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## Seeking Quiet Solace Amid a Pandemic

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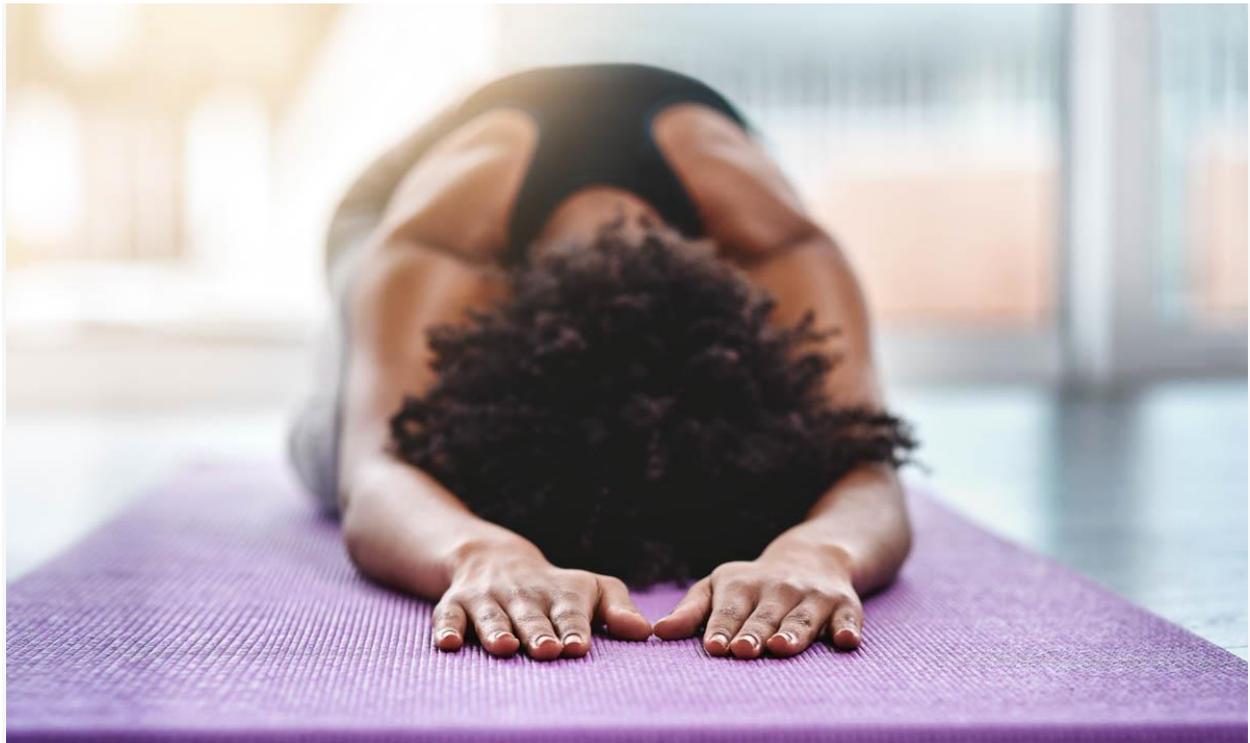
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## Seeking Quiet Solace Amid a Pandemic

By **Michelle Gregoire Gill**  
UCF Forum columnist  
Wednesday, April 29, 2020

Even during this awful coronavirus threat there are still gifts to be found.



(Photo by PeopleImages on iStock)

A friend's husband is in the hospital due to a heart attack, but the family isn't allowed to visit. People are losing their jobs. Politics about the severity of COVID-19 has frayed connections between me and some of my relatives. My aunt's funeral was canceled, and I can't even hug my mom.

How do people cope during these times?

I am writing this as a muted Zoom conference window sits on the right side of my monitor. There, in my peripheral vision, are the friendly faces of a group of women faculty who are committed to meeting each week to write. We usually meet in a cozy conference room in the UCF Education Complex.

When the coronavirus pandemic sent us home, we decided to keep meeting virtually.

After we check in on each other for a few minutes and set our writing intentions, we get to work. We have written grants, edited book chapters, and revised manuscripts together. But when the coronavirus pandemic sent us home, we decided to keep meeting virtually.

It's different, but it works. We still see each other. We check in on each other. And we write. This day, I'm writing this column as part of the women's writing-group time.

I always wonder if anyone will show up to these meetings. We have every excuse not to show up—it's the end of the semester. Grades are due soon. We have kids at home. It's so easy to prioritize many things other than writing. And yet, we show up. I sometimes wonder if that isn't half the battle with anything worth doing?

I've been thinking about this a lot.

Surprisingly, I have found myself returning to yoga and meditation, two practices I used to follow almost religiously, but which I let slip over the years as my life got busier and other things took priority. I know a lot about yoga and meditation. I was trained as a power yoga instructor 12 years ago. Twelve years earlier than that, I practiced vipassana meditation regularly twice a day.

So I kind of thought I was still reaping the benefits of both. Didn't I take deep breaths when waiting in line at Disney? Didn't I do downward dog after a long session of grading papers? Didn't I spend time in prayer every morning? And didn't I go to yoga classes from time to time with friends?

But the longer I stayed home, the more I found myself longing to practice yoga and meditation regularly again. So, one morning, I rolled out my dusty mat on the porch, turned on a free yoga streaming class, and began a series of sun salutations. Then I plunked myself into a quiet corner, turned on my Calm app, and meditated for 10 minutes. (Yoga prepares the body for sitting still; it is a lovely precursor to meditation and prayer.)

Within a few breaths, I was home again. Ah, there I was! Back in my body. Back in the rhythm of my breathing. Back in that delicious spaciousness where time seems to stand still, and I can let go.

There, in that space, I saw how much grief I had been carrying due to the pandemic. Grief over those lost, those dying, those struggling, and those alone.

Resting in this space, I also remembered the good, too—neighbors meeting outside for a social distancing cocktail hour, nature flourishing with fewer cars on the road, my boys going outside and becoming more independent, actors and artists sharing their art on social media and lifting us up, the folks singing in Italy.

Ahh. I realized something then. The thinking of the thing is not the same as the doing of the thing. Thinking about something is not the experience of that something. Experience costs. And takes time.

I read recently that for academics, we face a particular problem because we tend to think about so many things, that we sometimes can unknowingly fool ourselves into believing we have experienced the thing we have thought about. But reading and studying about parenting is not the same as being a mother, and reading and studying about meditation does not still the mind. I am grateful that even during this awful pandemic, there are still gifts to be found.

For me, the gifts have been reconnecting to my family, reconnecting to what I most love about my work, and this: reconnecting to that quiet place deep inside where my heart sings with joy, my mind settles, and all is well. Despite the chaos in the world, and even in my home sometimes. Underneath all the noise, there is a quiet place, reminding me not to panic. Yes, there is grief. But there is also joy. Both/And.

Underneath all of it is a place of spacious stillness, a place of peace. Peace that I can bring back to the world, back to my home, back to my work, and back to my family. May it be for you as well. Whether it's found in prayer, meditation, stretching, walking outside, or simply lying on your back looking at the sky, may you find that quiet place inside you, and may you bring it back to a world which so desperately needs it.

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