

# Justin Zorn & Leigh Marz Silence is Golden

**Justin Zorn:** [00:00:00] Noise is unwanted distraction. That which interferes with our true perception and intention. You know, that which pushes us or pulls us away from what we really want. And silence, You know, as you mentioned it as one level is the absence of noise. But this space where no one's making claims on our consciousness, where no one nothing is interfering with our clear perception and intention.

**Leigh Marz:** Silence is not silent at all. It's teaming with life and joy and ecstasy, but it's quiet. Of thoughts of this self. So it's quiet of thoughts of this self, it's quiet of foolishness

That was Justin Zorn and Lee Mars on psychologists off. off. the clock

**Yael Schonbrun:** we are [00:01:00] three clinical psychologists here to bring you cutting edge and science based ideas from psychology to help you flourish in your relationships work and.

**Debbie Sorenson:** I'm Dr. Debbie Sorenson, practicing in Mile High Denver, Colorado. Co-author of Act, Daily Journal, and an upcoming book on act for burnout.

**Yael Schonbrun:** I'm Dr. Yel Shreen, a Boston based clinical psychologist, assistant professor at Brown University, and author of the book Work Parent Thrive.

**Jill Stoddard:** And from coastal New England, I. Dr. Jill Sto, author of Be Mighty, the big book of Act metaphors and the Upcoming Imposter. No more.

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**Jill Stoddard:** Thank you for listening to psychologists Off the clock.

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**Jill Stoddard:** I'm here with you L to introduce today's episode where I interviewed Justin Zorn and Lee Mars about their book Golden, The Power of Silence in a World of Noise. And I thought this was just a really interesting take on silence and I'm wondering, Yel, what your reaction to the episode was.

**Yael Schonbrun:** I had an interesting experience listening to the episode, Jill, because once in a while something funny happens as we're editing our episodes, , in preparation for our intros for one another, and somehow you silenced your track. So as I was listening to it, I could hear Lee and Justin speaking and not you.

So there was these. Silences when you would be reflecting on what they had said [00:03:00] and then asking your next question. And I could have reached out to you and said, Hey, Jill, can you fix the episode so that I can hear you? But I thought to myself, Oh, this is such a great opportunity to, with silence and what it's like to know that I'm missing chunks of this conversation.

And on the one hand it was like, Oh, what is she saying? And am I gonna know the context? But actually, it was pretty easy to figure. And it was a really kind of fun experience and I think an opportunity and, and one that sort of opens this question of like, how can we each build in more opportunities to, instead of filling the silence when there is taking it as an opportunity to sit with it and see what comes up.

It was kind of fun,

**Jill Stoddard:** Oh my God. I love that you did that so much and it's so true to you being like such a little scientist at heart, you're like, Oh, I'm gonna use this as an opportunity to experiment . And, and I think, you know, and this is partly

one of the things we talk about in the episode is how much we all kind of like fear and [00:04:00] dread and dislike silence.

And you know, there's even the phrase awkward silence and that we work so hard to avoid those things. But when we get curious and allow ourselves to sit in them, you have a really different experience and it's often not the aversive experience. Predict it's going to be, And it sounds like that was your experience listening or not listening to me when you were listening to the interview.

**Yael Schonbrun:** Yeah. Well, and silence is such an interesting thing as therapists too, because we, we use silence as a therapeutic tool and learn to sit with it. And what's interesting about that is I learned how to be a therapist in silence before I learned how to be a partner in silence. And my partner is kind of a quiet guy and much more comfortable with silence interpersonally than I am.

And so I, I feel like I have thought a lot about silence as. Something that can make me uncomfortable, but also is something that can be quite productive and connecting if you allow yourself to sit with a discomfort long enough.

**Jill Stoddard:** And that's the key, right? Is like the willingness [00:05:00] to sit in that. And you know, it actually reminded me, I was listening to the interview that you did on Brad Stolbergs podcast. So Brad has been a guest on our podcast, and then Yel was on his podcast, The Growth Equation. And you're talking about how. You have a deliberate rest time for your kids, for your family, and that often what comes up is they complain that they're bored, of course, as kids always do.

And that you look at, like, you ask them questions about like, what did you notice? What sort of thoughts came up as you were sitting in this space? And that idea of boredom sort of reminded me of this idea of silence. Like we hate to be bored and we work very hard to get away from boredom, but like when we.

Just kind of slow down and allow ourselves to sit in spaces with less stimulation and get curious , something interesting or beneficial may actually come out of that.

**Yael Schonbrun:** Yeah, and I mean the research on boredom is that what happens when we're bored is our minds tend to [00:06:00] wander over to more personally interesting, meaningful, and stimulating content when we're not being stimulated from the outside. And so it is a place, Emotionally speaking,

where real creativity can come or where really powerful self reflections can come or where, you know, other kinds of realizations can come.

And yet I think the impulse, the reflex almost is that when we're quiet, when we're a bit understimulated is to just like, Automatically reach for something that will entertain us, distract us. And so I think the trick for building more silence in is to have practices that sort of force a, a brief pause before you reach for something to distract or stimulate you.

And that because. That is the automatic action that we all take. And so my kids' rest time is one example. , I offered another few examples in the conversation that I have with Brad Stolberg and Steve Magnus on their podcast. , but this is something that I do. So like when I'm in line at the [00:07:00] grocery store, that right, the temptation is to reach for your phone.

And I try really hard to. Keep it in my pocket and instead to just kind of sit quietly. I think it's also nice when you come home from work before you pick up your kids to have a brief time in the car or before you step into the house where you just kind of breathe a few breaths quietly. So I think practices like those help you build that muscle of sitting with silence and kind of less stimulation.

And again, getting curious like what? What's gonna come out of that?

**Jill Stoddard:** Yeah. And close to the end of the episode, Justin and Lee give some examples and they're right in line with what you're saying. You know, if, if your podcast shuts off, like my voice shut off for you, instead of rushing to get to the, you know, turn it back on or get to the next one, like, Just sit with that lack of stimulation.

And what I like about your examples and their examples are, you know, these are really easy things that we can build into our day. Almost like little micro sessions of silence or boredom. And that you don't have to go to a monastery and, you know, go to a two day [00:08:00] silent retreat. So it felt like it was a really kind of like, um, realistic and accessible way to, to talk about building more silence.

**Yael Schonbrun:** I love that. Can, can I actually say one more thing that I love about it? So I'm like a fairly socially anxious person as I'm often admitting on this podcast. And one of the things that I like is being around people who are comfortable with silence, cuz it takes the pressure off of me to come up with a good response.

And so I just wanna say that, you know, sometimes we're afraid of silence and sometimes we're afraid. Of what other people might perceive if we're silent. So I think almost like talking about it more, bringing it out into the open and you know, maybe even sharing those kinds of experiences and commitments to silence with other people that you care about.

Not like in a, let's, you know, have five years of silence, although that's, An interesting experiment too, as, as they talk about in the podcast, but, you know, have times that with your partner or your kids, you just agree to be silent and, and be silent together, which is kind of [00:09:00] beautiful. And, and for the socially anxious among us, sort of a, a reprieve

**Jill Stoddard:** I love that. I think there's so much wisdom in that. And truly, if I could get my son to be silent for 30 to 60 seconds, it would be like an absolute dream come true, So on that note, we hope you enjoyed this episode with Justin Zorn and Lee Mars.

Hey everybody, it's Jill here, and I'm excited to bring to you this episode today about a book called Golden, The Power of Silence, and a World of Noise. The book was written by Justin Zorn and Lee Mars. Justin Tbit. Zorn has served as both a strategist and a meditation teacher in the US Congress, a Harvard and Oxford trained specialist in the economics and psychology of human thriving. He has written for the Washington Post, the Atlantic, Harvard Business Review, Foreign Policy, and other public.

Justin is the co-author of Golden, The Power of Silence, and a World of Noise he is co-founder of Astray Strategies, [00:10:00] a consultancy that bridges contemplation and action helping leaders and teams envision and communicate solutions to complex challenges.

Justin lives in Santa Fe, New Mexico with his wife and three children. Lee Mars is a collaboration and leadership coach for major universities, corporations, and federal agencies, as well as a longtime student of pioneering researchers and practitioners of the ritualized use of psychedelic medicines in the West.

She has led training programs to promote an experimental mindset among teams at NASA and a decade long cross sector collaboration to reduce toxic chemicals and products and partnership with Green Science Policy Institute, Harvard University, ikea, Google, and Kaiser Permanente she is also a co-founder of Astray Strategies. Lee lives in Berkeley, California with her husband and daughter, Justin Lee, welcome to the podcast. I'm so happy to have you on Psychologists Off the clock.

**Leigh Marz:** Thanks, Jill. Thanks for having.

**Justin Zorn:** Thanks for having us, Jill. Good to be with.

**Jill Stoddard:** [00:11:00] You got it. So let's jump right in. This is a really, Fascinating. I, first of all, I love the title and the cover of the book. It's really appealing and, , I don't know, sort of compelling, this whole idea of like, silence is golden. And I'm curious just to start, we're gonna talk about what silence is in a moment, but given you know, what you guys do with leadership and you know, I imagine your jobs involve a lot of. So what is it that led you to wanna write, you know, a whole entire book about silence?

**Justin Zorn:** Totally. We, uh, we were actually just joking about this chill yesterday that we're both big talkers. We both really like to talk and we're like, This is kind of funny. We wrote a book about silence up

**Jill Stoddard:** it's a little ironic.

**Justin Zorn:** a little ironic, but for us it came from a feeling of despondent feeling like, what are we gonna do about this crazy world?

How are we possibly gonna bring a little bit [00:12:00] more sanity? Our own lives and the lives of people around us and some of the systems that we live within in healthcare and in education and politics and policy, the environment. And we felt this intuition that the prerequisite to bringing any positive change right now is getting beyond the noise.

Getting beyond the noise, and tuning in to silence, finding the most pristine attention that we can. And listening, tuning into it, immersing ourselves into it, that the answers might not come through more thinking or talking.

**Jill Stoddard:** Well, I have a question I wanna ask you later, after we get into silence a little bit more, because you know what I do for a living? Therapy sometimes called talk therapy. So I'll, That's a little teaser. I'm interested to, to talk to you about the role of silence in therapy. But before we get there, let's talk about what you [00:13:00] mean by silence, because you say silence isn't just an absence.

But a present.

So can you say a little bit more about what you mean by.

**Leigh Marz:** yeah, absolutely. , we'll start by saying, when we were in that state that Justin was describing, we had this intuition. About an article which we wrote for Harvard Business Reviewer, looking at silence as a strategic, , space of, you know, to help us kind of sort through those difficult places. We were working on a lot of complex issues, you know, how might silence support us in strategic thinking and how might it be a benefit to us to maybe do something.

Relax, the mental reflexes of always having to think of what to say in response to everything. So we were trying out these ideas of silence really from an auditory perspective. And that article that was published in Harvard Business Review, , to our surprise, got a lot of responses and went [00:14:00] viral and.

Cost us to step back and think more deeply about this question of silence. That exactly what you're pointing us towards. So we started thinking of it as you know, in initially as the absence of noise, but as we then went out into the world and started asking these fascinating people, neuroscientists and politicians, and a man incarcerated on death row, and artists and whirling dervishes and activists.

Therapists and you know, psychologists and neuroscientists, I think I already said, but we spoke to many this, we asked them this question, What's the deepest silence you've ever known? And they're the ones who really pointed us to this deeper understanding of silence as a presence unto itself. Cuz their answers were not always auditorily, quiet.

They included these moments of peak moment ex, you know, life experiences, births, deaths, moments of awe moments, running the perfect line through Roaring Rapids, , or [00:15:00] the 4:00 AM market, the all night dance parties. So and flow states and all kinds of different mental states. So that really set us on this journey of exploring the many dimensions, um, of silence and.

The many definitions and meanings of it in people's.

**Jill Stoddard:** I really loved that you took that track of getting outside of your own, you know, experience or even research and asking all of these different types of people with different roles, and I think that was one of my favorite parts of the book was just reading their. Vastly different, but really wise conceptualizations, and I liked so many of them, but one that really resonated with me.

, we had Judson Brewer on our podcast and he talked about silence as equanimity and an absence of push or pull, and it was one of the simpler.

Conceptualizations, but it really spoke to me and I think especially as a psychologist and has someone who specializes in anxiety disorders,[00:16:00] , you know, that, that really spoke to me.

And I'm curious if, what were your favorites? You know, were there any that kind of gave you goosebumps when you first heard or read them?

**Justin Zorn:** Yeah, there's so many, you know, Judson Brewer. When, when we spoke with Judson Brewer, Yeah. He described the equanimity. This silence is the absence of the push or pull. And it, he kind of got to the essence of, you know, back to your question before the meaning of silence, you know, and the meaning of noise.

Noise is unwanted distraction. That which interferes with our true perception and intention. You know, that which pushes us or pulls us away from what we really want. And silence, You know, as you mentioned it as one level is the absence of noise. But this space where no one's making claims on our consciousness, where no one nothing is interfering with our clear perception and intention.

So when we talked with Judson Brewer, he was [00:17:00] talking about how through his MRI studies of long term meditators, he said the common denominator to the experience of noise in the consciousness was a feeling of contract. And the common denominator to what people would report as an experience of silence in the mind was a feeling of expansion expansiveness.

So Gordon Hampton, who is one of the world's great acoustic ecologists, who studies the endangered soundscapes of the world and records them before they disappeared. Before they disappear, he says that silence is time und disturb. It's the think tank of the soul. So it's this same idea of this feeling of like expansiveness, you know, which from the standpoint of thinking about therapy, it's like, you know when people are in a difficult.

State, psychologically are people in a difficult state that they're trying to get out of, or in [00:18:00] a moment of transition when there's just too many thoughts competing for the mic within the consciousness, you know, worries, anxieties. It's that feeling of contraction. What we found, what I found, at least in my own life, in difficult times, and the feelings when I feel inspiration and equilibrium and like I can be present with the people I love.

It's this, it's this feeling of expansion and that's one way we think of the silence that we talk about. Lee, are there any other, uh, any, uh, these definitions you wanna point to?

**Leigh Marz:** Yeah, so many. I'll just say that I do remember coming in contact with judge and Brewer and his definition that it con contraction and expansion. That was a big opening for us and it is so simple, but that could keep you busy for your lifetime. Tracking the contraction, , and the expansion. So it was a beautiful moment and they all sort of, there was a resonance that shows up in these definitions for us, which is why they're all in there.

[00:19:00] What comes to my mind right now is Phab Decon. He's a Sufi teacher, , here in Northern California, and he says Silence is not silent at all. It's teaming with life and joy and ecstasy, but it's quiet. Of thoughts of this self. So it's quiet of thoughts of this self, it's quiet of foolishness so that he, you know, calling in all this vibrance and liveness that's in silence, which really feels true for me.

And then yet, what is it that's quiet? These thoughts of the si, you know,

**Jill Stoddard:** It sounds like the way he described that is almost like a dissolution of ego, which reminds me of, you know, the use of psychedelics, which I know is something that you are interested in.

**Leigh Marz:** Absolutely. In fact, you know, asking these. Amazing people. This question about the deepest silence and having these different reflections show up, we [00:20:00] found it led us all, um, towards looking into different research and neuroscience. What, where is the, what's, what are we understanding about this internal state of quiet this and finding those common threads?

We found an area, an emerging area of science. Looking at self transcendent experiences, which does create this almost umbrella term for things that we experience in sometimes in meditation and in flow states, which we can get into and in mystical experiences and in some cases in experiences brought about by using plant medicines or antigens or psychedelic medicines as well.

This experience of quiet where the. Self, the small and go itself kind of, um, falls away and there's maybe no space for that self-referential thought, but there's a greater sense, a bigger sense of self, something more integrated and connected to the larger world around us. People, nature, God, whatever, [00:21:00] fill in the blank, you know, that is incredibly quietening and

incredibly enjoyable and shared in these seemingly different mental states. We thought that was

fascinating.

**Jill Stoddard:** is si It is. Yeah. It absolutely. I agree. And um, I'm wondering, do you think of silence? How is it the same or different from flow, from mindfulness? Is it, is it a larger umbrella term? Is it part of these things? Are they related but different?

How do they. And how are they separate?

**Justin Zorn:** You know, we think of this book as a non meditators guide to Getting Beyond the Noise, and we have so much respect for mindfulness. You know, taught mindfulness on Capitol Hill when I worked there, as you mentioned. And Lee has integrated it into a lot of her work. , but we've had 40 years of mindfulness and the world is more distracted than ever.

So we wanted to look beyond the rules and tools of mindfulness, you know, and offer a simple field guide [00:22:00] to finding accessible ways to navigate these different kinds of noise. Because in the book, we look at the auditory noise, but also the informational noise and the internal noise, the noise in our. But also the noise in our screens and the noise in our heads.

So we wanted to offer people an invitation to let go of questions and expectations that they often have around mindfulness. Like, am I doing it right? Am I meditating enough? We wanted to give people license to let go of all those feelings of doubt around mindfulness and to simply tune into something that's so inherent to being. The experience of silence, which is something that we all know in our own way for ourself, you know, and in this way that we all know silence for ourself, it's often experienced as a state of flow. We asked a whole range of neuroscientists and academic psychologists what is silence in the Mind? And they all, you know, were [00:23:00] pretty unanimous in saying like a mind that is totally silent is a mind that's dead.

That's like not what you actually. But there is an experience of silence in the mind that is in a mind, that is alive in a universe that's alive and buzzing and singing and dancing. And this silence is, you know, as we were mentioning this, this absence of any interference in our perception and intention.

It's a state of pristine awareness, pristine attention. Again, where there's nothing making claims on our consciousness and like in the highest degree of this kind

of silence we're talking about, you know, we experience a kind of wholeness to it. You know, it's like if the sound and stimulus of speech and thought are signaling what needs to change, what action needs to be taken, what needs to be done, then the pristine awareness of a moment of, of deep silence.

[00:24:00] Of pristine awareness and our consciousness, it signals the opposite where nothing needs to be done. These states of peace in our lives, and sometimes, as Lee mentioned before, these can be active. These could be on the basketball court, These could be, you know, kayaking down a river. These could even, in some cases, be in conversation with a loved one, but it's these places where there's no interference.

**Jill Stoddard:** Yeah,

when you

posed the question in your book, and I know you do this in workshops, but you ask, What is the deepest silence you've ever known? And I had to get through the book before I could even answer the question because it my first response to the. Was, I don't think I've ever known a deep silence.

I'm not, because I don't think I really understood exactly what was meant by the question initially. And then reading the

book, I had a better understanding of it, and I was surprised that the answers that kind of rose for me were in these very simple moments. So for example, the first thing that came to me was when I used to walk my [00:25:00] dog on the beach when I lived in California.

You know, he's a French bulldog, so he is not silent, right? I mean, he's huffing and puffing and snorting and grunting and making all sorts of noise, and of course the ocean and the seagulls and the wind. And, but there was just this, like you said, like this expansive present awareness where it was like time and distraction and everything was.

Just absent and, and there was no effort involved. Like I didn't have to try to be present and aware. It just sort of, it was like a state of being almost. So, Does that sound right? Like, does that sound like what you're talking about when you talk about knowing a deep moment of silence?

**Leigh Marz:** Absolutely. And I love, we haven't had a French, , bulldog in the mix [00:26:00] yet, so thanks for introducing that in the answers that Yeah. And

the new answers, the, we spoke with, , Professor of Bio Behavioral Health and Medicine, Dr. Joshua Smith, who was the one when we were asking him, really haranging him for this internal silence.

What's internal silence? He does large scale, um, studies, um, mindfulness and all kinds of stress reducing, , practices. And he's the one who in exasperation said to us, Quiet is what people think. Quiet. Quiet is what people think quiet is. And we would probably add, it's really what quiet is, what we feel quiet to be.

And as Justin said, we all know, we believe that there's this innate wisdom to what quiet is, and it may look pretty weird. Like it was, He mentioned a man in his study who found his quiet carving large chunks of [00:27:00] wood, doing chainsaw carving and making artwork and sculptures with that. That's when he was, This man was in complete flow, right?

Complete focused concentration. No, no space for self-referential thought and all other kinds of things. So there's like merging of action and awareness. This is building on the work of Mihi cheeks at Mihi. Again, this pointed us towards flow. Um, you know, I also had a hard time answering that question. , it's like the, the answer that came to me when I when we asked this question just didn't seem quite right. It was kind of complicated. It was a mess. I mentioned in there that I was postpartum and having a postpartum psychotic episode and was asked by my, the. Have I lost my witness? And that's that moment where all of a sudden there was clarity, two types of quiet showed up, the quiet in me that actually had been tracking all the different voices and all those different, , [00:28:00] unhelpful voices that were coming in.

Obsessive thoughts and paranoid thoughts and anxious thoughts, all that parted. So there was a quiet in me, but there was also. Vast silence that was holding me this expansiveness that was holding me and just told me everything was gonna be okay. It took months and months and months of sort of excavating to get at that, that what that is.

So for some people, they get an answer right off the bat. And for those of us who may have an unusual. Seeming answer, um, it can take a little more time, but what we hope happens for the readers is they engage this, this book is that they find their way to that answer and that they honor it. As weird as it may be,

**Jill Stoddard:** Yeah. Yeah. Well, you provide a lot of different exa, you know, you provide all the different kinds of like conceptualizations or definitions that all the different, you know, scholars and poets and everyone had, and then you

also provide a lot of different examples. So I think it does. [00:29:00] Certainly lead, lead down that path of understanding it for the individual reader.

And of course, we will talk about how to find moment of silent moments of silence. But before that, let's talk a little bit about why silence is important. So you present a lot of research in here, about both the costs of noise and, and Justin you had mentioned there's the auditory stimuli and informational noise, you know, all this unrelenting data.

Assaulting us on a daily basis, and then internal noise of thoughts and, and feelings. so maybe we can talk a little bit about the cost of noise as well as the benefits of silence. And you know, in reading the research in the book, I was surprised and not surprised about one of the findings where you talked about a research study where people could either opt to sit in silence for 15 minutes or get an electric shock.

And 67% of men would prefer to have a shock than to sit in silence. [00:30:00] And it was only 25% of women. So that gender different, just the fact that anyone would wanna shock rather than silence is really interesting and important and telling. But also that gender difference is really something as well. So can you tell us a little bit about that, these benefits and costs of silence and.

**Justin Zorn:** Sure. You know, and it really comes back to what we were talking about before of. Noise and the consciousness is this state of contraction, which in a way is almost like the dopamine rush, the state of, of busyness, of really going for it in our lives, of having that contracted intensity in the body and in the mind.

And the expansiveness isn't always how we think of success or progress or what we're going for in this culture, you know? Thus you have like that University of Virginia study people preferring a painful electric shock. The intensity of something, rather than needing to sit in the silence and face it, but to, to look at this question [00:31:00] of why silence matters for us, You know, I think.

It's important to first look at the fact that noise is so radically on the rise in our society. Like it's not just a figment of our imagination. I mean, researchers through the National Park Service estimate that noise pollution increases two to three fold every 30 years. In Europe, 450 million people, about 65% of the population live with noise levels of the World Health Organization deemed to be hazardous to health.

And this is auditory noise. And the research shows that this is linked to cardiovascular disease. It's linked to stroke, it's linked to depression and anxiety, you know, as well as sleep problems. But there's also the informational noise. In 2010, Eric Schmidt, when he was CEO of Google, made an estimate that every two days we now create as much information as we did from the dawn of civilization up [00:32:00] until 2003. That's every two days. And researchers like Mihai, Chache, Mehi have found that the upward bound of what we can actually compute in terms of information as a human being isn't increasing. It's just we're dealing with this fire hose of more and more information. So what's really of interest to us is how, you know, to your question, of the importance of getting beyond the noise for our health, for our clarity.

This auditory noise and this and this informational noise. There's a lot of evidence that that gives rise to more internal noise too. Ethan Cross, who you may know, the psychologist at the University of Michigan estimates that we now have to listen to something like 320 State of the Union addresses worth of compressed speech in our head every single day.

The average person,

**Jill Stoddard:** Wow.

**Justin Zorn:** and this is. This is [00:33:00] natural in a world of so much sound and stimulus and information. So one thing we've really aspired to do in this book is to, is to point out that we often mistake the feeling of stress for a aliveness. We often mistake that contracted state of noisiness and the consciousness that judge and brewer spoke.

As fulfillment and there's another level of fulfillment that all of these extraordinary people who Lee mentioned that we've interviewed in the course of this book, all the stories we weave through this book, all of them explain to us how there's this level of fulfillment. That is a state of expansiveness.

That's a level of tuning into the silence, and we explore in the book the science that shows that this state of expansiveness in quiet, in time of immersive, pristine attention, time in nature. This is actually edifying for the mind is what the research is showing.

**Jill Stoddard:** [00:34:00] You talk about how, There's a real tendency to, to fear silence. And I will say like, I really relate to this. I think many people relate to this in this culture that, you know, for me, the way, not proudly, especially as

a psychologist, but the way that I kind of escape my own stress and anxiety is to be in this like, go, go, go, do, do, do.

You know, as long as I'm busy, Then I'm not worrying and anxious because I'm distracted and doing all of all of these things. And it works in the moment, in the short term. But of course in the long term it's creating, you know, it's a feedback loop, right? It's costing more and more, causing more and more of these issues related to noise.

Um, and the other thing I thought about is with that study with the electric shock, there's a very similar study that it's the same finding, but instead of being related to silence, it's related. Uncertainty. So basically if people may or may not get an electric shock, they were much more distressed [00:35:00] than if they knew for sure they were going to get an electric shock.

Right. So it was like less painful to get a shock than it was to sit not knowing if you were going to get a shock. And so I wonder if you can just talk a little bit about like, is that difficulty with uncertainty or, you know, lack of control is a, is a problem for folks when they get anxious and fearful. Do we think that is somehow related to the fear of silence? Like, why are we so uncomfortable

**Leigh Marz:** Mm-hmm.

**Jill Stoddard:** I mean, people talk about awkward silences and you can see how we like fill space instead of just sitting in that moment.

**Leigh Marz:** Yeah, we felt that was so important to address that we have a chapter on why silence is scary. Um, Roshi, Joan Halifax. Says, When we stop our habitual mental and physical activity and sit quietly, difficulties often become more visible. We can become even more [00:36:00] sensitive to suffering and feel at risk For breakdown, what is probably breaking down is our ego. Our identity. Yeah. . There she comes again. Yeah. What is probably breaking down is our ego, our identity as a small separate self and the healthy part of us should welcome this. So we do look in the book at that place of the unknown as well as the place where something may become known something. Suspect is a problem.

One of those definitions that we love about silence is Pad Ouma who says he's a poet, theologian who says, Um, silence is where we can ask ourselves the really strange questions.

**Jill Stoddard:** Yeah.

**Leigh Marz:** And sometimes those questions are fun and quirky and interesting, and sometimes they're really hard. Like, what if I'm not in the right marriage or the right job? [00:37:00]

Or on my path or if I'm, you know, covering up with addictions and habits that are causing harm. So we really wanted to meet this cuz we know this from the inside out. We know this place, , we really wanted to meet this, um, Head on with compassion and to uncover some of those places all the way down to that awkward silence that my daughter who's 16, there's like nothing more horrifying than an awkward silence in her world.

So it really has been with us this, this, um, fear of silence. Uh, n she spoke to the horror of the vacuum, that that fear of emptiness of the unknown and what might become known I would.

**Jill Stoddard:** Yeah.

I went to a, a writing retreat. It was actually March of 2020, right before the world blew up. And I was out in, I was living in California, in [00:38:00] Massachusetts at the time, um, and went to this writing retreat and unbeknownst to me, the mo the first morning that we were there, it was a silent breakfast.

and as soon as the, And I was with my best friend and as soon as they announced it, I had almost this like panic kind of response. Like, Oh God, how are we gonna do that? That's gonna be so awkward and so uncomfortable. And it was at first, but much more quickly than I would've predicted. . And Julie, my best friend that I was with, she and I talked about this after, you know, we both really as people who have never been in, you know, we are not like retreat going type people.

So we had never had an experience like this before and we were surprised at how quickly we settled in and how pleasant it became. And it shifted our experience of the writing a little bit later in the day. You know, we were just starting our day from this much [00:39:00] more grounded. Kind of peaceful, like almost introspective place.

It was really powerful and it, it made me think maybe I should do an actual silent retreat for a couple days, and if I have not, but I, you know, I have friends who have done it and just, you know, they, they talk about how incredibly powerful those experiences are.

**Justin Zorn:** I love that, Jill. I love how you described how, you know, it didn't take that long to get over the discomfort, you know? And going into it, it's like, Oh my God, what's that gonna be like? But then once you sit with it for a little while, it's like, all right, what's on the other side of that awkwardness?

What's on the other side of that discomfort? And often it's more feeling of connection. Often it's more feeling. Clarity. We look in the book at how Paths this great mystic teacher who is also this phenomenal mathematician and, and and, uh, [00:40:00] explorer of the cosmos basically and astronomy 2,500 years ago. He required his inner circle of student.

Who wanted to be philosophers in ancient Greece. He required that inner circle of students to spend five years in silence, five years not talking if they wanted to study with him. So we look in the book and it's like, what is five years in silence due to the architecture of the mind? Sometimes it's like, what is five minutes in silence do to the architecture of the mind, you know?

And that's probably a little more relevant for most of our lives these days. But like looking at this question of like, what is on the other side, You know, it's more. Of the work of knowing ourselves, it's more the work of awareness. What is really going on in a given situation? What's really happening in the dynamic of a couple or a mother and child, [00:41:00] or a therapist and and a client.

You know what, what's really at play? What are the energies really there? And the silence is often necess. To clarify what's really going on, and once there's an awareness of what's going on, we can find a little bit more order and equilibrium in our lives.

**Jill Stoddard:** Yeah. Well, it's

interesting you say there's often a sense, a greater sense of connection. because even in this room filled with hundreds of people eating breakfast in silence, not talking to each other, not getting to know one another, that was definitely something I felt, I felt more

deeply connected to this room of strangers, and I wasn't really sure why other than we were all having this similar experience.

That was probably a little bit d.

**Leigh Marz:** Mm-hmm.

**Jill Stoddard:** For all of us, you know, sort of like a shared, painful experience almost. But, but the way you're describing it, there's, there's more depth

that's there. And I certainly think in therapy, you know, this is something 20 [00:42:00] plus years in, I'm still constantly working on. I talk too much and I know it, and I have to really remind myself like, just shut.

Up stop trying to fill these moments. And often when I'm able to do that, that is really when the most, um, I don't know, when there's a greater connection with the client or when the more important stuff tends to then come to light. And it's, it's hard to do that. And I, I think to, um, the quote, Have you seen the movie Pulp Fiction?

**Leigh Marz:** Yes,

**Justin Zorn:** there we

**Jill Stoddard:** So there's a moment where, um, Mia Wallace and Vincent Vega are, you know, they're out, they do their twist contest and they eat their burgers and their shakes, and she asks him, um, Do you, do you listen or do you wait to speak? And he said, I wait to speak, but I'm trying to listen. And I just [00:43:00] love that moment.

And I think if we could all. Listen and get curious and use silences to do that, that there would be more depth to those interactions that we have with one another.

**Leigh Marz:** Oh, absolutely. I love that you're, um, pointing us towards that, that place of shared silence is really one of the things we were most excited to bring in with this book. We have a chapter, or actually a whole. Part of the book Devoted to Quiet Together, because we find that silence is magnified when it's shared, and it does offer this connection that you're talking about in part.

I suspect cuz we're in this space of wholeness without all these divisions. Words are beautiful. We love them and we use a lot of them as we already confessed, but they're, they divide things, they categorize and they make, you know, to do a certain [00:44:00] magic to the world. And silence offers us the space of, of wholeness, which we so appreciate.

In fact, we, , turn to, Japanese principle of ma ma is how it's transliterated. The conge character is gait and sun put together and it's that an image of the gold light pouring through the slats of a temple gate. It's this principle that feels to

me. Silence in action or silence operationalized throughout a culture where in the aesthetics there's this emphasis on the empty space, the silence, the nothingness, if you will, or the pure potentiality as we like to.

Refer to it, there's this emphasis on that as well as say, in Iki Bonna, flower arrangement, the branches and the pedals. So it's really, there's a wholeness there. You're taking in the wholeness of that piece of [00:45:00] artwork, that beautiful arrangement, and then Japanese scrolls, the empty spaces, just as important as those brush strokes.

And in conversation you'll hear a different pacing, a different rhythm, and more space. When our, our friend in, uh, who's interviewed in the book, a colleague of mine faithful or goes to Japan. She has to slower her northeastern self down a little bit, , uh, to actually listen when she asks. How are you? Those students will take the time to check in. and answer, ask, you know, ask that question to themselves and then answer wholeheartedly. There's a pacing that she has to kind of slow down. So this ma is one of those principles that we bring in to, you know, where can we bring in more ma to say our, our therapy practice, our, our work in the world, Whatever that looks like.

Our conversations are day. Where can we invite in more? [00:46:00]

Have more of a whole, a whole sense of a day instead of just the content and the agenda and the meetings and the

words.

**Jill Stoddard:** that. I love that. And that's one of the things that you talk about. So in the. I think it's part five. The second half of the book is really kind of the part that is really the field guide to finding silence, where you really walk readers through several ideas for building more quiet into their lives.

And then you even very kindly catalog them at the very end of the book with page numbers and everything. There's right, there's a whole section that's like 33 ways to

**Leigh Marz:** Yeah,

**Jill Stoddard:** Um, which I love that because this is a, you know, it's a book I've read that will now sit on my shelf, but when I don't remember, I need a refresher six months from now.

How nice that I can just turn to the back and here are 33 examples of things that I can do. So of course we could never possibly go through 33 examples in a podcast interview, so people will have to buy the book so they can get all that that juicy practice [00:47:00] in. But I was hoping you guys would be willing to share, um, you know, maybe two or three each that, that you, that are either your favorite in your own personal life or that you have gotten feedback from your audiences are the most helpful for them. Like, let's help our, our listeners so that they can practice finding these moments of silence.

**Justin Zorn:** Sure. You know, and the way we walk through the 33 ways, like some of them, they start with what we call the healthy successor to the smoke break. It's like back when people used to smoke cigarettes. Thankfully people are, most people aren't smoking as many cigarettes or smoking cigarettes these days. But like people used to have these moments in their day when they could step away from work.

and just connect to the rays of the sun and breathe. That was a very unhealthy way of doing that, of course. But it's like, what is the healthy successor to the smoke break? So the first set of practices we have are these [00:48:00] throughout your day. How do you find these pockets of silence? And then we go into deeper silences that we can find in our own lives, what we call rous silence.

So the once a year, once every five years where we could connect to the, some of the deepest silence that we've known. And then we get into shared practices and workplaces and families. You know, as you were talking about the connection between silence and connection to other people, silence isn't always about solitude.

The power of silence can be magnified when it's shared. And then toward the end, the practices we imagine. A society that honors silence. So we look at public policy and we look at ideas for how to reshape our culture so there's more appreciation of silence. Lee, do you wanna go into some individual first that I.

**Leigh Marz:** sure. Um, thank you for this question too about what's really been [00:49:00] resonating. I think since we mentioned ma in here, the idea of as an individual, really thinking about where you can weave in ma into your day. So we spoke with a man who. Aaron Mania, who's in um, Singapore and had worked, works in Formula One, one of the loudest, or used to work in Formula One, One of the loudest of all worldly events, , but is also this poet and thoughtful, just beautiful human.

We spoke with him how he brings quiet into his day, even when he is planning this huge event. And so he really taught us about transitions, bringing the MA to transition. So even. Opening a new document, he might just pause and take a breath or transitioning from one room to the other. He may just, just take a beat at that door knob as he opens the door, crosses the threshold, or just the way he even just pauses [00:50:00] to drink some water with such mindfulness.

Right? With just bringing in that ma. Finding those places of transitions, I think is one of those things, maybe even to think of our commutes a little differently as maybe a moment of quiet instead of like, uh, you know, racing. So that's one that comes to my mind

**Jill Stoddard:** I, I love those examples because I think what, what often happens in a very noisy. World is people think, okay, yeah, the okay Lee, those are great suggestions, but how am I gonna have any time to find this quiet in my life? And these suggestions you're giving are things that you can build in to the day that you're already having. Like you don't have to go away for a week long silent retreat.

**Leigh Marz:** Yes,

**Jill Stoddard:** during during a time of transition,

**Leigh Marz:** absolutely this, this book is not for people who wanna run off on retreat for months at a time. And we love that when that can happen, but it's really for people like ourselves who are [00:51:00] living a full. Very vibrant. Um, in the case, you know, full of kids, we all, we have kids and Justin has two year old twins and a six year old daughter.

I have a teenager. These are full times, full consulting practices, um, full community involvement, all those things. So how do we weave silence into those moments? And so another one that is like, yes, it doesn't need to be added to your to-do list, those of you listening is just the little gifts of silence.

Basically when you get plan, your plans get waylaid, so you're in a long line. Your, um, you know, podcast streaming just suddenly stops , or your phone breaks or whatever. How can you embrace that moment as an unstructured moment for quiet instead of trying to cram in more stuff?

**Jill Stoddard:** And I think to notice the moment that happens, the discomfort that will likely arise and

that desire to fill, [00:52:00] Oh, oh, my podcast just turned off. I have to immediately turn something else on. I couldn't possibly drive my car with no noise. And to right to

notice that kind of auto autopilot reaction. And can you sit through that and look at that as an opportunity to, to get the benefits of silence?

**Justin Zorn:** I love that you said that. Notice, cuz you know, at one point in the book, we, we really distill this to its essence, like what we're recommending and it's really comes down to notice noise, tune into silence, appreciate silence, you know, rather than just reaching for the podcast to restart it. You know, I mean, we're obviously fans of podcasts, , but, But like the need to, Yeah, the need to.

To constantly fill the space. Like, can we also appreciate these moments of silence? You know, can we pay attention to all these forms of noise, auditory, informational, internal, that are arising and study them? And then can we [00:53:00] perceive these small pockets of peace that live in between? And even if these little pockets of silence are only five seconds, How deeply can we go into those five seconds?

Like how much can we connect to the quality of silence rather than the quantity? And then we look in the book at how can we sometimes cultivate spaces of what we call profound silence. Like we sometimes even call raps silence, you know? And like what you were saying before, like, um, Jill, when you first picked up the book, you were saying like, I don't know if I've ever experienced this profound silence, and sometimes it's a matter of consciously cultivating it.

So we do go into practices in the book for really profound silence. And again, that doesn't need to be a long silent retreat. We actually don't get into that so much. We do talk about some ways to have a short DIY retreat, silent retreat at home. But you know, we don't tell [00:54:00] people go run off to a monastery for a week or a month.

You know, we do have a practice that we call take your to-do list for hike. And that was inspired by someone I mentioned before, the acoustic ecologist, Gordon Hempton, who had a rule that whenever his to-do list would get too long, he would take it to the most remote place he could get to this temperate rainforest in Washington state.

That was a few hours from his home in Seattle. And he'd get there and then he would tune into the silence and then he would take out his to-do. In this place of

such pristine silence. He told us that he was recently able to cross off five months worth of professional commitments from his list. So he took a day off and was able to cross off five months of work that he thought he needed to do because from the point of his home office and his computer, everything in that list looked super [00:55:00] important.

But from the vantage point of. Deep immersion and silence in nature. He could connect more to what really mattered to him. And in that place, he realized he didn't need to be so caught up in the busy.

**Jill Stoddard:** I love that. Yeah. And that we talk a lot on this podcast about acceptance and commitment therapy, which includes, uh, a present moment awareness aspect to it, but most importantly is all about connection to values and really living, uh, a deeply values driven life. And, you know, I think what you're saying is, is making me so the, the last place I wanted to talk about, which we already touched on a little bit, but is thinking about the role of this. Therapy and, and what made me think of the question was in reading about Jarvis j the inmate at

San Quentin that you talk about, which was the other favorite part for me of

**Leigh Marz:** Oh yeah.

**Jill Stoddard:** Right. I mean, just such a tr tragic, but, but I don't know, inspiring story at the same time. And, [00:56:00] and you know, he's known to meditate and teach meditation and, um, and you know, so I think at the very least, therapists want to get quiet so they can hear.

Right. And silence allows that space, like I said. But like for observation, reflection, curiosity, listening, Um, but I'm wondering if, I know you aren't therapists, but if anything comes to mind in terms of like, is there a heal, a like specific way, like a healing way to use silence and psychotherapy? That goes beyond just that kind of like, observation, reflection, Like, is it, would it, could it potentially even be useful to teach clients

about silence and using silence and how they might connect to values through silence or, you know, quiet that internal noise.

Did, Does, do you have any thoughts about that?

**Leigh Marz:** Well, we do, in many ways, we're doing this in our own work, which is with, um, so for example, [00:57:00] uh, working with, um, scientists

who are trying to solve complex issues around pollutants in our environment, in our products. And the, um, there's a way in which we can come at these issues. You know, there's a lot of knowledge in the room generally speaking about these issues.

Lot of studies, lot of, they could do lots of PowerPoints, they could do a lot of data, but that kind of keeps us in conventional understanding about the problem. And I think something similar can happen. If we're talking, we're sort of replaying the story. About ourselves, to ourselves, and now to our therapist.

You know, we're just in a sense just carving that groove deeper, deeper, deeper still. So we take folks out to quiet spaces and we just sort of. Change it up a little bit, do different things. Or maybe we're talking about the content, but we're also inviting in a lot of open space so that some new [00:58:00] novel connection could be made around this issue.

Maybe the, that what spiritual religious perspective, the we small voice can be heard instead of the, the dominant voices of, of. Inside. So I'm, we're doing something similar with organizations and trying to create a little bit more space for something new to come through because, um, those, it's, sometimes it's the voices inside us or inside even a group that are marginalized, that are quieter, that really carry the answers. So I'm, yeah, so that's, that's what comes to my mind as you point out. This is not our expertise, but with the value of. What is offered so many different types of groups and people and ourselves to get a little quiet so we can hear different voices, quiet voices, even sense things that maybe don't feel verbal at all.

That's just of the, it's, we just feel like it's an imperative. Um, right now at this time.[00:59:00]

**Justin Zorn:** Yeah. One of the, one of the questions we explore in the book, you know, is what if you could take a break from one of life's most basic responsibilities, Having to think of what to say, you know, how can we rest the mental reflexes that habitually protect our reputation and promote our point of view? You know, and, and one thing I find.

in, you know, why people seek therapy of various sorts, you know, whether it's it's formal therapy or, or different healing modalities In our world these days, it's a feeling of overwhelm, not just with the sound and stimulus of the world, but the sound and stimulus and the, the kind of dialogue and entertainment that we're expected to keep.

Having to keep up appearances on social media and in our work. And you know, there's something about the healing encounter in silence that can especially I think, [01:00:00] be really powerful in therapy. You know, there's something about being able to hold space with another person without the expectations of needing to prove our worthiness through saying the right thing, you know, or looking clever or looking.

Like you have some certain virtue, like the, the joy of just being so, you know, I mean it's, it's um, it's of course, you know, in, in therapy a person is, is paid, compensated, you know, therapist for the expertise that they would bring in different healing modalities. But one thing I find is, is just presence, just holding the space for another person can often be what provides the most.

Value to a person. It's like this question like, where does healing come from? One of the big propositions we make in this book is that it comes through the silence.

**Jill Stoddard:** Well, I think that is a brilliant [01:01:00] place for us to wrap up, and I know I am going to try. Bring more silence into my own life, both in my, in the therapy room and in my life as well. Thank you both of you so much for being here and for the great book. , again, it's called Golden, The Power of Silence and a World of Noise.

if people want to learn more about you, about the book, about what you do, where can they find.

**Leigh Marz:** Yeah, they can find us at ASTREA Strategies. That's a S T R E A strategies.com. That's our shared website consultancy. There's a lot of, uh, ways to contact us as well as a lot of different, um, Interviews and reviews and podcasts and stuff if you wanna learn more. And, uh, we're on LinkedIn as well for people who, who enjoy that.

And the book can be found really anywhere you find books. And if you're an auditory person, we like to highly recommend the auto, the audible book Read By Apprentice on Yemi, [01:02:00] who just brought so much quiet and magic to his reading of our book. So,

**Jill Stoddard:** that's lovely. Well, we will link to all of those in our show notes, and thank you again so much for being here.

**Leigh Marz:** Thank you, Jill.

**Justin Zorn:** Thank you, Jill.

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