

How Quiet is Your Mind?
By Barbara Ashcroft B.A. M.ED.

SO...you have a difficult time getting to sleep. Your mind just won't stop all its chattering. You can't relax. Well, maybe you should just take a look at what's been bogging and overloading that mind all day long.

In today's fast-paced society we are constantly being bombarded with thousands of visual images flashing simultaneously and rapidly in front of our eyes from our split television screens, computers and movie theatres. With our remote control and our mouse we quickly learn to channel and high-speed internet surf, watching two or three shows and screens at once. In addition, our ears are bombarded with constant loud background noise from blasting stereo speakers while we try to communicate, and extremely loud music from our headsets pierces our eardrums. We have become 24/7 individual walking offices with our PDA's and laptops. Visual and audio stimuli captivate us all day long. Mega sensory stimulation keeps us in a state of constant "on".

As well, advertisements are forever enticing us all to work harder and longer to accumulate more "stuff". We search for bigger and better gadgets and products. We look for external commodities and activities to fulfill our happiness needs instead of looking for peace within. We are surrounded with overwhelming choices and distractions.

Consequently, our need for more of the "good life" has increased the time demands on our careers and family life. Recreational breaks often get neglected. Our lives have become hectic and over-scheduled. Our "to-do" lists get longer, seem endless and never complete. Busyness has become the norm and we constantly look for faster and instant solutions to our daily tasks. We have become an extremely restless and jumpy society. Our children too are picking up our impatient manner and habits. Do we all suffer from attention deficits or does our life style contribute to this condition?

Is it any wonder we have difficulty making the transition from this high speed over stimulating daily environment to a night of peaceful sleep? Making the switch from "fast forward" to "pause" is just not that simple. Our bodies are rebelling and telling us to slow down, reflect, build in some quiet time and just "be". When was the last time you just allowed yourself

to sit quietly and do nothing and enjoy the present moment? David Kundtz in his book, Stopping, defines this pause as follows: "Stopping is doing nothing, as much as possible, for a definite period of time-whether a moment or a month-for the purpose of waking up and remembering who you are."

Awareness is the key. Take charge of all your mind chatter. In fact, refresh and remove some of those scattered unwanted thought files throughout the day. Experts suggest taking quiet mental breaks every 90 minutes. Even five minutes of deep breathing, a little walk with a pleasant change of scenery, a gaze at a pleasing photograph, a few stretching exercises, or some soft reflective music all break the chain of high speed mind racing. Our spirits are crying out for these peaceful moments. You may need a timer to remember to take these breaks until you become so aware of this need that it becomes an automatic response. Consider building in fifteen minutes of meditation into your daily schedule. Create your own special downtime space where can catch your breath and not be disturbed.

Turn off all that idle prattle well in advance of going to bed. Get ready to go into "sleep mode". Set up a quiet relaxing routine for a good hour before turning in. Make a conscious decision to leave all your worries and concerns with The Universe for the night. Give up your general world manager role for at least seven hours. The job will still be there waiting for you the next morning!

*Each of us needs to withdraw from the cares
which will not withdraw from us.
We need hours of aimless wandering
or spates of time sitting on park benches,
observing the mysterious world of ants
and the canopy of treetops.*

Attributed to Maya Angelou

Barb Ashcroft has spent 35 years motivating and inspiring others. She believes that joy resides within every one of us.

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