Managing Internal Dialogue: Part 2

The Arena and the Quiet Mind
(Shifting the submodalities of internal dialogue)

By Joe Cheal

In the previous article we began to explore our ‘internal dialogue’ through a model called the ‘Zero Point’ (i.e. being in the here and now). We will be continuing this time by developing the idea of the ‘Quiet Mind’ with a focus on utilising the submodalities of our inner speech.

‘Free your mind.’
Morpheus (The Matrix)

The Arena: a personal account
As I sat quietly one afternoon, eyes closed in a light meditative trance, I chose to ‘observe’ the workings of my mind. Images flashed from time to time, but most prevalent was the internal dialogue. Firstly, there was the familiar ‘mainstream’ Narrator. To explain...this is usually in my own voice and is clear and ‘near the surface’ of consciousness.

This Narrator is me ‘talking to myself’. It is often very practical, like a planner working out his to-do list and schedule. It can also be me thinking through an idea or model or theory. It is there when I write and I have often had the experience of articles and stories ‘writing themselves’...as if they are not written by me but through me. From conversations with others, I believe this is quite a common experience...getting into the writing groove...in flow and on track as it were.

Sometimes, the Narrator can get carried away, sounding out imaginary conversations I might have to have with someone (or would never have!) or sometimes giving marvellous presentations. When the Narrator goes ‘out of control’, it acts as a worrier, particularly in the middle of the night if I wake up and can’t get back to sleep.

However, when I quietened the Narrator, I found that other more random thoughts ‘came to the surface’ and submerged again. After a little while something dawned on me. The internal dialogue was not always a singular ‘voice in the dark’. Sometimes I became aware of multiple layers and streams of thinking, coming from different directions with a range of tonalities (and submodalities). Some of it was audible and understandable; some of it was distant and mumbling...I’m not even sure that all of it was in English! As I stayed ‘meta’ to the noise, I felt like I was in the centre of an amphitheatre with thoughts coming at me from all around. As I came back into the room, the external world created a distraction and these thought streams became unconscious again. After repeating the process a few times and discussing it with others, I called this multi-directional panorama: the Arena.

I began to get fascinated with the qualities of the internal dialogue. Not just the content (which will be
The unconscious mind is a curious thing

It's not what you think: it's the way that you think it

In the next article we will be eavesdropping on what our internal dialogue (and parts) might have to say, but this time we are tuning in to how our internal dialogue endeavours to be heard.

Each thought-stream of internal dialogue will have its own submodalities (qualities). Even if you are only aware of one inner voice at any given moment in time, take a moment to ‘observe’ it. Ultimately, if you want to experience a Quiet Mind, it will benefit you to familiarise yourself with what is actually going on in there! Then you can decide what you want instead and work with the submodalities.

So, if you wish to explore further, imagine you are entering the Arena of your mind. Listen to the qualities of the thought-stream(s) and use the questions below to determine (and write down) the particular characteristics.

- Where is the voice coming from – which direction/spatial location – in front, behind, left, right, up, down?
- What distance from you is the voice – close, far away?
- Whose voice is it – is it yours or someone else’s? Is it familiar or unfamiliar?
- If the voice had an age, what would it be? Adult, elderly, childlike?
- What state does the voice portray, e.g. angry, sad, authoritative, kind, worried, excited?
- What accent does the voice have?
- What language is it speaking?
- What is the intensity level – soft, gentle, harsh, light, heavy?
- What is the pitch – high, medium, low?
- What is the volume level – quiet, ‘normal’, loud?
- What is the speed or tempo – fast, slow?
- What is the musicality – melodious, grating?
- What is the duration – continuous, intermittent?
- What is the degree of clarity – clear, distorted, muffled, in ‘focus’, out of ‘focus’?
- Are there any other sounds linked to the voice – music, noises?
- Are there any significant images, feelings, smells or tastes associated with the voice (if so run through the submodalities of the other senses)?
Each thought-stream of internal dialogue will have its own submodalities

If you have written down your responses, how do you feel about that thought-stream voice now? If you would like to feel differently about the voice and want to make changes, what submodalities could you play with? For example, most people find it harder to take a critical voice seriously if it sounds like Mickey Mouse, Scooby Doo or some other cartoon character! Alternatively, if the internal dialogue is harsh and unfriendly (e.g. saying ‘what a silly fool!’), try changing the voice to soft and seductive!

You might really want to go to town here and use the ‘submodality map across’ process. Who would you prefer the voice to sound like? Go inside and run a positive outcome statement through your mind (e.g. ‘you can do it’) giving it a voice you would like to hear more of. It could be your own voice when you feel motivated and confident, or calm and relaxed. You might use the voice of someone you admire, or an actor/actress who is compelling and easy to listen to. Once you have a phrase and a voice that works for you, you can run the full map-across using the new voice as the improved ‘template’.

The Quiet Mind: releasing internal dialogue

Some people find that their internal dialogue is intrusive, critical and negative. This could be the Narrator, which tends to be in ‘I’ form (e.g. saying ‘Why have I done that? I’m such a fool!’) or some other voice, which is usually in ‘you’ form, as if we have taken it from someone else (e.g. saying ‘Why have you done that? You fool!’)

If the internal dialogue is unwanted (or you wish to be free of it for a while), whether it is the Narrator or some other critical voice, you might for example: change the submodalities (as above), investigate the intentions (which we will be covering in the next article) or quieten your mind.

The Quiet Mind is a meditative, mindfulness type approach. It is about coming back to your ‘Zero Point’, the here and now. When you are ready to quieten your mind, firstly tell the internal Narrator to ‘stop’.

Then imagine stepping into the Arena. ‘Observe’ other internal dialogue (noticing the submodalities) and then use the Narrator to tell the other thought streams to ‘stop’. This may happen initially by stopping each thought stream one by one, the Narrator acting like the conductor of an orchestra.

There will be gaps of true silence and then if another thought stream enters the arena, tell it to stop. After having done this a number of times, I can now say to myself ‘Quiet Mind’ and the whole Arena tends to hush! As a side note, this is the most effective way I have found of getting back to sleep if my mind is buzzing with activity in the night.

As an alternative approach, some people find they can turn the volume down on the internal dialogue, as if turning a volume control down to silent. I find this approach useful if I want to become more aware of the external sounds (which seem to come up in volume as the internal dialogue goes down, but maybe that’s just me!)

So when you are ready: Stop...