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Mind Clutter

A little meditation goes a long way toward inner peace

by Mary Jo Ruggieri

Consciously or unconsciously, we all at some level are seeking peace of mind. Turmoil, confusion and anger present obstacles that affect a person's inner being. Constant obsessing about details and not being able to quiet the mind creates chaos in our lives. We attract into our lives that which we focus upon. Whatever we give energy to flourishes.

One way to alter the outcome of what we will call "mind clutter" is to learn the fine art of clearing space or finding a reasonable distance away from unwanted feelings. The practice of meditation, the "healing silence" as called by some, is the opportunity for us to calm the mind and bring a sense of awareness to our body. In many cultures, meditation is considered an essential part of life.

Meditation has been around for centuries. Meditative practices have their roots in many of the far Eastern traditions, such as Buddhism, Indian yoga and Zen meditation. Concentration, essential to all forms of meditation, is basic to such disciplines as tai chi, qigong, karate, aikido and judo. It is the power within!

How does meditation work? In essence, it trains many parts of the brain to make positive changes in various systems of the body. The brain has the capacity to adjust physical functions such as blood pressure and heart rates, and meditation can restore balance to those functions.

Some medical researchers also believe that meditation retrains some of the neurotransmitters in the brain. This concept can be useful when trying to change habits not beneficial to our health. By changing the "key codes" in our brain we learn that if we have a desire for something we want and should not have, we do not have to act out our desire. This would certainly help chocolate addicts--or could be the demise of the dieting industry. Other research indicates that meditation could well replace some medications that help in areas as panic disorders, anxiety attacks and attention deficit disorders. It's time to learn more.

Transcendental meditation was introduced to North America by Maharishi Mahesh Yogi. For those who can remember, recall the transcendental meditation movement during the Beatles years when John Lennon spent time in India learning to meditate with the Maharishi. Transcendental meditation quickly became a popular pastime for the Beatles followers.

Meditation should be approached with a willingness to explore and to change some preconceived ideas. For instance, don't think that you couldn't possibly sit long enough to meditate or that you can't sit in a crossed leg position to begin with. To ease your mind, the traditional crossed leg position, called lotus, is not a prerequisite. The only truly known essential for beginning meditation is breathing.

Many meditate sitting comfortably, feet firmly on the floor, with the back straight resting against a wall or self-supported with the eyes closed. Conscious breathing begins with slow, easy and long deep breaths. Try it.

Systems such as kriya yoga and kundalini yoga believe the breath is the most important part of meditation. The kundalini theory is, "When the breath is long, deep and slow, the mind is constant and one-pointed. When the breath is heavy, quick, and shallow, the mind is scattered. You normally breathe 15 breaths per minute. If you can train yourself to breathe eight breaths per minute, you can have your temper and your projection under control." Kundalini yoga uses many forms of breathing to change the state of energy. You change your breath, you change your life.

To try a conscious breathing meditation, begin by bringing your awareness into your body. Follow your breath in and out, allowing your focus to be directed towards the breath. Become aware of energy and any body sensations. Continue to breathe as you try to identify where in your body you are feeling these sensations.

Breath awareness develops meditative skills and creates the capacity for listening to your mind/body. Inhalations and exhalations should be even while using the diaphragm to breathe deeply, relaxing the abdomen. You master breathing when you become constantly aware of your breath even while talking in a group, brushing your teeth or driving your car. Are you aware of your breath as you read this article?

As you begin to connect with the "healing silence" within, a state of peace emerges similar to having run a great distance. Meditating brings about a state of consciousness where true healing begins. The potential for rejuvenating and repairing the mind/body during the conscious breathing and meditation process is limitless.

Carving out a special time for yourself daily to consciously breathe and meditate should be a priority. Anne Morrow Lindbergh has often said: When assessing the need for quiet and alone time, what matters is that one be, for a time, inwardly attentive. Learning to get in touch with that silence within gives your life a plan. Prioritize yourself--meditate!