

KEEP CALM AND Carry On

A/Prof Angie Chew, the founder and CEO of Brahm Centre, on the importance of finding your inner calm.

Interview **KOH YUEN LIN** // Photo **COURTESY OF BRAHM CENTRE**

>> SHE IS A PICTURE OF

TRANQUILITY, who speaks in a gentle manner, and often with a serene smile. Yet just a few years ago, A/Prof Angie Chew was a different person. Tumultuous life events had taken a toll on her emotionally. She was grappling with anxiety attacks that made it difficult for her to breathe. "I was trying to figure out why I wasn't happy despite having material comforts and a successful career. I felt a void," she recalls. Thus, she turned to practising mindfulness. "I had to train my mind to be in the present, and appreciate what I have," she explains. "Often, the turmoil we experience — be it a sense of insecurity, perceived threats, or of being disrespected — is actually in our minds. Mindfulness allows us that clarity to recognise that."

In 2012, A/Prof Chew founded Brahm Centre, a charity that promotes happier and healthier living through science-based mindfulness programmes.

Since then, A/Prof Chew — who left her career to work at Brahm Centre — has conducted such programmes for thousands. For her work with the elderly and people with mental health issues, she was named *The Straits Times Singaporean of the Year 2019*.

ACCEPTANCE VS RESIGNATION

Observing the frustrations many Singaporeans are experiencing, be it in life or work — and especially those impacted by COVID-19 — A/Prof Chew says that it is normal to panic or feel stressed when facing a difficult situation. "Resilience comes through being able to focus on what needs to be tackled," she says. To her, an inner calm is necessary to achieve this. It is what enables a person to accept a situation without judgment or cynicism, look at the big picture and



EASY STEPS TO MINDFULNESS >

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Angie Chew

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come up with holistic solutions. "This does not mean you are resigned to the situation, but a recognition that, what has happened has happened. It liberates us from the past so that we can move forward," she says. "Anger will just stress the body out and negatively impact the immune system. But by accepting it, the body and mind can be at ease, and can heal."

LIVING EVERY BREATH

"My mindfulness practice is anchored in knowing how precious time is. This allows me not to get sucked up by negative emotions and instead to strive to make every moment a

good one — one that is useful to my community and family," she says. "Another anchor is the cultivation of kindness — I want to add value and happiness to the lives that I touch."

Mindfulness is a journey, even for A/Prof Chew, who shares easy steps to calm the mind. "Taking three deep breaths is a good start. It makes you focus on breathing, and stops the mind from perpetuating a certain way of thinking," she says. "If you wake up in the middle of the night and find your mind crowded with thoughts, focus on your breathing, and tap your finger lightly on your bed. When the mind is focusing on one thing and not busy fabricating more thoughts, it will allow itself to go back to sleep." She also highlights the need to surround oneself with positivity. "We are very conscious of what we eat, yet what we feed our mind is equally important. If we fill it with negativity, then it will become corrupted. If we hang out with those who are kind and forgiving, we will turn our mind into a powerhouse of positivity."