We are living in rather stressful, complicated times. As if unstable governments and climate change weren’t enough to worry about, we’re also facing some rather significant economic challenges worldwide. The nature of these challenges and their ramifications are mostly beyond our control so, to some extent, worrying about them is a waste of energy. However, one question we might be asking ourselves is - “How can I live a life full of contentment and joy with all this doom and gloom we’re facing?”

I believe the answer to this question is always the same. It is SIMPLE - simple pleasures.

We don’t have to give up work, live in a cave or even have a sea- or tree-change to enjoy the pure beauty and joy of simplicity. No matter how mad or complex our world, household or lives are, we can all take steps to slow things down a little and simplify. In order to do this well, it is easier if we understand a few basic Ayurvedic principles...

Ayurveda outlines three qualities to describe our state of mind - Rajas, Tamas and Sattva. It is taught that these qualities actually exist in all things and, like all qualities in Ayurveda, the rule of ‘Like Increases Like’ applies. This means everything we experience or come into contact with actually influences the balance of these three qualities within our minds. If we come into contact with more Tamasic influences, we will become more Tamasic; more Rajasic influences and we’ll become more Rajasic and so on...

Rajas is the source of outward movement and activity. It is at the root of our passions and desires, of our constant outward seeking for gratification. It stirs our longings and provides the energy we require to try and fulfill them. In this way, it brings a degree of disturbance, fragmentation and, if unchecked, eventual exhaustion.

Tamas is the quality of inertia, indifference, dullness and darkness. It is heavy and obstructive and is associated with laziness, delusion, ignorance and depression.

Sattva is the opposite of Tamas. It is the quality of truth, purity and intelligence. Luminous and light, it give rise to peace, patience, love and creativity and its predominance is associated with clarity, contentment and compassion.

In Ayurveda we are taught that there are two ways of slowing down - one promotes stillness while the other promotes stagnation. As you can probably guess it is a predominance of Tamas that causes the latter.... Most of us tend to ‘slow down’ in this way, often following a Rajasic binge - we tend to fall into an exhausted heap that can be difficult to get up from again (without the help of coffee or red bull).

Slowing down into stillness, on the other hand, is a result of a predominance of Sattva and is the sort of quality we want to cultivate in order experience greater contentment and joy in our lives. We don’t have to force our minds into this state.... and it doesn’t have to be difficult or complex. All we have to do is focus on the simple pleasures of life that are always available to us - these simple pleasures are more Sattvic in quality so naturally increase Sattva in our minds. I’m talking about the intuitively warm and joyful moments of life that deeply move us - that we’d trade all our ‘stuff’ for in a heartbeat. Here are some ideas to get started...

**Spending more time being ‘present’ with loved ones.**
Take the time to have real conversations with the ones you love - to ask questions, to really listen to the answers... get to know them deeply and develop a sense of closeness, intimacy and fun.

**Spending more time with pets.**
We have so much to learn from our animal’s capacity to truly live in the moment and to derive complete happiness from the simplest things in life - a good walk, a good feed, cuddles, love and sleep.

**Spending more time in nature.**
Walks in the park; walking barefoot on green grass; swims at the beach; watching the sunset or sunrise; cloud or star-gazing will all promote Sattva. Spending time in nature is simultaneously energizing, uplifting and deeply calming.

**Spending more time in the kitchen.**
Making delicious meals from scratch, eating something we’ve created and watching others enjoy it provides a deep, soulful satisfaction! This is especially true for those creations that require a little extra energy, patience or effort. So pull out those Ayurvedic cookbooks on the weekends and have some fun!
Growing our own food.
The one thing more enjoyable than buying yummy, fresh wholefoods from the markets is picking herbs, fruits or veggies from our own garden. It is an amazing feeling to plant, grow, tend, harvest and then eat our own food!

Getting moving - gently.
Enjoying some daily exercise such as walking in a peaceful place, a slow bike ride, gardening, gentle yoga, qigong or tai chi will help to invigorate the body and calm the mind... increasing Satva, pacifying Rajas and reducing Tamas. Being gentle with ourselves is best. If we don’t overdo it, we are far more likely to enjoy the experience and make it a part of daily life.

Creating more Sattvic spaces.
Tidy, clutter free, spacious and light-filled rooms decorated with plants, cut flowers, candles and scenes from nature promote Satva and feel wonderful to spend time in. Great pleasure can be taken in the simple creativity of making the bed each morning or arranging nicknacks in a beautiful way. A lick of paint (especially whites, creams and pastels), some de-cluttering and a little thoughtful decorating can literally change the way we feel - instantly soothing and calming our minds!

Satisfying the senses.
Increasing our exposure to Sattvic sensory inputs will, in turn, produce a more Sattvic state of mind. We’re talking things like hugs and cuddles; gentle massage; wearing more natural fabrics such as wool, silk and cotton; burning natural scents such as incense and essential oils; listening to gentle, soothing, uplifting music; reading or watching feel-good, laugh-out-loud funny or inspiring books and movies.

Sitting still.
Meditation can be surprisingly difficult to do for those of us with busy (i.e. Rajasic) minds and bodies... but it is equally surprisingly how quickly it can still the mind and stabilise our moods. The benefits of quiet sitting or ‘being with ourselves’ for just 10 mins a day in the morning or before bed can’t be underestimated. If you can find a local meditation group for occasional longer sits or silent retreats, all the better.

Doing something for someone in need.
We will bring great joy to our lives if, every now and then, we take a little time to help someone out or contribute to a worthwhile cause without expecting anything in return. Giving money is never quite the same as giving our time and energy.

Being warm and kind to ourselves.
Finally, one of the most important things we can do to promote a life of contentment and joy is to be a little warmer and kinder to ourselves... to rest more often, pamper ourselves more often and to be with ourselves more often so we can listen more deeply to our needs. If we can succeed at being warmer, more forgiving, and more caring towards ourselves, we will naturally be more able to cultivate these feelings towards others. This is simple to say but a little more challenging to do... so just take it one day at a time.

So as you can see, slowing down in a Sattvic way is not all that difficult to do and it generally won’t cost us anything apart from a little time. But it is worth every minute. It is good for our minds, our hearts, our relationships, our wallet and our planet!

Focussing on the simple pleasures of life will increase our capacity to experience joy and contentment and will actually improve our decision making - when we have more Satva present in our minds, we are naturally drawn to more Sattvic activities. But importantly, it will also improve our ability to better cope with the challenges of life.