



The Wisdom of Stillness

By Steven L. Anderson, Ph.D., MBA

I have noticed, as I observe those around me, that few of us seem to practice the art of stillness. It's as if most of us are in such a hurry to get where we are going, we don't take the time to ask ourselves if, in fact, we are headed in the right direction. Just as importantly, many of us do not ask whether or not we are enjoying the process of getting there. In my life, I have found that taking time to listen to my feelings is the most profound difference between the hectic life I once led and the tremendously enjoyable one I am now leading. I have also learned that the best way to gain insight into my emotions is to meditate. Therefore, this article is about the benefits of meditation and how to do it.

In his wonderful book, *The Relaxation Response*, Herbert Benson, M.D. details the benefits of meditation. A little background about Dr. Benson is in order. He went to Harvard in the early 1970's to do research. After his arrival he informed the administration that he wanted to study the health benefits of meditation. Harvard told him that they weren't interested in that. He answered that he was either going to do research on meditation or leave. Talk about guts. Fortunately for us, Harvard backed down.

Through his research Benson found that not only did meditation help people relax and focus, it had immense and lasting health benefits. He found that meditation reduced blood pressure, increased the effectiveness of the immune system, and reduced the incidence of heart attack and cancer. All that may be true, but I do it because it makes my life great. It is amazing how it makes me feel centered, alive.

Benson also found that meditation is a lot easier than most people realize. He found that only four components were necessary to derive the benefits I just described, as well as help one get in touch with their feelings. These four are:

- * Get in a quiet environment, free of distractions.
- * Get an object to dwell upon. I often use a candle.
- * Have a passive attitude. You have to focus on your breathing, not what is going on in your life or in your environment. The best way to do this is to slowly breathe in and out and when you exhale say a mantra to yourself. I usually say the number one.
- * Get in a position that is comfortable, but not so much that you are tempted to fall asleep. Meditate for about twenty minutes to derive the full benefits.

Be aware that it can be a difficult skill to learn. Expect your mind to wander all over the place. Just remember, the greatest race horses are the toughest to tame.

Benson recommends that a person derives the most benefit from meditation by doing it every day. It is magical. Try it! A feeling of well being will come over you that will be well worth the time spent. I believe you will also find that your priorities become much clearer in this relaxed state. The wisdom of your emotions will come to the surface. I'd love to hear your reactions or any questions you may have about this subject. Thanks and have a great month!