

YOGA AND MOVEMENT AS A TOOL

BY KAITLYN VITTOZZI

Have you ever had to listen to a recording of your own voice? I always used to shudder at the thought. My vision would go blurry – thinking “my, voice, my breathing, who breathes like that!? I can’t listen.” My somatic yoga therapy practice changed that. When I do have to listen to a recording of my own voice, what am I really feeling? My stomach churns. If you’re a woman, odds are you have lived through a stomach churn or ten. By naming the sensation in my body, I become bigger than it, and it becomes feasible.

“Anything that’s human is mentionable, and anything that is mentionable can be more manageable. When we can talk about our feelings, they become less overwhelming, less upsetting, and less scary.” – Mr. Rogers

I am currently sitting at my kitchen table writing this on day 9 of social distancing. It feels inauthentic not to mention it. While my body is healthy, and I am fortunate not to have lost my job, my shoulders feel heavy from being glued to a laptop each day. I find myself getting short of breath from the emotional weight in the air when I’ve been sitting for too long. The silver lining is that there are currently some awesome yoga classes online from my favorite instructors locally and on opposite ends of the country. Those yoga classes let me experience that weight from my own living room. Noticing when it feels heaviest and when the load starts to lighten.

Not sure how that works? Here is a mini yoga therapy session you can do, right from your chair:

#1 How are you feeling right now?

Name in a word or phrase, no more than a sentence.

#2 Seated as you are, bring your feet to the ground and start to wiggle your toes. Scrunch them up, spread them out. If they don’t move, have your hands help them.

#3 Then start to roll your ankles around. Let the legs go with them. Sway those legs and hips around gradually getting faster.

#4 Run your legs in place as fast as you can for 30 seconds. Let your quarantined housemates laugh at you.

#5 Stop. Close your eyes and breathe.

#6 Name what you are feeling. What are you feeling in your body right now? Be specific about the raw sensations you are experiencing. Practice the act of being curious without trying to solve anything. For example, if you feel a tightness in your hips, don’t beat yourself up because your hips are tight, just notice it, speak it to yourself and give yourself permission to be where you are at.

What does this have to do with empowerment? Mindful awareness of the sensations in our bodies allows us to cut through the mental nonsense story of “I can’t!” and tune it to where we are really at. From there, we can make more conscious decisions.

Use your family as an example. Maybe you really love them but find yourself at annoyed at one another during holidays, all that build-up just to disappoint. Good news for you, Easter 2020 dinner is cancelled. Just kidding. While I am still very much a work in progress, I

try to infuse this mindfulness when I’m with my family because they’re important to me. I love my father dearly, but he always has the TV on full blast, flipping between news networks. My immediate reaction is to say, “CAN YOU JUST TURN THIS THE F OFF UNTIL DINNER IS OVER!?” which I know from experience makes the whole room uncomfortable. Now if I mindfully check in with my body, I feel discomfort in my ears from the TV and a pulsation in my neck. I can choose to deal with that discomfort for the next few hours.

Mindfulness can help not just with conflict, but in allowing us to live a fuller life. Since the gyms have been closed, I started running two miles a few times per week. I’m not training for anything, so there’s no timing or pacing. I have been leaving the house without my earbuds and listening to the sounds of my feet and feeling the burning in my lungs.

On the first day of spring it was warm and sunny. Checking in with myself and what I really wanted, I stopped to walk for a little bit. Listening to my body, I spread my arms out wide and felt the sun on the sweat on my arms. It felt like a rush of warmth, and it felt like happiness. And I knew when I went back to my home, to sit at the kitchen table, the day would be a little bit better.

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