

BRINGING BACK

by Mary Nearpass

**In Our Multi-Tasking
Media Mecca World**

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Human beings have always had the capacity to attend to several things at once. Thousands of years of evolution created human physical communication via facial expressions and body language that puts broadband to shame in its ability to convey meaning and create bonds. Sometimes I wonder if we are not replacing side-by-side and eye-to-eye connections with quick, disembodied e-exchange!

Electronic multi-tasking is not entirely new. We have been driving while listening to car radios since the mid-twentieth century. However, the phenomenon has reached warp speed in the era of Web-enabled computers. It is now part of the daily routine to conduct six IM conversations, watch *American Idol* on TV and *Google* the names of last season's finalists all at the same time. Our children can teach us parents and teachers a thing or two about what technology can do. On the positive side, I am blown away by my own children's technical prowess. The breadth of their knowledge and their ability to find information has flourished! On the other side of the coin, they are less tolerant of ambiguity and demand a simple, clarified answer instantaneously. Could this aversion be directly related to multi-tasking? With too many windows open on their hard drive, iPods and cell phones, could this be keeping them (and us) from having to focus on one topic and pursue it deeply, rather than skim the surface with a tool bar?

This level of multi-tasking and multi-processing is now so commonplace that it is hard to remember how it began. Fifteen years ago, if homes had a computer, they were not even linked to the Internet. The CD player was the rage. Five years ago, the implementation of the cell phone began. Now, children as young as seven and eight are chatting away on their very own cell phones. The Internet offers so much more than the radio/CD e.g. games, movies, e-mail, IM, *Google*, *MySpace* to name a few. "Media-multi-tasking" is the buzz terminology.

As an adult, ask yourself if you cannot go a few minutes without talking on your cell phone. Do you find yourself experiencing a strange discomfort with not being constantly stimulated? Is the silence deafening to you? On the other hand, have you ever whipped out your cell phone and pretended you were using it - only as a means of avoiding engaging in eye-to-eye conversation with a fellow human being? How about E-mailing a co-worker in the cubicle down the hall

instead of walking a few steps to connect? A woman pulled into her driveway, pushed a button to open her garage door while simultaneously calling her husband on her cell phone to help her bring in the groceries! Essentially, are we getting lost in a mega, multi-tasking blur; not to mention incredibly lazy?

Look what is happening to "dating"! Why do you think websites like *MATCH.com* are booming? The on-line environment is safe; less risky if you are alone and afraid of intimacy. If things get a little too close for comfort, you can simply log off, while in real time and space, you have consequences.

Another feasible allure of E-mail is its addictive quality; similar to gambling. Just like with a slot machine, with E-mail, you have intermittent variable reinforcement. You are not sure you are going to get a reward each hit or how often you will, but, we keep on pulling that handle. (Do you ever find yourself getting up in the middle of the night to check your E-mail?)

I could give example after example of the pluses and minuses of twenty-first century technology; yet the quandary is not the technology; it is the time that is being taken away, therefore, what we are not doing if this electronic era grows too large.

Ask yourself some of the following questions: Are you sitting down to a regular family dinner? If you are eating alone, why are you? Are you engaging in real conversation with your child debating whether to go out with a boy who wants to have sex on the first date? Are you taking family vacations? Are you simply taking time to just be? It is not the video games that may disintegrate our brains; it is what we are not doing that is going to stunt our fully engaging in a balanced lifestyle.

So, the next time you eat, check in with yourself to see if you're gobbling down the first thing in sight, or truly breaking bread with your partner. Next time you have the desire to be sexual, check in with yourself to see if you are engaging in frivolous sex to satisfy your own ego, or if you are truly making love with an intimate, inter-connection. Are you present mentally, emotionally and spiritually, or are you simply physically focused on your own

selfish outcome? While breaking bread and/or making love, there are many common bonds. Are you engaged in your appetite or true hunger? In love, as in gluttony, pleasure is a matter of the utmost precision.

Bottom line, we have only just begun to tap into the true potential of multi-tasking technology mania. If used appropriately, and within a balanced lifestyle, including the people, places and things that truly matter in our lives, we can still reap the true rewards of life beyond the screen.

Make the time to become profoundly aware that spending quality time with loved ones is fundamentally a process. It can be a long,

enticing, wonderful encounter that is all about discovering every possible way you can truly connect (rather than getting lost in a multi-media blur). Once you make the time for this journey of utter pleasure, you will not believe what you have been missing! It is entirely possible that you increasingly cannot imagine not having that particular person(s) in your life. Now that is Bringing Back Balance!



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