



Turning Off Your Mind

Wendy Marks

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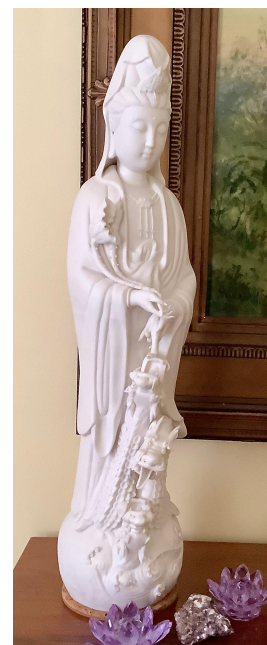
Hypervigilance is a state we go into when we are overstimulated by life and events, or even just the noisiness of the drama from our family and friends. Stressful working and living situations add significantly to the situation. Sometimes we just need to turn off our mind. I can hear myself running in circles and doing what is called in Buddhism “monkey mind:” repeating a circle of thoughts that get me nowhere over and over again.

As Healthline, the online magazine, defines it, “Hypervigilance is a state of increased alertness. If you’re in a state of hypervigilance, you’re extremely sensitive to your surroundings. It can make you feel like you’re alert to any hidden dangers, whether from other people or the environment.” Others may refer to the state as just plain anxiety. I will use them interchangeably here. Those who are already prone to anxiety have found it amplified, others are experiencing it in a new and stronger way.

This can cause a lot of problems. It’s appropriate to be hypervigilant when there are threats around you all the time. I promised myself not to write anymore about COVID, but we are emerging from our COVID world, where we have been in a state of hypervigilance for a year and a half. This has been an adaptive behavior to a simply crazy environmental situation. Our home lives and our work lives have been disrupted, so our body and mind were constantly telling us “stay alert, a lot is going on out there.”

Although increased alertness can be extremely smart if a lion is pacing behind you, it isn’t when walking into a crowded supermarket. It stresses our body and mind. I’ve mentioned COVID-related gastritis and IBS, and I’ve since seen many more people with these symptoms. I’m not beyond taking a slippery elm bark lozenge at night for a little indigestion, when previously I’ve always been known for my cast iron stomach. That is just one of the symptoms of long-term hypervigilance.

Symptoms can be insomnia or difficulty sleeping, jumpiness, jerking when startled, loss of appetite or increased appetite, digestive discomfort, and adrenal stress often manifesting as exhaustion, brain fog, or just crashing really hard at the end of the day. There are, of course,



other symptoms but basically we have worn out our “fight or flight” mechanisms, and our bodies and minds pay the price.

Meditation

I support all forms of meditation. There are thousands on YouTube to choose from. One that has worked really well for me lately is a Yoga Nidre meditation. I used to primarily suggest this for falling asleep (I use it myself); but I’m finding that doing it in the morning when I wake up sets the tone of my day in a really nice way. Yoga Nidre is an extreme resting meditation designed to let your body let go of stress. It gently goes through the parts of your body, relaxing each one and setting an intention for the day— not a bad thing.

But even a counting breath meditation will slow down your heart rate and calm your body and mind. I tend to do quickies of these all day. I just stop for a moment and count, four counts in-breath and eight counts out-breath, repeating about four times to push the reset button.

Breath

Speaking of breath, we all hold our breath when stressed. It’s a natural thing to do and pretty unconscious. I was taking an eye test and the doctor reacted with concern, saying that my eye pressure was really high. I realized that I had been holding my breath unconsciously. Once I breathed, the pressure returned to normal. I’m not sure why we hold our breath when we are stressed. It may be back to that lion in the bush where we are trying to keep quiet, or it may just be from trying to keep very still. But it’s never going to work for anything good. When you find yourself feeling stressed, anxious, or hypervigilant, make sure you concentrate on even breathing. It will slow you down and calm things to a normal pace.

Prayer

It doesn’t really matter who or what you are praying to; prayer slows things down and helps you to concentrate on what you need and what others need. Prayer can be for yourself, it can be for others, and it can be for the world. It’s another good way of setting intentions.

Exercise

We all know that exercise is good for us. But just as important, it kicks in a bunch of nice chemicals called endorphins that help us to feel better and give us a natural high. It also helps to take down our stress hormones. I would encourage you to find an exercise that is actually fun for you. I’m not against doing a regular workout as a routine, but I think we all do better with an exercise that we like. Whether that’s biking or swimming, or just taking a walk with the dog, that’s the best exercise for you— the one that feels good and that you can sustain.

Music

Music does soothe the savage breast. It also soothes everybody else. Music can be used as a form of meditation; it can be used to dance around your house while you’re cleaning; it can be used just to chill you out. When I was pregnant I used to play Bruce Springsteen really loud to

clean my house—although for the first few months after I gave birth, my baby wouldn't go to sleep unless I played Bruce Springsteen really loud. Music has many effects that we are not even aware of. But we know that it's good for us. Use music as a tool to rev you up or calm you down— it really works.

Do something nice for someone else

Any act of selflessness is a blessing to both ourselves and others. Practice radical kindness. And just try to take it all down a notch. Turning off your mind can be the best possible healing practice we have.

Namaste,

Wendy