

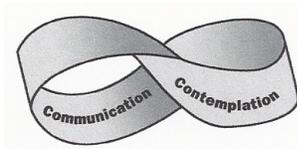
HIGH-TECH, HIGH-TOUCH

Kent Ira Groff

“Another writers’ workshop. But nobody presents about writing any more; it’s all about Internet, websites and marketing.” Sound familiar? Sometimes the stress of technology sabotages the delight of crafting words. How can we balance the contemplative life of a writer with the increasing demands of the Internet culture? Better yet, can we *integrate* the two?

Contemplating and communicating

Our culture is shifting from postmodern to what I call primal modern. Cool computer screens and high-tech communications leave us starved for primal intimacy and authentic relationships. Our high-tech lifestyle leaves us yearning for high-touch experiences. Using Facebook or YouTube we can get in touch with others, but we may also present a false face (editing digital photos), or deface another person or group (bullying or spreading viral lies). We neglect face-to-face relationships with loved ones by allowing the Internet to suck away our prime time.



The key to humanizing technology is to integrate contemplation and communication, meditation and action. The Möbius strip, with its two sides that are really one, provides a visual image for the goal of integrating the outer and inner life. (You can make a simple Möbius strip: cut a strip of paper, write any two opposite words, like silence and sounds, and tape it with a simple half turn). When you contemplate the beauty of a rosebud or the violence of an earthquake, you’re communicating to the self on the inside. When you’re communicating to others, you’re contemplating inwardly.

Time spent alone contemplating will bear fruit in communicating. The 20th century educator linguist Ivan Illich said, “It takes more time and effort and delicacy to learn the silence of a people than to learn its sounds.” This is golden advice for parents of teenagers, workers in other cultures, or caregivers for people with disabilities.

Methods for restoring the balance

At least three time-honored methods can restore this vital balance and keep us from losing our souls: returning to the rhythms nature, including your body and breathing; a set-aside daily time for quieting the soul’s inner noise; and brief quiet pauses throughout the day.

- Return to the rhythms of nature, including your body’s heartbeat and breathing. Walking puts the whole body into a rhythmic cadence, reminding us of the balancing of engagement and withdrawal; add to that Colorado’s beauty with the Rocky Mountains and it’s a spiritual Rx. Notice the rhythm of breathing in... out... filling... emptying... receiving... giving... Tend to the body’s need for resting and risking, exercising and relaxing.

- Set aside a period of time (at least 20 minutes) at the beginning and/or end of each day for quieting the soul. Meditate on a short sacred text from your tradition, such as “Be still, and know that I am God” (Psalm 46:10). Use a centering word or phrase, like *shalom*, one, restore, a hearing heart.
- Intersperse brief pauses throughout your day. After you’ve worked for some time at your computer or other project, push your chair back a few inches, with your hands empty. Take a few deep breaths... Let a line of a poem, scripture, or centering word to come to mind (as above). Begin to repeat it slowly, in rhythm to your breathing. After a minute or so, pull your chair toward to your work area and continue working. OPTION: Place an icon, bell or chime at your workspace; push back to meditate on the icon, or the sound of the chime or bell.

The image of “cyberspace” invites us to integrate intentional spaces into the cyber networks where we live so much of the time.

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