

An answer from John Beary (centre teacher for Dhamma Mahāvāna, California) to a question about fear of the coronavirus:

Ask an AT: How can Vipassana help in an uncertain and fearful time like this Covid-19 viral pandemic and attendant hysteria?

JB: A virus is contagious. Likewise fear is contagious as well. We may become carriers of the virus, we don't have to be carriers of fear.

Arresting our own inner fears so that we do not become carriers of it is a significant contribution Vipassana yogis can make to all those around us at this time.

Media inundates us with fear mongering. At every turn obsessive fear of impending doom from without and within clouds us, impedes right understanding and leads to wrong decisions and even to paralysis where we don't know what to do to protect ourselves. This triggers our own inner fears and insecurities.

In the course of Vipassana practice we have the chance to arrest, attenuate and ultimately eradicate fear. But this is only possible via our practice of Vipassana: when fear arises we remain in *sampajjañña*. In other words while meditating, when worry, fear or dread arise in the mind in the form of thoughts and emotions it is critical that we remain aware of the accompanying sensations recognizing their inescapable evidence of impermanence. The more we become adept at doing this the more we undo the tendency of mind to dwell and react upon counter-productive ideation that produces nothing but suffering and unhappiness.

Epidemics, pandemics shouldn't distract us from these fundamentals. As human beings throughout our lives we will cycle incessantly between good and bad health, wellness and sickness, until we die. Ignorant wild swings of behavior accompany the extremes of each: in youthful exuberance we blithely feel carefree and take risks thinking ourselves somehow immortal. As adults in the throes of illness we over-react with despair thinking our suffering is somehow unique and interminable. "Yikes, it must be cancerous." "Yikes, surely I've got the Covid-19 virus!" The hallmark of each of these extremes is the absence of the awareness of the truth of impermanence. Dhamma practice is the only remedy to correct and undo the effects of this deep seated ignorance.

We are going to become ill at some point and we will recover until we don't. Reasonable precautions to safeguard health by definition are those undertaken with a

balanced mind. We obtain a balanced mind increasingly when we purify it with the practice of Vipassana/sampajjañña.

Mettā

John Beary