

PUTTING DOWN THE NOISE

BY KAITLYN VITTOZZI

What comes easier for you, silence or noise? As a child, my mom called me painfully shy. I never really loved playing with other kids, being alone with my toys was just fine. In hindsight, my parents may have actually sent me to a small private high school so that my peers would even notice that I existed. I did not have as much of a partying stint as my peers did in high school or college, and when we had to write “a few words” about one another- quiet was bound to be one of my identifying adjectives.

I remember my first few jobs, sitting in meetings thinking “Ugh I have to say something, it’s been like 45 minutes and I haven’t said anything.” I’ve built a successful career in procurement and a side business in yoga I’m passionate about, so I did get over that hump for successful communication. But, I also work from home, for a tech company – before I started teaching yoga I could go days without talking to anybody. Calm came easily. Functioning in chaos is difficult for me. The extroverts reading this are may be currently feeling quite sad for me.

In silence and quiet, noise may still exist. noise/noiz/a sound, especially one that is loud or unpleasant or that causes disturbance.

For many of us, when we are alone and quiet, the first thing that comes out are the distractions. The need to be doing something, even if it’s the numb of scrolling through social media. The noisy mind stories might kick in. “Should I have said that to her? God I wish I would just lose the five pounds – who sucks this badly at losing 5 pounds? I’m probably going to get fired, they don’t understand me. Reliving that moment of rage from eight months ago. My clock is ticking, I’m in my thirties are kids going to happen or not?”

As part of my yoga therapy practicum we were required to do a day-long silent retreat based off of the book “Turn Stress Into Bliss” by Michael Lee. To be fair – this was supposed to be in-person on the beach in Charleston, SC. I would have been barefoot in the sand embracing my true nature. But instead I was in Rochester, cooking my own meals and making my own bed. If you read the book, Michael

Lee recommends taking a day alone where you may need to check yourself into a hotel room to get away from your normal day-to-day, but like so many other events, this needed to be adjusted due to COVID-19. Silence was just one part of this day - I had been training for a day in silence my whole life, so that would be easy peasy. We also had a yoga practice with meditation to do, a walk to take, and some journaling. Great, I try to do yoga every day of the week and rarely accomplish that goal so this would set the tone of my week. I love taking walks. What I was most interested in – which is probably the most important part of silence in 2020, is a tech-free day. What is a cell phone, but noise? Occasionally it could bring joy but how often do you look down at a device and have the visceral response of “OH, GREAT NEWS”? I realized I had been calling myself noise-free and quiet meanwhile I was attached to my laptop and cellphone. It seems that the more noise I take in – whether it be on social media or email or whatever, the louder my mind stories get.

I told my family and my friends who text me the most, that I would be in silence on Sunday. As Saturday turned to Sunday, I set my phone to airplane mode at the stroke of midnight. At 7 AM when I woke up, I briefly turned airplane mode off in a panic thinking I missed a really important message. That was false, back to airplane mode. We were supposed to journal our experiences but NOT while eating. They must have figure out that we multi-taskers could be really efficient at retreats. So instead of multi-tasking I ate the same toast I had been eating all week, without a phone or TV on. WOW, how delightfully buttery it is. That toast was decadent! Previously I had no idea. If there was no other take away from this day in silence, I would have been totally content with the fact that food tastes better when all you are doing is tasting food.

It was a beautiful, hot Sunday in early May. I took the dog out for his walk, and until this point did not realize I talk to the dog as if he were a person. Also, I talk to myself – a lot. My mind noise had crossed a barrier and gone to ACTUAL SOUND. My dog is not a big fan of heat, and though I wanted to force him to walk to get his exercise in, I paused. Ok, what

is really happening here? He doesn’t want to walk, I have to, let me accept it. I dropped him off at the house. Assignment #2 after mindful eating, vigorous solo walk. I realized I stood up a lot taller, because I wasn’t looking down at the dog. I noticed moments when my feet sped up on their own, like a “let’s get this over with instead of let’s experience this.”

My tech-neck neck pain had been near chronic since the pandemic started- since there was rarely a reason to walk away from the screen. Even my beloved yoga was at a screen. A single two mile walk without a phone that Sunday and my neck pain was gone. It might not work for everyone, but go out and try it people.

If you have ever wondered where all the woo woo yoga language comes from (see “true nature”, above) I figured out that it comes from people on yoga retreats. “I am radiant light; I can live unattached.” – All these things that I normally roll my eyes at in yoga class, floated around in my mind. Not staring at my phone, but using my eyes to look at real life – I saw how many people take some alone time on Sunday mornings. The guy playing guitar in his garage, the runner – these weren’t multi-taskers in that moment, but people escaping noise. Hearing sounds of music and nature, but putting down the noise.

Assignment #3. Yoga and meditation. The big takeaway here is I realized how exhausted I am, and always pushing through, all the time. That’s not everyone’s story. Some of you are great at prioritizing rest. I’d love to blame the pandemic, but that would be a lie. The truth is, if we’re constantly exhausted and constantly in noise (audible or not), how can we ever grow as a human? I don’t know if any American will live ever live truly noise-less, but how much time do you set aside each week for silence and sound? For me, it is simply promising myself a phone-free walk each week.

Now through September I will be offering heavily discounted yoga therapy sessions (online, until further notice) through September, if you want help sorting through some noise. You can schedule a session by emailing Kaitlyn@TozziYoga.com.