

The Silent Mind

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Information is proliferating at such a frenzied rate today that even with personal computers and cellular phones—or perhaps because of them—our attention is stretched to the point of shattering. Not only do we have more facts about more diverse fields than ever before, we are also subject to a greater array of outcries and personal opinions. Fortunately, under all the cacophony of the Information Age, the quiet truth about our life purpose—and even about daily situations—is always available. By learning to slow down and pay attention to what's right under our nose, we have a chance to find our own authentic answers, unaided by media and technology. To do that we must build our "intuition muscle," which has atrophied, and learn to center ourselves in the present moment. It's only at our core, in the here-and-now eye of the global information hurricane, that we can hear "the mind in the heart."

How attuned are you to the subtle messages around you, like those hidden below our voiced communications, or those carried by synchronicities or life's omens? There is guidance available to us at all times, just below the surface of our logic, just after we stop pushing and striving, just before we jump to conclusions. By cultivating the ability to pause and be comfortable with silence, then by focusing steadily and listening for the first sounds, or feeling for the first impressions emerging from that core place, your intuition is likely to wake up suddenly and enthusiastically, as if from a long winter's nap.

In my many years of using intuition to sense the deep, underlying patterns in people's lives, and then to find the most accurate words to describe these subtle insights, I've learned to listen for that inner voice, that nearly silent song, that faintest of whispers. One of the most important skills in developing accurate intuition is the ability to tone down your domineering, talk-addicted mind, which arrogantly thinks it knows how the world works, without ever observing what's happening in the freshly occurring present moment. To know clearly, you must learn to observe neutrally, and true observation can only take place with a silent mind.

SOFTEN YOUR AWARENESS AND ENTER THE "FEMININE MIND"

Activating intuition always starts with a shift into softness and silence. You'll never receive accurate information with a chattering "monkey mind" clenched tight as a fist. Do you remember how you feel when you're concentrating on meeting a deadline and worrying about doing a good job? Your brow is furrowed, you're bent to your task, and you're probably "ahead of yourself," anxious to achieve the intended goal. This is what I call the "masculine mind," the kind of awareness both men and women must use to achieve concrete results. We're in our linear, left-brained masculine mind so often, we've come to identify it as normal. We forget there is an equally powerful, complementary state of consciousness which is quiet, unhurried, and tension-free: the "feminine mind." The feminine mind is not goal-oriented; it

simply observes, includes, appreciates, and is present with whatever it notices.

Lao Tsu says, "Be aware of your masculine nature, But by keeping the feminine way, You shall be to the world like a canyon, Where the Virtue eternal abides, And go back to become as a child." Intuition starts when the masculine mind stops.

RELAX YOUR MASCULINE MIND

Pretend your brain-mind is a muscle. Tense it and contract it, as though it were a fist. Squinch your eyes closed. Make your brain-mind feel hard and tight. Hold it until you feel like shaking. Then suddenly, let it go slack and loose and let your eyes drop open. Don't focus on anything in particular. Go blank, go blah. In fact, open your mouth and hang your jaw down, all the while moaning something like "Duhhhh." Just "hang" for a minute without commenting to yourself. Let your attention be soft. There's nothing you need to do or change right now.

STOP YOUR INTERNAL DIALOGUE

Another way to pause and become quiet is to suspend your "self-talk," an ongoing component of the masculine mind. Carlos Castaneda tells us how his teacher Don Juan insisted that he continually shut off his internal dialogue. By doing this, he disengaged what Don Juan called the "first attention"—our ordinary, external, societal perception. Don Juan said that once the internal dialogue is stopped, we actually stop the world of phenomena. And by stopping our habitual internal description of ourselves and the world, we open to endless new possibilities. The world of direct knowing, or intuition, suddenly opens to us. Psychologist Frances Vaughan, in her book *Awakening Intuition*, says something similar, placing emphasis on the importance of a regular meditative practice. "The silent mind, cultivated in many different forms of meditation, is the matrix of intuition. When you are in touch with the stillpoint at the center of your being, there is no need to use imagery or verbal exercises to activate intuition. It flows by itself, unimpeded by fears or preoccupations."

STOP YOUR INTERNAL DIALOGUE AND LISTEN FOR THE SILENCE

1. Notice your internal conversation. Stop mid-sentence and go blank. Within a few seconds your internal commentator will make more comments, living out yet another private stage play with friends and/or enemies. When you catch it happening, just go blank again. Exhale.

2. Once you can repeatedly suspend your self-talk, start actively listening for the silence. At first you may hear a buzzing, or be aware of a subtle vibration caused by your physiological organism. Simply intend to listen past that vibration, under that teeming, and find the velvety quiet place of origin. When you first touch it, you may bounce off. Find it and enter it again. Learn to tolerate it, merge with it, become it, and desire it.

3. When you're able to spend timeless time in the silent place, you'll be able to trust wholeheartedly the ideas and desires you find occurring to you immediately after you've been there. These perceptions, or first thoughts, arise from your direct knowing, from your intuitive voice. Take note.

BE CENTERED AND SINGLE-MINDED

To maintain a connection with your wellspring of wisdom, you must be able to concentrate. Given the roving, restless nature of the conscious mind, it takes will and skill to achieve true focus. If you've grown up on a steady diet of television, remote control in hand, you're probably used to seeing life in two-second sound bytes, and your attention span is about as big as a gnat. Intuition can't flow in a noisy, chaotic world, so first try reducing the amount of external stimuli you take in each day. Then narrow down occasionally and concentrate on an object or task. Start by focusing your attention fully inside your body—this will help you access your own deepest knowledge.

CENTERING

1. Close your eyes. Take a few easy breaths and bring your attention inside your skin. Imagine that you're looking out from behind your eyes. Now, imagine a point in the geometric center of your head, in the middle of your brain. At that imaginary spot, let a tiny pinprick of light break through. Through that white hole, allow the pure, glossy, diamond light of your own highest truth to emerge and form a tiny crystal ball. Go into that spot and stay there.

2. Maintain the feeling of that crystalline centerpoint. You may feel it as white-hot; maybe cold and fresh. Concentrate on strengthening the purity of the diamond light. Practice living wholly in this electromagnetic center of your brain for one minute, five minutes, then ten minutes at a time.

PAY CLOSE ATTENTION

Once you can slow down, find the silence inside everything, and maintain a focus, the next step is to place your attention fully on, then inside, whatever is at hand. When you look at something you're still outside and separate from it, but when you "feel" into things, you become one with them, and thus gain a whole new body of information. By being with and in your life's process, you will begin to receive the direct knowing about what is right for you in any given situation. The insights that come through attentiveness will seem second-nature; you'll know just what you need to know, just when you need to know it—almost without needing to ask.

NOTICE WHAT IS, THEN NOTICE MORE OF WHAT IS

Enter the silence and start noticing the details of your current physical state. Describe the things you feel in a simple fashion, just the way they are, as though you're taking inventory. "I notice I'm sitting in my desk chair; there's some tension between my shoulder blades, my feet are crossed at the ankles. I notice a slight nervous feeling at the base of my sternum. I am hungry. I can feel my pulse in the bottoms of my feet." By noticing things, you connect with your world and quiet your drive for constant external activity. Connection opens intuition. Then gradually notice and include the elements of your external environment; "The air feels cool, the light looks pinkish, the papers on the desk are in messy piles, the radio is blaring."

You can become alert and aware in any moment. Are you sitting, reading a magazine? Or standing at the mirror looking at your hair? Stop your mind's momentum and feel life. Listen for the silence right next to or underneath your last thought and action. Notice all your senses

and suspend your thoughts. Just feel, just include, just appreciate existence as it's occurring. Enter your "movie bubble" of experience, then sink in farther by paying even closer attention.

Stay connected with the silence. What do you notice now? Next, make a small movement—turn a page in your magazine, comb your hair, maybe in slow motion. Be fully aware of the increments of the movement; enter the flow of the movement—all the while feeling the internal quiet. Feel yourself doing it, feel the consciousness of the page as it is turned, the hair being touched by the comb, the comb's reality as it passes over the head. Become the movement itself. As you do, you'll realize that any flow, any process, is conscious, and there is information available to you in any given second, about what wants to happen next. Zen has a saying, "Talk when you talk, walk when you walk, die when you die."

You might also use a rite of passage we all go through many times a day as an excuse to slow down, get quiet, and pay close attention. Doorways are natural focusing devices, though we have largely forgotten their symbolic function.

DOORWAY MEDITATION

The next time you approach a doorway, use it as an opportunity to become alert. Every door is a passage between experiences, between states of awareness. As you enter the arch of a doorway, pause a moment. Enter the feminine mind. Let yourself feel the subtle differences between the space you are leaving and the new space you are about to enter. Is there a difference in height? Spaciousness? Color? Temperature? Comfort? What was your consciousness like while you were in the space you are now leaving? Feel into the new space. Prepare to enter the new state of awareness, to welcome whatever it holds for you. When the moment is right, step through.

Ironically, by learning to slow down and focus fully on one thing at a time, you will actually know more, and more instantaneously. By reducing external, physical stimuli, you will gain the clear impressions of your internal creative urges, those that come from your deepest truth and life purpose. You'll be able to discern the messages that come to you then, be they via your inner voice, through visions and imagery, by "vibrations," or in symbolic real life experiences. As Mother Teresa once said, "See how nature—trees, flowers, grass—grows in silence? See the stars, the moon, and the sun, how they move in silence? We need silence to be able to touch souls."