

THE SOUNDS OF SILENCE

By Helen Adrienne, LCSW, BCD

Simon and Garfunkel sang of the “words of the prophets being written on subway walls and tenement halls” and prophetic words being “whispered in the sounds of silence.” As prophets themselves, they sang of “people talking without speaking, people hearing without listening.” This article is an invitation for you to ponder what “vision might have been planted in your brain [which] still remains...within the sound of [your] silence.”

So often we run from pillar to post seeking answers when what we need to know is within us. And when the going gets tough the tough usually get going in every direction to get the information they need to resolve a dilemma. This is an effective coping skill. Others - friends, colleagues, relatives - who have been there before us can help; and professionals are trained to provide guidance which we need at critical moments and reaching out to them for help is healthy.

When in a frenzied state, it often feels impossible to escape from bodily tension or to come in for a landing mentally so as to really know what course of action is best. Crises such as infertility amplify the physiology of stress and for most of us the frenzy of a circumstance is met with a frenzy of body and mind. Common sense sends us to others for answers and guidance, which is important. Yet crises usually involve making decisions and the only one who can know if a decision is right for us is us.

An often overlooked aspect of dealing with a crisis is quieting the noise of physical and mental frenzy. The body needs the respite of serenity and the mind cannot be expected to decide what is right if it is spinning. Crises create a unique dilemma: There is a physical and mental need to slow if not stop the tide of frenzy at the same time that the tide of frenzy has such force that it is hard to imagine that you could sit still with it without getting bowled over. This is a common situation for those struggling to arrive at parenthood but it is also common for any of us struggling with any crisis. To learn how to be with the sounds of your own silence is just what any doctor with a mind/body orientation would order.

Meditation, guided imagery, the relaxation response, self-hypnosis, mindfulness and breathing exercises are all cousins to one another and all serve to calm the savage breast, as do physical activities such as yoga or tai chi. Mind/body frenzy is a viscous circle that goes in both directions and meditation and its cousins and the focused physicality of yoga and tai chi are different doors by which we can enter a frenzied state to break the cycle.

I have been practicing as well as teaching many of these approaches for many years and I can attest to their effectiveness in hearing the sounds – the wisdom – that can emerge from silence. The physical restlessness of stress or a mind which jumps like a Mexican bean need physical and mental silence as an antidote to stress. This allows the bodymind to approach if not return to neutral. Once any of us allows a momentum of experiencing serenity or stillness to gather, it can come to be experienced as a “positive addiction.” Seeking relief is easier once you understand that getting relief is possible. The fact that relief is relieving becomes its own motivation, if not addiction.

But what if you have lived in general and through crises in particular as if you were addicted to stress, maybe even without being fully conscious of it? You would be in good company. In this fast-paced world where multi-tasking is held in high esteem and where caffeine may as well be infused intravenously, the notion of being able to reverse the physiology of stress is at best in the margins of consciousness for some of us.

It can be brought front and center. Tuning in to the rich and wise silence – the prophet within each of us - is a skill that can be learned to great benefit. There is at least one approach which is right for you which can be discovered. But then it must be practiced in order to become legitimized by a mindset that has excluded it or has been averse to it. Practice lays down new neural pathways which, over time, become a new reality. Conversely, refusing to honor learned limitations diminishes their neuronal power, making those limitations less of an obstacle over time.

You may feel that you would like to learn how to return your body and mind to neutral and may have even tried it, possibly to no avail. I fully respect that self-assessment. After all, that is how you have been experiencing yourself. But all you are telling yourself really is that you have not had the right teacher or enough patience or especially enough belief in your capacity to make this change. Belief systems can be powerful barriers. But if the struggle with fertility or any other struggle has left you feeling a pressure to change now, and if whatever you are doing to cope is not working – then you might feel a motivation to give listening to the sounds of your silence a try, or another try.

Sometimes people are discouraged from trying to tune in because they feel that they must be able to literally sit still. This is a common misconception. Walking meditations, yoga and tai chi each utilize mindful attention to movement as a way of curtailing mental frenzy. These approaches have a positive impact on physical frenzy as well. If we distract from frenzy, in essence we are refusing to honor it and it loses its power, a fact which may never have occurred to you.

Another fallacy in excusing yourself from the opportunity to explore inner silence and relieve your internal machinations is the belief that you cannot quiet your mind. Perhaps you do not realize that you do not have to. There is a way to gain relief from mental frenzy by following it, albeit as a detached observer. This is simply a matter of saying to yourself, “Now I’m thinking this, now I’m thinking that ...” without judging what you are thinking and without trying to process or resolve the intrusive thoughts. Here, too, if you acknowledge that you are thinking something without becoming preoccupied with it, theoretically the detachment robs the thoughts of their power to keep you in a spin. Current advances in neuroscience have shown that you can use your mind to change how your brain fires off.

There are many audio programs for sale which will bring you out of gridlock and into an inner infinity where the sounds and wisdom of your silence are waiting for you. Some have to do with guided imagery or hypnosis. Some draw on the power of music to alter brain waves. Some foster serenity based on spiritual inspiration. Many have to do with replacing negativity with affirmations.

Using a tape recorder, you can create your own affirmation tape by planning beforehand what you want to say which acknowledges the best of who you are. This is particularly important if you tend to be hard on yourself. Self-criticism is a common phenomenon in general,

but the demands of an infertility struggle shatters self-esteem and that commonly increases the tendency toward harsh self-judgment. Self-judgment keeps the ego busy and focused on what is wrong with you, neglecting all that is right about you – your strength, inner resources, stick-to-itiveness, creativity and more.

With sufficient determination you can reach out and find appropriate help. Locating classes in yoga, tai chi, mindfulness meditation or a mind/body support group can make a big difference because it provides much-needed social support in addition to setting the stage to turn your attention inward. If you are someone who prefers to work in private, there are teachers or therapists in all of these realms who work individually.

You can work with yourself hypnotically as well. Hypnosis, or in this case self-hypnosis, is nothing more than a relaxing, focused day dream. It involves narrowing your field of vision and utilizing the tranquilizing power of your breathing to bring you into the present moment. Clasp your hands together leaving your index fingers free and pointing away from you, parallel to each other. Stare at the space between your fingers with “soft eyes” while breathing with full consciousness and allow yourself to be curious as to the attraction that your index fingers seem to have for each other, as if they were magnetized. Having decided ahead of time what post-hypnotic suggestion you would like to give to your unconscious mind, when your fingers touch, close your eyes, take a deep breath, and say your suggestion over and over to yourself. You will know when the time is right to bring yourself back to full alertness.

I can do phone sessions. For more info, go to my web site, www.mind-body-unity.com.

Or, you can order my CD or MP3, “Breathing in the Now.” You will see in the instructions that I offer free phone time to adapt the CD to your needs if you have not achieved the desired results.

I take great pleasure in making personalized hypnosis tapes. After a brief interview I would then be in position to address your issues and your goals with appropriate hypnotic techniques and imagery that is particular to you. This can be done over the phone as well, as I have the technology to digitally record the session, email it to you and then you can download it onto your MP3 player. This would allow you to practice, reinforce and integrate your intended changes. If your computer is equipped with a built-in camera, and if you download free Skype technology, we can do the session over the computer where we can see each other. If you are in the New York Metropolitan area, we could meet in person.

Using professional or home made tapes or any of these other techniques are great for slowing if not stopping the viscous interplay of mind/body frenzy. When the tape, yoga class or technique of choice is over, remain quiet for a bit and be open to what can come. Achieving stillness, even stillness through movement, fosters concentration as well as contemplation and activates an internal search which can toss meaningful little gems into conscious awareness.

Are you talking without speaking to yourself? Are you listening without hearing your own wisdom? Here is your chance to try, or to try again to discover how much you know - that you may not know that you know - about what you need. Your inner prophet awaits you.

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