

## The Need for Silence in a Noisy World

It is quite evident that we are living in one terribly noisy world and it seems to be getting worse every day. Everywhere we go we are accosted by loud, unwanted sound. When we enter elevators, malls and restaurants we are engulfed by music. I recently had lunch at a popular restaurant and found the background music so loud that it interfered with normal conversation and the enjoyment of my lunch. When I asked the waitress if she could turn the music off, or at least down, she said, "I don't think we can." Surely we as a people are still in charge of volume controls.

When you add lawnmowers, snow blowers, leaf blowers, jack hammers, jet engines, transport trucks, and horns and buzzers of all types and descriptions you have a wall of constant noise and irritation. Even when watching a television program at a reasonable volume level you are blown out of your chair when a commercial comes on at the decibel level of a jet.

We seem to have created a cultural acceptance of our noisy world in spite of the fact that it is making us ill physically and psychologically. We can't seem to live without background sound. We have friends who turn on the television the moment they awaken in the morning and leave it on all day. The house is just too quiet if it isn't on. Former highschool students of mine used to tell me that the first thing they did on arriving home after school was turn on their CD player as loudly as would be tolerated by their parents.

Cornell University recently conducted a study to determine the impact of noise on employees in an open area office space where people are constantly exposed to fax machines, telephones, office chatter, shredding machines, etc. Test results revealed that workers in an open area had high levels of adrenalin in their urine. Adrenalin is released by the body when under stress. It prepares us for fight or flight. When these employees were compared to those in self contained office spaces the results were startling. People in a quiet, self contained work area did not have the same high levels of adrenalin in their urine. They were much more relaxed and less stressed.

A puzzle, demanding attention and concentration, was given to both groups of employees. The open area group was found to be less diligent in the solution of the puzzle becoming easily frustrated and giving up much earlier than the group from the quiet office. The study also found that workers from the quiet office slept better at night, had better digestion, were much less irritable at home and felt better at the end of their workday than employees from the open concept office. Noise does seem to effect focus, productivity and general physical and psychological well being. Noise tends to increase stress levels which in turn can result in increased frustration, anger and strained interpersonal relationships. We must begin to establish a friendship with silence.

### How to Make a Friend of Silence

While we have very little control over noise in the environment at large, we do have control over our own private environment. This is where we begin to cultivate a friendship with silence.

- \* Make a conscious commitment to the experience and appreciation of silence.
- \* Go for a walk in nature. Let the silence soothe your spirit.
- \* When you are alone in your residence turn off all noise making appliances. Begin with fifteen minutes of silence and gradually increase the duration.
- \* Learn how to meditate and schedule a ten minute meditation period once or twice a day. Gradually extend your meditation time.
- \* When driving to work, turn off your car radio and drive in silence.
- \* Go camping for an night by yourself. Find a quiet campground where they don't allow people to blast their music without consideration for others. I usually go solo camping for one week each year to be alone and silent in the outdoors. It has become something I eagerly look forward to.
- \* Drive to a lake at sunset and rent a canoe. Paddle slowly along the shoreline observing the silent sights and the gentle sounds of nature as the sun sets and darkness approaches.

\* In silence listen to your breathing. Get a sense of the silent rhythm of life.

\* Just before retiring go outside and look up at the night sky. You will soon sense another universal rhythm so unfamiliar to many. Let the night sky and the darkness embrace you and calm you as you prepare for a night's rest.

\* When you read a book, do so in silence. Many of us read to music or during television commercials. Try silence. You'll grow to love it.

Soon you will begin to cherish the periods of silence you have built into your day and long for more. You will quickly discover that you are becoming more relaxed and less tense even in the midst of our noisy world. You will have made an invaluable new friend of silence, a friend which can comfort, heal and soothe your spirit. What a gift you will have given yourself.

Be still and know the restorative power of silence.

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