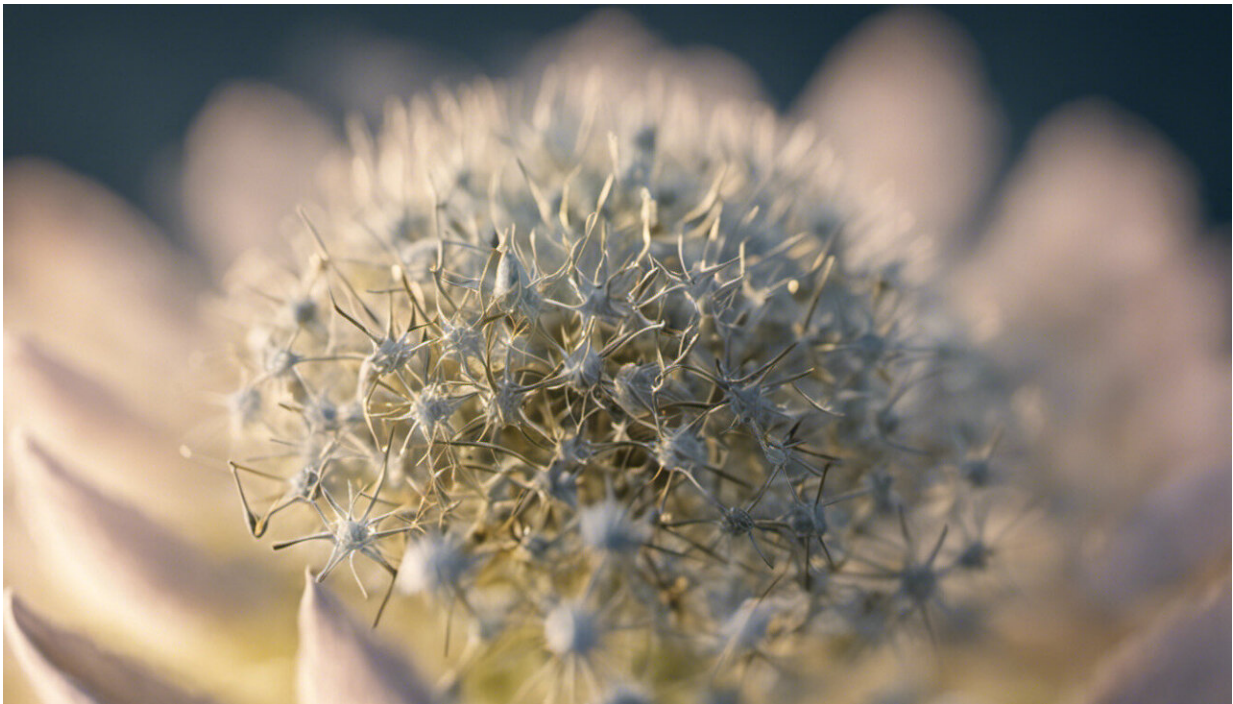


Practicing mindfulness can help us through the coronavirus pandemic

July 6 2020, by Kira Jade Cooper



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

We seem to have mastered the perfect recipe for chaos: a global ecological emergency, humanitarian crises and to top it off, a pandemic of epic proportions. Where do we begin to make sense of the current times? Or more importantly, how can we move towards a positive systemic shift that leaves no one behind?

How about by taking a breath.

Mindfulness, a once-traditional Buddhist practice has become a normalized part of secular society and is lauded by many health and wellness authorities. It is now found in many [public spaces](#) such as [schools](#), [politics](#), [military units](#) and [hospitals](#).

Increasingly, researchers are finding [new applications](#) and interventions for [mindfulness](#) practices to enhance individual well-being, including the reduction of [stress](#), [anxiety](#) and [depression](#). While these have demonstrated promise for improving numerous aspects of human health, little research has explored the potential benefits for mindfulness to contribute to collective well-being, especially during times of widespread crisis.

My research has found that [mindfulness can be used to advance not only individual wellness, but depending on the practice and its application, a broader sustainability agenda as well](#). This relatively unexplored means of supporting sustainability progress has immense value to offer in times of crisis, particularly COVID-19.

Mindfulness and COVID-19

The COVID-19 pandemic has surfaced many deep sustainability concerns. What it has also emphasized is our too-often mindless ways of being that have resulted in deep [inequities](#) and an exploitative relationship with the [biosphere](#).

Researchers have found that mindfulness practice can increase [compassion](#) and [empathy](#), which are essential traits for supporting both individual and collective resilience.

And as [social distancing](#) and quarantine measures keep us physically

separate and yearning for connection, the role of mindfulness in nurturing feelings of [interconnectedness](#) and reducing [risk factors](#) for [loneliness and isolation](#) has become increasingly important.

Mindfulness has also been found to deepen [connection to nature](#), and even heighten [recognition of climate change](#).

Together, this understanding and commitment to well-being for all are critical processes to mitigate our current unsustainable ways of being and doing. Since mindfulness has been found to [reduce consumerism](#) and promote more [sustainable consumption habits](#), it supports a path for tackling large sustainability challenges.

First responders and frontline workers

Additionally, for [first responders](#) who are facing likely unprecedented high levels of chronic stress as a result of COVID-19, mindfulness can also help reduce [compassion fatigue](#) and [workplace burnout](#).

Furthermore, in light of the current tension between police and civilians, mindfulness may also offer benefit in addressing inequalities as it has been found to reduce aggression in [law enforcement officers](#).

Despite the numerous potential benefits of mindfulness, finding effective ways to leverage these practices, while also recognizing some of their drawbacks and limitations remains an ongoing challenge.

Drawbacks of mindfulness

To increase marketability, mindfulness has been largely separated from its [Buddhist roots](#). In the process, many of the traditional moral and ethical elements of the practice have been replaced with a more

[individualized](#) and often [self-serving agenda](#).

Business ventures that [target high-spending and elite consumers](#), including [Google](#), [Apple](#) and [Nike](#) have capitalized on this niche in the wellness market. Mindfulness is a [profitable and growing multi-billion dollar industry](#).

Mindfulness practices that reinforce a notion of self as separate from the rest of nature and society can risk missing many benefits of traditional [mindfulness practice](#). Similarly, by focusing exclusively on developing a heightened awareness of self, mindfulness practitioners can fail to see the consequences of their behaviors.

Individualized mindfulness practices that are preoccupied with [enhancing pleasure and enjoyment](#), as opposed to ending suffering, can inadvertently encourage materialism and [selfishness](#).

A mindful future

Rather than advancing narrow [neoliberal](#) and [capitalistic](#) agendas by leveraging mindfulness as a [productivity hack](#), [product or service](#), mindful practice could enhance both individual and collective well-being while supporting broader sustainability progress. For this to be conceived and pursued, the ways by which we define, practice, and apply mindfulness need to be re-examined, and in some cases, transformed.

One such transformation is the integration of mindfulness practices into [peace-building](#) initiatives in [conflict areas](#). In places such as refugee camps, mindfulness is used to support [resilience building](#), while simultaneously fostering both individual and collective well-being.

As our new reality unfolds under the circumstances imposed by COVID-19, it continues to reveal further socio-ecological challenges.

We will need to learn how to practice mindfulness wisely, in a manner that reduces suffering for all beings, in both the present moment and the post-pandemic future.

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