political proposals, their consequences and our responses to them, what positive lessons can you take with you? What does freedom mean to you and your loved ones right now and for your future?

Perhaps it means leaving things behind – both materially and emotionally; letting go, at least for enough time and in this moment, to truly appreciate what it is that we really are blessed to have.

And in this moment, you really are okay! ■

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FILE AWAY your worries in an imaginary cabinet. (Omid Kashmari/Unsplash)

NOW MORE than ever, look after your body. (Max van den Oetelaar/Unsplash)