



SERENITY NOW

Time to take a deep breath after stressful year

I'm writing this column on Election Day. Any other year, this would be the end of a campaign that was probably stressful for people who follow politics closely. They could now catch their breath and relax for a while.

This year, based on early voting numbers and constant media coverage of a bitterly contested race, it's fair to say that the election has been stressful for many more people than normal. Add to that a deadly pandemic, economic collapse, racial strife, natural disasters and the very real possibility that the election could continue to drag on for weeks or more, and it could be quite a while before the stress level of the country drops to a healthier place.

What everyone needs to do is take a deep breath. If you need help winding down, there is of course an app for that. **Calm**, available on the App Store and Google Play, is designed to help you relax, be mindful, sleep better, meditate and reduce stress.

Most of the content on the app consists of narrators explaining in relaxed, measured tones, how you can be in the moment and recharge your drained psyche. The narrations are divided into categories based on what type of relief or growth you're working toward. There's Daily Calms, Quick and Easy, Mental Fitness, Sleep Stories, Meditations, Music and Sparks.

Daily Calms are designed to help you get your day off to a peaceful start. Quick and Easy are short sessions of five min-



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utes or less in case you need quick relief from a stressful situation. Mental Fitness features educational series on training your mind, meditating, building confidence and more. Sleep Stories are bedtime stories for adults. Meditations are soothing, instructional talks meant to help you reach a state of mindfulness. Music is a collection of sounds that you can use as a calming soundtrack to your day. Sparks are talks given on developing life skills, such as managing expectations, forgive-

ness or trusting your gut. There's also a Calm Body section that features stretching exercises to help you relax.

You can choose episodes of different lengths, from a few minutes to a half hour, or even some longer series that can be listened to over an extended period of time. The meditations I listened to all followed a similar script. The narrator would give an introduction that addressed the theme of the exercise, but then the actual meditation instructions were all very similar:

The app has sophisticated design for its visuals and navigation. Beautiful, full-screen photos and art provide the backdrop for the narrations. Many are nature scenes, but there are artistically shot portraits for some of the narrators. The home screen fea-

tures a series of peaceful nature videos you can choose from. Most of them portray rippling waves on a lake, flowing streams, falling rain or other repetitive natural phenomena.

The free version comes with some content in each of the app's sections, but the majority of content must be paid for. In fact, Calm never misses an opportunity to try to upsell you to a \$70 annual paid subscription. I found the frequent pitches to upgrade annoying rather than calming. The app is apparently making some money because they have some big names, like LeBron James and Matthew McConaughey, doing readings.

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