

Finding Stillness

I've heard from many people who say, "I think too much," or "I can't get out of my own head."

This is pretty common. Thinking isn't the problem, but the struggle comes when we're constantly spinning stories in our heads and getting caught up in them.

Our minds jump from one thing to another, seeking distraction or avoiding difficulty. We can't focus, we can't be present in the moment, and we feel the need to be constantly busy.

The answer, I've found, is finding stillness.

Our mental processes — jumping around and distraction and being caught up in stories — don't have to cause anxiety, actually. They're not only common, I think it's the normal human condition. If this is how our minds are most of the time, then feeling afflicted by this condition is probably going to cause us constant anxiety.

Instead, I find it more helpful to learn to:

- be aware of these mental conditions;
- be present with the mental pattern and stay with it; and
- work with the condition in a mindful way.

The only way to do all of that is to start with stillness.

A Moment of Stillness

Take a minute out of your busy day and try to do the following:

1. Sit still and look away from all devices and other activities. Just sit there, maybe with your eyes closed, maybe looking at nature or a wall.
2. Take a moment to assess your condition. How do you feel? Are you tired, anxious, frustrated, calm, happy? What state is your mind in?
3. Assess how you've been behaving recently (today, or just in the last hour) ... have you been constantly distracted? In a state of busyness? Focused? Procrastinating? Anxious or fearful? Irritated? Feeling down?
4. Stay with these feelings for a moment, just being curious and non-judgmental about them.
5. Face each of the feelings you're noticing, and notice the mental pattern that caused it. If you're frustrated, are you stuck in a resentful story about someone else or your

current situation? If you're anxious, is there some desired outcome that you're holding tightly to? If you're feeling down, are you comparing your situation with some ideal that you don't have?

6. Bring your attention to your body. How does it feel? What sensations can you notice in your head, neck, arms, hands, torso, hips, butt, legs, feet?
7. Can you find gratitude in this moment? Can you find love or compassion, for yourself or others?

You don't have to do all of these things each time you sit still, but these are all things you can try doing. Pick a couple and focus on them for a minute, then next time pick a couple more. Take a few deep breaths, then give yourself permission to return to work or whatever activity you're doing.

Cultivating Stillness

As you can see, it just takes a minute of stillness to work with your spinning stories and other mental patterns. We can use this minute of stillness to bring less busyness and anxiety and more calmness, mindfulness and gratitude to our lives. It just takes a bit of cultivation.

Some ways to cultivate stillness in your life:

- Set reminders to get away from technology for just a minute or two, and sit still somewhere.
- Build time in your day for just sitting. It could be sitting meditation, or simply sitting somewhere pleasant and doing nothing.
- Find time for disconnected reading — using a paper book or dedicated ebook reader.
- Have tea in the morning or afternoon. Just sit and drink tea, noticing its smell, flavor, warmth.
- Do a couple yoga poses — child's pose for a minute or two, for example, or downward facing dog or pigeon's pose. This can be a meditation, where you're staying with your breath and body for a couple minutes and getting a stretch in as well.
- Go for a walk. While this isn't technically stillness, it's moving your body in a healthy way while not allowing yourself to be distracted.

When you notice your mind racing, when you notice distractions and procrastination, when you notice anxiety or resentment ... take a stillness break.

And in this stillness, notice all of the wonders of life that we take for granted.

"Let us be silent, that we may hear the whispers of the gods."

~Ralph Waldo Emerson