

# OVERCOMING THE SUNDAY SCARIES WITH MINDFULNESS

BY KAITLYN VITTOZZI

While New York State was on PAUSE I was taking a socially distanced walk with a family member. It was a chilly April Sunday evening, but the fresh air was a needed contrast from being in the house all the time. Being recently laid off from her job, she said “Wow, Sunday is the best night of the week now, I have nothing to worry about tomorrow.” I had to work the next morning, but on that Sunday night, I looked around the street we were walking down, and felt at peace. At the same time, I felt where she was coming from - I have spent many a Sunday evening dreading the next day. A quick google search on the Sunday scaries and one article reported over 68% of Americans experience anxiety on Sunday nights.

Did I have heavy responsibilities waiting for me Monday morning that week? Of course. Every Monday there is an inbox of no less than 200 emails waiting for me. Some wanting answers on Saturday. Several two weeks overdue. And I know some of you reading this have much more than that to deal with. So why was I able to overcome that and find peace on our walk? This is not an article about how you should quit your job and travel, throw financial security aside and follow your passion. There are a lot of people out there who are braver than I am with untamed souls who gain a lot of life experience by quitting their jobs and they write really great stories about that. This article is about yoga for the householders – those of us who hold jobs and careers that produce anxiety (even if we really like them) – and cannot just simply get up and leave.

What is a householder? In Ancient India there were people who could become renunciates in the woods or move to monasteries to become monks to study spirituality. If you are living in the woods

you don't have the fear of “Oh God what mood is my boss going to be in tomorrow morning?” They might have had to worry about getting eaten by tigers but we've probably all sat through a meeting so painful that that death by tiger feels like the easiest way to go. Here are some mindfulness tools I've pulled from my studies which allow me find peace on Sunday nights. These Sunday night insights come from a variety of sources - yoga, Buddhism, meditation teachers, mental health professionals and self-help books.

- Concentrating on the present moment. Stop letting Monday steal from Sunday. Dharana means concentration or one-pointedness in yoga. What if we practiced gratitude for Sunday evening the way we do Friday night? You may have heard the Lao Tzu quote “If you are depressed you are living in the past. If you are anxious you are living in the future. If you are at peace you are living in the present.” The next time Sunday night blues start to swell up in your stomach, look around. Make a list of all you have be grateful for right here. It could be, wow I really had a good laugh with so-and-so, this couch is so comfortable, this cup of tea is so delicious. So often, I channel my anxiety into mindlessly scrolling through social media, but I've just dulled my concentration and let the mind wander. Feel more right now and less what's next.

- Practicing self-compassion and enoughness. Paraphrasing, Stephen Levine says we all have a sense of unworthiness society gives us that we are trying to overcome. Our ego tries to over-do and overachieve to try to play catch-up for that sense of self-doubt. Many Sundays, with my laptop at home, I've logged on and put in a few extra hours to try to

make Sunday less terrifying. It doesn't usually work. What if I took those hours and said “Kaitlyn, you are doing your best of juggling three jobs right now. You are a wonderful person who deserves rest and joy and to read a good book without feeling guilty? You are smart, you bring in a lot of money for that company, they should be appreciative of all your effort. Nobody is perfect, nobody has ever perfectly pleased any manager. It is not your job to please everyone.” Try it on. Saying this out loud for the first time, I was nearly in tears.

- Moderation. As Krishna told Arjuna in the Bhagavad Gita, “...those who eat too much or eat too little, who sleep too much or sleep too little, will not succeed in meditation. But those who are temperate in eating and sleeping, work and recreation, will come to the end of sorrow...” Are you taking care of yourself over the weekend, so you are ready to take on the week in your healthiest possible state? In the summers I teach on the lake, which means I work seven days per week. It is some of my most enjoyable work, I count down the days as soon as the weather in Upstate New York starts to show a glimmer of spring. But I don't get much rest all summer, which makes Mondays a little bit foggier. Where can you carve out time for rest? Be cognizant of where you are spending your energy. Maybe it means two mimosas at brunch, not six. In Buddhism it's called the middle way – not self-indulgence or self-deprivation. It is not doing the most or avoiding all work. What does your middle-way weekend look like?

- Take note: journaling. What conditions are arising that make you hate your Mondays? What specifically about tomorrow is really going to be that



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bad? Write it down. Some weeks will be worse than others, but do you have anything to legitimately be afraid of or are you in a habit of prejudging it? If you can name it, you can tame it.

- Move! On any day of the week, I can accumulate worries like those tiny weights they use in barre class. At first they don't feel like anything but all of a sudden I can barely breathe. Another yoga therapy student and I had to give online sessions to one another a few weeks ago online. I had a small list of things I was trying work through at the start of the 60-minute session: the wants, the worries, worrying about why I want

those things. Halfway through some stretches I laughed at myself because I had no worries at all. My physical body had just felt stuck from not exercising three days in a row. Exercise is a proven mood booster, there is science to back that. It improves anxiety and depression, so give it a try the next time you start to let your wheels spin.

“Don't give up your own welfare for the sake of others' welfare For the sake of others' welfare, however great. Clearly know your own welfare . And be intent on the highest good.” – The Dhammapada

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