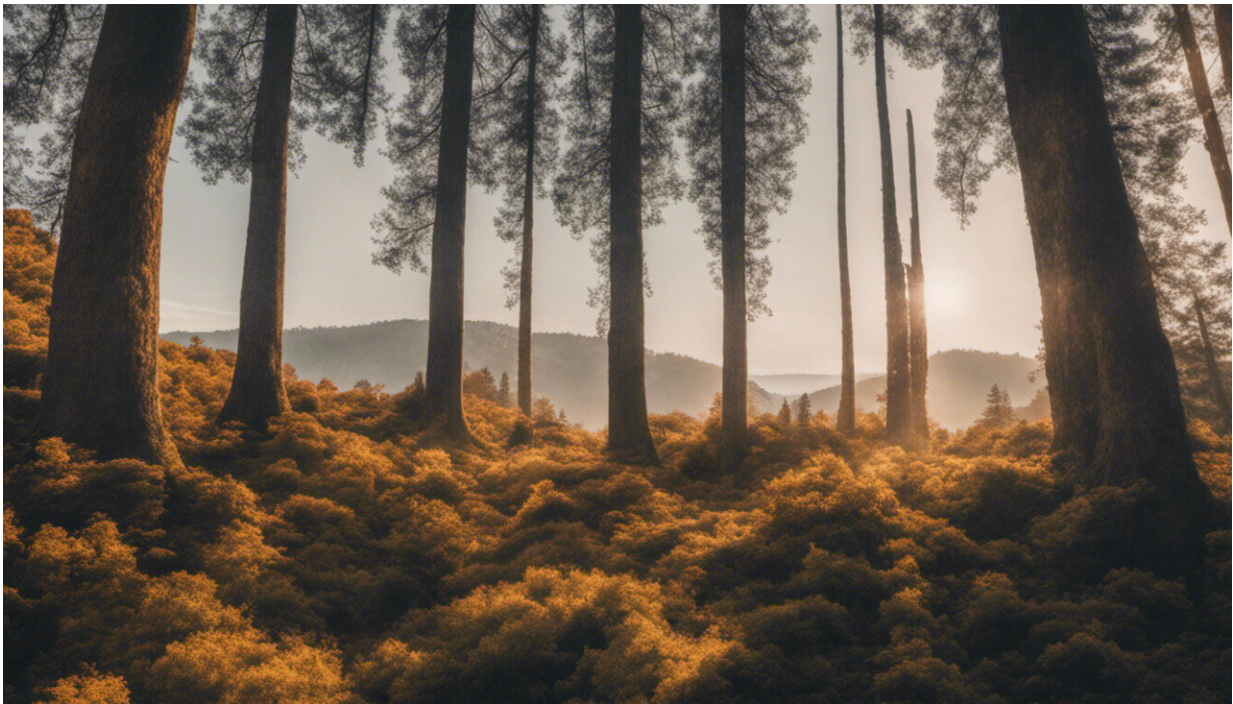


What spiritual retreats can teach us about the challenges of lockdown

April 29 2020, by Steve Taylor



Credit: AI-generated image ([disclaimer](#))

In 2005, a documentary called [Into Great Silence](#) was released, which portrayed life in a monastery in the French Alps. The director Philip Groening spent months living with the monks, where after a few weeks of silence and solitude, he developed a new sense of awareness.

The quietness and inactivity of the monastic way of life had an awakening effect on him. He began to live wholly in the present, and seemingly mundane objects became intensely real and beautiful.

At the moment, during [lockdown](#), we may not be living like monks, but we are certainly living restricted lives. Some of us may find the lack of hustle and bustle unsettling. We're so accustomed to background white noise that when it ceases we may feel uneasy.

Quietness and solitude can also expose us to discord in our minds, which start to chatter away, creating a sense of disturbance. Negative thoughts and feelings emerge—especially during uncertain times, when there are urgent and real concerns about job security, family members and financial stability.

But as I show in my book [Back To Sanity](#), once we get used to living more slowly, quietness can sometimes be strangely therapeutic, and help us cope with difficult moments.

The positive aspects of confinement

And while many of us are understandably finding our present predicament extremely challenging, I believe we can learn something from retreat techniques which might help.

Of course, this may not be possible for everyone. People who live in isolated or crowded conditions or who are in turbulent relationships may find it much harder. It's partly a question of temperament too. People who are naturally introverted and reclusive will find the lockdown easier to deal with than people who are more extroverted.

But there are certain practices we can try to follow which will help us to learn from retreats how to better deal with the changed lives we are

leading. Here are five tips:

Acceptance. If you keep thinking about how great your life was before the lockdown, and about how awful it is now, then you will feel frustrated and unhappy. One of the best pieces of advice I have heard is: "If you can't change a situation, stop resisting it. Just accept it." So tell yourself that this is the way things are, that this is your life for the time being. Don't fight the situation—embrace and accept it.

Live in the present. Don't think too much about the past or the future. Just live from moment to moment, taking each day as it comes. Pay attention to your experience on a moment to moment basis. Be mindful. Look out of your [window](#) or go into your garden (if you have one) and look around slowly, paying attention to everything which comes into your range of vision. Do the same when you go out shopping or for exercise, and when you eat.

Appreciate the small things. This is the time to appreciate the things in our lives which we are normally too busy to notice. It's the time to appreciate food and drink, the [natural world](#) around us, the sky, the stars and the people who are close to us. Above all, we should feel gratitude for life itself.

Trust yourself. One thing my [psychology research](#) has taught me is that human beings are much stronger than we think. There are reserves of resilience inside us which we only become aware of when we are challenged or face difficulties. Even if you think you can't cope with a situation, you will be surprised to find that you can.

Reframe the situation. It's not going to last forever, and it may be a long time before anything like it happens again. Don't think of the lockdown as imprisonment—think of it as a spiritual retreat. Some people go on meditation retreats or yoga holidays to feel rejuvenated. Now many of us

are on an enforced retreat from our normal hectic, stressful lives.

In [my role as a psychologist](#), I have become aware of the therapeutic power of these practices. At the end of this period of retreat, we may return to our normal lives feeling more human. We may become more centred in the present, and less focused on the future. We may become more aware of the beauty of our surroundings, rather than giving all our attention to tasks and activities.

Instead of losing ourselves in our roles and responsibilities, we may become attuned to our authentic selves. And rather than looking for happiness outside us, by buying and doing things, we may find a simple contentment emerges naturally just from being.

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