

Pockets of Pleasure Episode 4

Hello and welcome to episode 4 of Pockets of pleasure.

Last week we dug into the crucial importance of self compassion and discovered an easy little technique for breaking through negative self talk.

I first learned about the power of the simple phrase 'I am enough' when I took a class by Marisa Peer. The incredible, life changing effects that she witnessed through the use of this phrase were nothing short of miraculous.

I'm all about quick and simple solutions that pack a punch that seem well above their weight, I Am Enough certainly fits into that category in my experience. I'll pop a video of Marisa discussing depression in the show notes if you want to explore her teachings further.

Ok so this week I want to talk to you about one of my favourite sensory topics: sound.

Funnily enough, this week, as I was planning this episode, we had a very noisy hurricane hit, followed by an icy blast that brought a few inches of snow with it. The contrast in the soundscape in those couple of days was quite incredible. And the timing was pretty perfect.

There's nothing quite like the sound of the world on the morning after a heavy overnight snowfall.

Everything is muffled. It's as though the world has been covered in acoustic foam. If I'd thought about it I would've gone outside to record this podcast, just to see how it compared - maybe I'll give it a go next time.

I find the sense of peace that comes with heavy snowfall (if you're safely tucked away in the dry warmth of home that is!) is like nothing else. It feels as though, just for a while, the world stops and takes a slow, deep inhale.

That short period of time, before the gritters get to work, and the hustle and bustle returns, feels almost sacred to me.

This time, because of the theme of this week's podcast, it really struck me how unusual it is to experience that level of quietness.

During the first lockdown there was an extended period of relief from traffic noise which was blissful, but it wasn't quiet - as it was springtime the birds seemed to make the most of the quiet and sang with more gusto than usual. I'm fortunate to live next to a small wooded area that leads down to a beck, and managed to record some of this birdsong, using it to create a woodland meditation sound journey (I'll play a snippet for you shortly).

By contrast, when the snow falls, there's neither traffic noise nor bird song. It feels as though you're contained within a cloistered environment. It's restful but it can also feel a little disconcerting.

It's a type of silence that we're rarely exposed to, here in England at least.

Whilst it does feel renewing and sacred, it's not a soundscape that I'd like to exist within for long I don't think.

Silence is a curious state - we can find it awkward in conversation and try to fill in any gaps, but in coaching, allowing space for silence is one of the most powerful tools at our disposal. It's often where the most profound breakthroughs occur.

Jonathon Goldman, who I was fortunate to learn sound healing from, says that 'silence is really the place that gives sound the opportunity to create healing.'

In music, the quiet spaces are as much a part of the piece as the sounds of the notes, if the gaps were all filled, we wouldn't have the same experience. Often a piece of music becomes more powerful through the anticipation that builds during a few beats of silence. During a live concert you can feel the energy of the crowd building as they wait for the musicians to explode back into action. Holding an audience rapt in the pause, the musician casts a powerful spell that the crowd itches to break. The energy from the sense of release that comes in that moment, if it could be bottled, would probably power a city for days!

Silence forces us to go within, to experience ourselves in our fullness, it gives us nowhere to hide from ourselves. It's no wonder that so many of us reach for the tv or radio to break the discomfort of silence when we find ourselves alone with nothing but our own thoughts.

Can we find pleasure in silence? I think it depends on what surrounds the silence. If your ears have felt assaulted by sirens, dogs yapping, the incessant chatter of children, the kettle whistling, the washing machine at the height of its spin cycle, then that moment of silent respite, when it falls, can be utterly blissful. But if silence becomes the default soundscape of your day, I imagine it could become extremely distressing.

I don't think we're built for long term silence. We were created in rhythm and from the moment of our conception we've existed in a world of rhythm. The beat of our mother's heart was the soundtrack to our first months of existence, we will have felt the vibrations as much as we heard them.

Silence often means trouble - as a parent, you quickly learn that, when your child suddenly goes quiet, they're usually up to no good - now is not the time to revel in the silence but to investigate its cause! In nature, silence often precedes a shift in the weather, when the birds stop singing before a storm, it creates an eerie sense of foreboding.

Nature is not quiet. I think this is why silence can feel so uncomfortable to us. But Unfortunately our modern lives are unnaturally noisy, leaving our nerves frazzled and our ears ringing.

We can't rely on the rare snow day to give our ears a rest, so we must find ways to build moments of quiet into our days.

Periods of quiet reflection might feel like an impossible luxury, but if you can make space for even just a few a week, you'll notice a reduction in your mental clutter and your stress levels. This might look like something as simple as enjoying a cup of tea without having the tv or radio playing and stashing your phone away in a drawer for those few minutes. Your brain will thank you for giving it a break from processing all those extraneous sounds. If needs be, with sound reducing headphones, ear plugs and ear defenders you can take the silence to a deeper level. Or you can just hope for a snow day!

We'll have a short break for that snippet of the woodland meditation i promised you and then, when we come back we'll leave silence behind and explore the types of sounds that bring you joy.

MUSIC

Welcome back, I hope you enjoyed that little wander into the woods.

If I asked you what sounds bring you joy? What would you say?

Would it be things like birdsong, the rain falling, a cat purring, the roar of a V12 engine, a certain song?

Would you include things like the striking of a match, the sizzle of a sausage, a thirsty plant

soaking up water, a teaspoon breaking the seal on a new jar of coffee, your fingers running through your hair, the snap of a piece of chocolate?

We live in the ultimate surround sound system, but how many sounds do you really notice as you go through the day?

As I write this, I can hear my son tapping away on his keyboard, the wind howling around the house, my feet rubbing together, the gurgle of my stomach, the central heating boiler, and the creaking of my neck. Not exactly the most exciting sounds, but it's half past midnight so a quiet time of the day where those subtle noises can be heard. I wouldn't call any of those pleasurable sounds, but they go to show how noisy even the quiet is.

My favourite sounds usually come from the kitchen. The slurp of a spoon scooping out jelly, the boing of water hitting a metal bowl, the pop of a cork being pulled out of a bottle, the schhhuchh of cold water hitting a hot pan. These are all as much music to my ears as my favourite songs, and definitely fit into the pockets of pleasure category - I think sometimes these sounds can be more pleasurable in a way than music because they're fleeting, not necessarily easily repeated sounds that can catch you unawares, giving you a little frisson of unexpected delight.

Music is wonderful and plays an enormous part in my life, it's not the only type of sound that can bring us pleasure.

How often do you notice or look for the unorchestrated sounds of your days? The little sparkles of everyday magic which have a private audience of one, the pleasing noises that will never appear on a greatest hits album!

What do the sounds that please your ears say about you? If you created a sound library of your day or week, what stories would it tell without using any words? Could a stranger know something of who you are, just from your selection of sounds? What would be more telling - the sounds you love or the sounds you loathe? Something to ponder perhaps?

What about your voice? How much do you use this powerful instrument that's always with you? Do you shy away from singing or do you love to belt out a cracking tune at the top of your voice?

Do you allow sounds of pleasure to escape or do you hold them in?

Do you carry any shame around the sounds you make?

How do you use music? Is it a background noise to your work? Is it a mood enhancer or a memory jogger? Do you use it to uplift you or lull you to sleep?

So many questions! But it's in the search for answers to questions like this that we come to know and understand ourselves better. As I mentioned last week, self knowledge is the first branch of my coaching methodology - the tree of self transformation - the search for pockets of pleasure is a part of this first branch. It's an enjoyable, daily treasure hunt to uncover who you are and what makes you tick. It's not just an exercise in self indulgence, it's so much bigger than that! It's a mapping of your subtle self. I like to like of it as a treasure map that you can use to guide your decision making. But I digress!

Let's have a quick break before getting into this week's pocket challenge.

MUSIC

Welcome back.

Ok, for this week's pocket challenge I've got a couple of options for you..

Option 1 is to start a sound collection - you can do this in a journal (have fun trying to write the sounds you discover!) or you can record them on your phone.

Option 2 is to create a playlist for a mood you want to be able to experience quickly and fully. It could be calming, energising, encouraging, uplifting - whatever appeals. I've been doing this for years and have quite a few collections now, including an angry playlist that contains lots of loud, swearsy songs - it's a great way to quickly work rage out of my system!

Creating associations with certain songs can be a great way to shortcut things - for instance, when my eldest daughters were little, we played an Enya cassette to them at night to help them settle to sleep. They quickly associated Enya with bedtime and for many years, if we were away from home and forgot to bring the cassette, we knew we were in for a long night!

Now my younger 2 children associate Enya with Christmas because we always play her Winter album in December. For me it's Bing Crosby that says Christmas.

Another association my eldest children had was with Blondie - it was my favourite music to clean to, so if they ever heard me put on that album they'd rush in to ask me who was coming to visit

(you can make your own mind up about what that says about my housewifery tendencies...).

Have a think about where you might need a little help from music and get creating a playlist for it.

As you create more pockets of pleasure across the different senses, you're building up a bank of moments that can hold you in your own loving care - you're building trust in yourself - learning to believe that you have your own back - something many of us haven't truly been able to hold as fact for a very long time. So keep going! Your pleasure matters so much more than you might think, hopefully you're beginning to see that more and more with each passing week.

Well this was a much more difficult topic to talk about than I expected because there's just so much I could say about sound! So many of the notes (no pun intended) I made haven't even been touched on, so let's consider this an introduction, with more exploration to come in future episodes!

Next week I'm going to begin touching the surface of another of my favourite sensory topics - smell!

As always, I love to hear how you're getting on, you can find me on instagram @thesensorycoach or use the hashtag TSCPockets to share your experiences.

Don't forget the self compassion advent calendar is available on my website thesensorycoach.com via the shownotes for episode 3 - you don't even need to give me your email address to download them. I'll also be posting each day's quote in my instagram feed so do check it out.

Have a fabulous week exploring sound!