

Stilling THE MIND

Carolyn Moody outlines three ways of quieting the mind for inner renewal.



In our busy world full of noisy mind chatter, it is hardly surprising that many of us are searching for peace of mind. It is a reflection of our left-brained, thinking and doing culture that we have to learn how to still our minds. As children most of us were adept at daydreaming, detaching the mind from current, everydayness, and going into in dreamlike musings, fantasies, hopes and dreams, while still awake.

As adults, there are many ways to still the mind. We can reach a meditative state doing the most mundane things: weeding the garden, taking a walk in nature, people watching, tinkering with machinery, creating something from scratch...Your mind has gone quiet when someone talks to you and you startle. You were 'miles away'.

Time spent alone and daydreaming helps us reconnect to our right brain, the centre of creative self-expression and intuition. Taking half an hour a day to let the mind wander helps release stress and gets things in perspective. This is already a challenge for some people who are so used to being busy, that they feel anxious when they stop and do nothing: no reading, television, listening to music, fiddling with their mobile phones and no chatting with anyone.

CONTEMPLATION

Defined as the act of 'regarding steadily', contemplation is like daydreaming except that as you gaze at something in front of you, say a sunset, you immerse yourself in it, following the images, ideas and trains of thought that arise, until a truth reveals itself. During quiet contemplation, you relax and feel more connected.

However, if you start feeling anxious and weaving

stories about right and wrong, good and bad, them and us, who did what to whom and how bad somebody or something is, this is not contemplation – this is ‘going nowhere’ thinking. At this point you can stop, breathe and see if you can get back to a daydreaming or contemplative state.

MEDITATION

The object of meditation is not to stop all mind activity, but rather to detach from any thinking and allow it to pass by without your need to take part in it. Meditation certainly relaxes the mind and body. Research on the brain during meditation shows a slowing of brain waves from beta waves, when the brain is in active, thinking mode, to the slower alpha waves which characterise wakeful rest. Experienced practitioners are able to move into theta waves indicating deep relaxation which is different to the delta waves of sleep.

Meditation for an overactive Western mind can be difficult at first. I had real problems just letting go of my thinking. Then one day I tried meditating to a meditation CD. My brain immediately calmed down and I felt relaxed and at peace. Sit quietly and comfortably with your eyes closed and just focus on your breathing and the music. Notice the relaxing effect it has on your mind and body. If images come to mind through the music, allow your mind to wander around the images without fixing hold of them. If you start getting into thinking and mind chatter mode, imagine balloons around the thoughts and see yourself letting go of the string and watching your thought balloons floating up and away. Meditation may be easier to learn first with a teacher before practicing on your own.

GUIDED VISUALISATIONS

Guided visualisations harness the power of an overactive mind by asking the mind to conjure up images and then guiding them to achieve

a specific objective. The beauty of guided visualisations is that you don't have to try and switch your mind off or detach from your thoughts. Instead you use your mind's ability to contain its own busy chatter while you conjure up the images you need to bring about relaxation and healing.

As with meditation, it may be easier to experience guided visualisation with a teacher before trying it yourself.

As well as being very relaxing, guided visualisations are a powerful tool for helping unblock deep-seated subconscious beliefs and behaviours that may be sabotaging our lives. They can bring a sense of connection and peace and help heal emotional and physical health problems.

Start by focusing on the breath, letting go of tension in the body and then taking yourself in your mind to a peaceful place where you feel safe and relaxed. From there you can ask your unconscious mind answers to questions that won't reveal themselves to your conscious mind. You might invite someone to join you and be surprised at who your mind brings to your peaceful place to give you the answers you seek.

Whatever the method, we can all benefit from regularly switching off our minds and just letting go of tension and stress.

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