

The Deafening Noise We Pretend to Ignore

By: Max Strom

"I'm trying to hear you God, but this person next to me is shouting into her cellphone!"

Part of our yoga practice is expanding our awareness and refining our senses with focus on what is harmonious and healing. Sound plays an important part in this, as it so profoundly impacts our nervous system. (Think about how a blaring jack hammer feels in your body as you walk by a construction site.)

Recently I was sitting at a sidewalk café, talking with a friend, but became very distracted by the cars and buses roaring by at 30 miles an hour only about 20 feet away from us. My friend was trying to explain something to me but two different people at tables nearby were almost shouting into their cellphones. Meanwhile, some pounding disco music was crackling through speakers above us and at the same time, a completely different song from the radio back in the kitchen could be heard as well. I had to stop and take notice. In this nation, so dedicated to external beauty to the point of dysfunction, so completely absorbed in selling beauty at whatever cost, there seems to be no consciousness whatsoever of the beauty of sound, music, and especially peace and quiet. No wonder our nervous systems are so tightly wound. Any animal in the world would have run away from the noise we were expected to not even notice at this restaurant setting. Now then... just add a couple of shots of caffeine and a good traffic jam to that and what do you get? Tight jaws, grinding teeth at night, insomnia, headaches, and occasionally even road rage.

In the major cities, these are symptoms yoga teachers see every day in class.

So, to help to bring harmony into our lives, meaning first into our very selves, sound and noise must be considered an important facet. Think of sound as food, as nutrition. They say, "You are what you eat." Perhaps it would help us to carefully choose our surroundings and select beautiful sounds and music over noise. If we feed ourselves noise on a regular basis until we don't even recognize it as noise, how can we expect to quiet the mind? Our practice in the yoga room is powerful, but when we walk out of the room our practice doesn't have to stop. It manifests in the choices we make, from our relationships, to what we play on the radio, to putting the cell phone away when we are around other people. In considering how our actions and sounds we produce will impact other people's nervous systems. The Buddhists call this being Mindful, and our mothers called it simply being polite and thoughtful. Let's see if we can quiet down our world which we've made our homes in. The quieter we become, the more likely we can hear the voice of wisdom within.

Namaste