

REACTING OR RESPONDING

Sadly, the modern world and the pace at which we live, leave little time for introspection and reflection. For most of us there is always something to do, something more important that must be done now. Our over reliance on technology and obsession with the external world mean that our interest and attention on the world inside are next to non-existent. The internal landscape is rarely tended to and when it is, it is likely to be by default rather than by design. We are more likely to be forced into a period of reflection because of challenge, difficulties and trauma, than to choose to look within and attend to our deepest needs. The reason that we are unable for the most part, to react as we would choose in many of the situations we're confronted with, is that our inner world has fallen into a state of disrepair because of our continued neglect. The lack of pause in our lives has led to a lack of poise, which is why many of us are unable to control and channel our emotions in constructive ways. It is important to listen to the heart, but it is critical to decide with the head. If we do not build in a time for silence and solitude our emotions will unconsciously drive our attitudes, moods, perceptions and behaviour in ways that can be either beneficial or erratic. It is silence that affords us the clarity and the power to ensure we are in the driving seat and not being driven. The gifts of our emotions are wonderful only when we know how best to use them. If we are at their beck and call, then we are run ragged by the contradiction of their messages. It's important to understand that everything we feel exists for a reason, however we must be able to discriminate between those emotions that are useful and relevant as opposed to those that are outdated and no longer beneficial. Silence allows us to connect with our core so we can best decide how to use our emotional compass. This is what we mean by listening to the heart but deciding with the head (see Listening In 1 & 2).

Simply reacting to life and all it presents us with rarely offers us the best outcomes. When we react, we come from a place that is almost entirely impulsive. There are moments when this can be useful, especially at times of danger when an instinctive response is needed; however, when reacting in this way becomes our modus operandi we are in danger of losing our way. The reacting position disables our power to discriminate, it cuts us off from the benefit of our experience and clarity. It has us believing it always knows best and as previously stated there are times when it does. But for the most part reacting is a misguided approach to life as it has very little relationship with the wisdom of introspection, silence and reflection. It's important to note that it's because we are quick to react that we rely much more on hindsight rather than foresight. How often have you heard it said: it's easy to be wise after the event? Of course, this is true, but it's just as easy to be wise before the event if we would practise using foresight. It is a skill we all possess but it needs to be developed. All that is required is regularly taking time out to connect with your inner world and spend time enjoying the internal landscape. This may at first seem uninspiring, even boring but nothing could be further from the truth. If we would just take the time to disconnect from the outside world and immerse ourselves in solitude and silence even for just a few minutes each day we would quickly find, in a matter of weeks, that our appetite and desire for the fruits of silence does indeed grow.

As one's inward-looking habit grows, one naturally finds oneself responding rather than reacting. The individual who responds has forethought; she pauses and is slow to react. Her slowness is a conscious decision to think and feel her way through her life. She knows hindsight is a wonderful thing, but she has come to realise foresight is so much better as it generates a far more beneficial legacy, culminating in fewer mistakes and much less misfortune. This is why we urge you to respond rather than react: in order to achieve that mental poise, you must make time to pause. Consciously build into your life 'me time', time to go within; little and often is the key. The more you go within, the more you'll discover the beautiful terrain of the mind and within that

the more you'll discover your own beauty. Reacting will then become less and less appealing as you'll see that its fruits are rarely sweet. If you're honest with yourself, you will already know that most of your reacting is a bad habit and that you do little about it as you hide behind the illusion that it's your personality, it's just who you are and therefore there's nothing you can do about it. This too is an illusion; you can change your reactions, but you need the power of silence and reflection to achieve that. Willpower by itself is insufficient.

When you become a responder, life will work with you rather than seeming to work against you because the responder is in harmony with himself and moves more harmoniously with life. So, which would you rather... to be one who is at the mercy of reacting, driven by his emotions or the force of circumstance, or to be one who can hear the sounds of his emotions and not become a slave to circumstance, but decide what is the appropriate action in any given moment, whilst remaining true to himself? As we've stated throughout, listening to the heart is vital but if we do not engage our heads we will be repeatedly pulled to react. It's time to build that internal bridge between mind and heart by repeatedly sitting at both of their shores. Remember, one is not better than the other; they have different roles and functions, but the truth is that one becomes ineffectual without the other. For generations we've made the mistake of thinking that either logic should rule over heart or heart over logic. As is so often true in life, it's heart plus logic that will best lead us to our destination. Both are needed.

Take this brief journey and see for yourself....

As I turn within, I become aware of my inner world... There's so much noise in here.... It's difficult to know what to listen to.... The stiller I am, the more I can hear and feel where best to let my mind roam... There's no right or wrong way to listen, I simply need to listen... And as I do, what needs my attention becomes increasingly clear... My intuition grows... My insight becomes clearer.... I come to trust my inner knowing as it has my best interests at heart.... Silence is such a beautiful pastime... Why don't I spend more time with myself in this way?... What am I afraid of?... As I listen, the answers to my questions float their way to the top.

There is nothing to fear here... Solitude only wishes me well... The more time I spend in this space, the better I come to know myself... I have unfathomable beauty and wisdom and the more time I spend looking within, the more I step into the truth of who I am... My masks fall away... My ego has no need to fight to be seen... What benefit is there in conflict anyway?... I choose peace and peace chooses me... Turning within is such an easy thing to do... I must make time for it each day... It offers me rich rewards... There's a lovely, warm glow growing inside of me... It melts away my fears... I realise I can choose to partake in my destiny and so I do... I take responsibility for my life, and I am set free.... I blame no one and forgive those who have trespassed against me... And I ask to be forgiven for my mistakes... The more I think kind and uplifting thoughts the more my life unfolds in accordance with my desires... I love being quiet in this way and generating a quiet trickle of pure positive thoughts every day...

Spend a few minutes each day developing this kind of monologue and your inner narrator will offer you infinitely better scripts to follow. This is how you will learn to respond rather than react.