

Ep #275: Stillness as Medicine: How Quiet Moments Promote Healing



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With Your Host

Susi Hately

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Male Announcer: You're listening to *From Pain to Possibility* with Susi Hately. You will hear Susi's best ideas on how to reduce or even eradicate your pain and learn how to listen to your body when it whispers so you don't have to hear it scream. And now here's your host, Susi Hately.

Welcome and welcome back. I'm so glad that you're here because today I'm digging into the medicine of stillness and quiet. Digging into how stillness and quiet can be so effective for our healing journeys and truly enable some transformative change and evolution.

If you've been following me in any form, whether it's here or on social or through my email, you know I'm someone who has seen and experienced just how possible healing is. I mean, this is almost 30 years I've been helping people reduce and eradicate physical pain. I've seen over and over and over again how tissue can change, and it's not by some magical process.

Rather, it comes from deliberate and specific action. And one of those actions is coming into, leaning into these spaces of quiet moments. Now, by quiet moments, I mean those deliberately restful pauses that we can take in our day or in our week to pause, to be still. And by doing so, connecting within.

It's different than sleep, though they may include short naps, but really what I'm referring to is those moments of stillness where we can connect, perhaps reflect, come into our body, allowing our right side, creative side of our brain to allow the executive function of our left brain to settle and to wind down a little. And overall, when that happens, so much positive change can occur.

Now I realize that's super easy for me to say, and I also know cognitively and from lived experience just how difficult it can be. So often it can be much easier just to keep going, shoving those feelings aside because recognizing that restless hum of being wired, gosh, it can be such a disconcerting state to feel, can't it? Especially, especially since that fight or

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flight sympathetic drive of our nervous system can be such a common cultural norm in many spheres of life and living.

And yet I know just how impactful these quiet moments can be. So today I want to share a summary of these key ways that stillness can be helpful, that these quiet moments can support our healing process in reducing and eradicating physical pain.

I find sometimes when I can explain things logically, when I can explain things that even though in the yoga world we've known for years and years, like a long time, ancient practices that have been shown to benefit people. But when we can express it from a Western scientific perspective, that can just help that left side of our brain logically understand it. And that can be the gentle nudge toward starting a practice, however small.

Once I share some of the science, I'll follow up with some of the ways that I integrate stillness and quiet moments into my day or week through a variety of different means.

So let's begin with some of the science. So what we know for sure is that these still and quiet moments can reduce cortisol levels. And we know that cortisol, being a stress hormone, when we can lower those levels, there's a correlation to reduced stress and anxiety. And not surprisingly, then these stillness and quiet moments can restore brain function. It can help reset brain activity. It can reduce mental fatigue, support cognitive performance and emotional stability.

And then there's the default mode network, the DMN, and I have an episode I'm working on that's going to dig into more of the default mode network. But this one, we're just going to go at a top level here, which is it is active during restful states and crucial for introspection. When we're in these still and quiet moments, we allow for this network to function more effectively. And when it's functioning more effectively, the byproduct is that we can have better problem solving abilities and creativity.

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So then it's not surprising that when we have quieter and stiller moments, there's a reduction of overstimulation. And this can improve focus, concentration, and better processing of information.

Cardiovascularly, we've seen lower blood pressure, right? That can simply come from the shift of a sympathetic nervous system drive to a more enhanced parasympathetic drive, right? Our fight or flight response settles out, rest and digest becomes more online.

Improved heart rate variability. This reflects in better cardiovascular health, and it's correlated to periods of relaxation and quiet. So it makes sense that when we're looking at cognitive benefits, we see more improved attention and focus. There's less cognitive overload. This can lead to enhanced memory, better memory consolidation and recall, and not surprisingly, better emotional regulation.

And simply because we're taking time with ourselves, we can have a deeper understanding of our emotions and emotional states. And being kind of more inside of ourselves, there's less distraction of that constant noise that's outside of ourselves. We can find that eye of the storm, so to speak, and this can stimulate creative thinking.

We know that when we're in this space, we can reduce inflammation markers. We can bolster the immune system, making ourselves more resilient to illness. So really powerful stuff, this idea of coming into quieter, more still spaces. And as I mentioned at the top of this episode, it requires deliberateness.

This is often not something that just naturally evolves, even though it's a natural state, ebb and flow, pause and action, yin and yang. And yet it's difficult to do, particularly in what is often considered to be a 24/7 always on culture. So there is a deliberateness in terms of incorporating these moments of rest, these moments of quiet and stillness into our day to day or week to week. The impact can be profound.

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So with that, let's consider some of the ways that I incorporate these. And some of these are going to be very obvious and like duh moments as you listen, and then there might be one or two that will be interesting for you as being new or novel.

So the first one, which has been a practice for me for many, many, many, many years, is the combined practice of my yoga asana, yoga nidra, and pranayama. So my yoga practice, my asana practice. What I love about these moments is I have a very deliberate practice on my mat.

So my mat becomes a very sacred space, whether that mat is here in my small studio or whether it's in my bedroom or in the living room when my kids aren't around. But it's a very, very deliberate space where I can move deliberately, specifically tuning into the way my body moves, noticing where my compensation patterns are, where my tension holding patterns are, and being the key word is exploratory and curious. Not trying to fix anything per se, but allowing myself to settle into my system.

My yoga nidra practice, where I get to sit or lay down, is usually a guided practice of being able to move through the various koshic layers of the body, breath, mental, emotional, and spiritual states. It's a sort of all-in-one holistic way of coming into and sensing into my state of being, body, and breath.

And my pranayama practice, so this starts off with basic breathing. And then from basic breathing, I can allow myself to settle into a quieter, more deeper and connected space where there is a distinction of subtle energy flow. So that's the first one. Very deliberate and scheduled practices of yoga, yoga asana, yoga nidra, and pranayama.

The second is utilizing functional music. And a piece of functional music that I found many, many, many moons ago is called Liquid Mind. And honestly, this was back in the day of CDs, and I was getting CDs to use in my group classes as a yoga teacher, and I was taken by the cover of Liquid Mind 7, which is called Reflections. And when I put that CD on for my

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group, no matter what time of day I taught, the whole group would just go vroom, and everyone would just settle.

And there was a period of time in my career where I was traveling a lot. And sometimes that restlessness that can come with a lot of travel, I'd be sitting in the plane and like humming. I couldn't necessarily nap, meditation was sort of not really in the cards, but when I utilized the Liquid Mind Reflections, everything would settle. My whole system would downregulate.

And after experiencing one of those, I then bought all of them. I've shared those with different clients, and a lot of them actually use them with their own kids, kids who are having trouble falling asleep or have quite a bit of anxiety. And they report back that when the kids put on headphones and listen, things just settle, settle, settle, settle.

I remember actually doing that with my eight-year-old nephew at the time, who had a lot of trouble falling asleep. And he put on a headset, played around with the Reflections, and he was asleep in no time. So again, that's Liquid Mind.

Sometimes I'll play that at the later part of the day as we finish up the meal time, the dinner time, and move in towards an evening routine. If there is a particular sort of restlessness in our family's air, so to speak, I will plug that one in and allow for it to work its magic.

Then not related to yoga or a breathing practice, coloring is a great go-to, particularly with my kids. So I have a whole series of coloring books, and we pull out the pencils and we'll color to our heart's content. So it's a lovely practice for connecting with my kids in a quieter way, coloring.

In addition to these practices of yoga, yoga nidra, pranayama, Liquid Mind, coloring, I have a very specific and deliberate practice that is used throughout the day, every single day. And it's how I manage my tech and ultimately how my husband and I manage tech as a whole family. This is really powerful and important.

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So the first thing that I do is with my phone, I have most all notifications turned off. I have one set of notifications around my kids and another set of notifications around my work team. And that is it. So two, that's it. All other notifications are turned off. The other thing I do is I only have the most important apps on the home screen of my iPhone and all other apps are on the non home screen. So when I lift up my phone, I have the apps that I use.

So I've usually been pretty good about not being distracted and going over into social, but putting the apps over into not the home screen, so just in the back screen, the last screen, putting them over there just makes it that much easier to allow my concentration to be where my most important work or tasks are. So I find that to be really helpful. It just makes my home screen on my phone really not cluttered at all so that when I pick it up, it's for a purpose and I'm directing my concentration and my attention to those very specific purposes.

Along with that, in our family, we created a new principle. It's not so much a rule or a law, but it's a principle that we all really recognize as being really important. And that is, we don't turn our phones or devices on when we're on the main floor to the point where for the most part, the devices don't even live on the main floor.

Now I don't live in a big house whatsoever. It's a main floor, a basement, and then a second floor. And so our devices live outside of the main floor typically. They might be there, but generally speaking we move them away from that space and certainly don't turn them on.

Now here's a big reasoning for why I did this. I was reading some interesting research about how someone feels when they're engaging in a conversation with another person. Now, not surprisingly, when the person is on their phone, for example, and there's a conversation happening, the other person feels very disconnected. Well, that's a duh, right? That's an obvious one.

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But even if the phone was down with the screen side down and it's beside a person, just the phone being there suggests to the other person that they are less important and that presence isn't specifically resting on them. So that's one reason why I started to simply move the device away from the main floor, because then the energy of it, or even the site of it, isn't in our cognitive space.

And the difference that that made in our ability to connect in a deliberate way was in and of itself, quieting and stilling. So we had a larger sense of stillness and quietness on the main level of our house. I can't tell you how much that changed the general relationships that I had with my kids.

Now, I already have pretty great relationships with my kids, and this just changed it and leveled it up like nobody's business. And what's super fun is this morning, for example, there was an issue that my husband Stu was having. And guess what? He was on his phone on the main level just before the kids were being taken off to go to camp, and one of them said, "Hey, dad, no devices on the main level."

And we had a good chuckle. We don't make a big deal, we just make a good chuckle. And then he turned it off, off he went, he goes, I need to sort this out, and then off he went. And we all just sort of had a reminder of what this was for and what this was about. It's something that can be really powerful in terms of how you direct your attention, where you direct your attention to, how that changes concentration and focus and overall presence. And to me, around my family is the ultimate medicine of stillness and quiet.

So those are a few ways that I integrate stillness and quiet into my world and some of the science around why practices and moments of stillness and quiet can be so incredibly helpful.

Now, if you would like my guidance on integrating more of these practices of yoga nidra and breath and therapeutic practices of yoga so that you can create your own deliberate practices of quiet and of stillness and of rest

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and feel the result that can come from that, you'll probably love my upcoming immersion, connecting to you and integrating these practices of stillness, of quiet, of rest.

You can learn more about that over at functionalsynergy.com/immersion. I'd love to see you there. Have a great practice. Have a great time exploring some of these ideas and we will see you next time.