

"Golden is a guide to getting out of the shallows and into the depths."

—Rebecca Solnit, bestselling author of *Hope in the Dark*

THE POWER OF SILENCE  
IN A WORLD OF NOISE



Golden

JUSTIN ZORN & LEIGH MARZ

EXCLUSIVE SNEAK PEEK

## THIRTY-THREE WAYS TO FIND SILENCE

On the pages to come, you'll find quick summaries of some of the key practices and strategies that we've laid out in ***Golden: The Power of Silence in a World of Noise***. These ideas range from small personal ways of finding pockets of quiet time, all the way up to big shifts in our societies.

## EVERYDAY PRACTICES FOR INDIVIDUALS

### 01. Just Listen

Step into a quiet place. Turn your full attention to your hearing. No need to think about *what* you're hearing—just listen to the soundscape around you. If it's silent enough in your surroundings, see if you notice any sensation of an “inner sound,” like a vibration or ringing in your ears. Just listen, without labeling or judging. Remember how Pythagoras advised his students to “let your quiet mind listen and absorb the silence.” Recall how Duke University Medical School researchers found evidence that “trying to hear in silence activates the auditory cortex,” stimulating brain cell development. When you anchor your awareness in simply listening, *how do your thoughts and feelings shift?*

### 02. Little Gifts of Silence

The next time you face an unforeseen break in what you're doing or an interruption of the ordinary sound and stimuli of your day—say, the podcast you're enjoying unexpectedly stops streaming in your headphones or you're stuck in a ridiculously long line at the post office—*see if you can receive this gap as a gift.* Rather than getting frustrated, can you take a tiny vacation from having to fill the space? How deeply can you immerse yourself in an unanticipated moment of quiet?

### 03. What You're Already Doing—but Deeper

Throughout your day, whenever you remember, *take three breaths.* You're doing it anyway. But, as you take these three particular breaths, *pay close attention.* You can use these breaths as a “diagnostic” to sense where there's noise in your body and mind. And you can use these breaths as a way back to internal quiet. Can you find the silence between the in breath and the out breath, in the “swing” from one to the other? As you take your three breaths, can you tune your body and mind to this silence? See how even thirty seconds of conscious respiration can shift your emotions and perspective.

#### 04. Silence in Motion

While it's understandable to conflate silence with stillness, silence also lives *in motion*. As you walk, run, dance, swim, do yoga, or shoot hoops, can you bring the most *exquisite attention to your body in motion*? Experiment to see if you can find a “merger of action and awareness” where there's no more mental chatter. See if you can get so immersed in what you're physically doing that you have no excess attention to devote to self-conscious rumination. In a true state of physical flow, the mind is silent.

#### 05. Momentary Ma

Take a cue from the Japanese cultural value of *Ma*. Seek clarity and renewal in *the spaces in between*. In conversation, sense how the pauses in words and sentences contribute to the meaning of the exchange and the connection that's generated. As you go throughout your day, stop to pause in moments of transition. When you're opening a door, turning on the tap for some water, or turning on the lights, take a quiet conscious breath to mark the transition. By appreciating the silence and space in a micro-moment, we can *decompress time*.

#### 06. Do One Thing

Think of a daily “to-do” that you usually just speed through on the way to doing something else. See if you can—like Faith Fuller's simple, yet elegant, practice of making a pot of coffee—“Get out of the outcome and into the process.” Can you slow your daily activity down by just 10 percent? Can you bring a sense of appreciation, even ritual, to it? Experiment with turning an ordinary part of your daily grind into an opportunity for sensory clarity. Find internal silence through the simple pleasure of doing *just one thing*.

#### 07. Silence Within the Words

Read a book with your fullest attention—no phone nearby, no intermittent side conversation, no distracted thought about what you're going to do next. Make time for “deep reading” with the explicit intention of bringing silence to your mind. Some kinds of reading are especially conducive to this kind of quiet, like, for example, reading on airplanes or in remote cabins with no cell

signal. One of the best ways to engage in this kind of reading is through poetry. Place a favorite volume of poems by your bedside. Seed your dreamland by reading (and rereading) a poem before you drift into sleep. Notice how good writing—to quote Susan Sontag—“Leaves silence in its wake.”

#### 08. Quick “Hits” of Nature

While a rushing river or a flock of trilling birds might register as high decibel, these sounds of nature don’t make claims on our consciousness. They generate the felt experience of quiet. Seek to encounter nature in two simple ways every day to help put life in perspective: (1) connect with *something bigger than yourself*, like a towering tree or the stars in the night sky; (2) connect with *something smaller than yourself*, like a new blossom, a trail of ants, or a sparrow. Connecting to nature—big and small—helps us dislodge the noisy delusion that life is just the mental stuff of a human-centered existence.

#### 09. Sanctuaries in Space and Time

Think about all your responsibilities in life and the commitments on your schedule. What are the *pockets of time and space you can preserve* to be in silence? It can be a few moments alone in the washroom (no phones allowed) or luxuriating in the gap between your morning alarm and a snooze cycle. Perhaps it’s late night or early morning, when you can make time for stretching, bathing, journaling, sitting on a patio, lying on the floor, or finding some other relaxed and quiet way of being. Make space in the calendar. Keep the appointment with yourself. Honor it as though you were meeting an important colleague or a beloved friend.

#### 10. Make Friends with Noise

Sometimes the noise is inevitable. The Irish poet Pádraig Ó Tuama counsels us to say hello to what’s unwanted but inevitable in our lives. So, find ways to say hello to the noise. Investigate it. Notice your responses to it. *Is there anything helpful that the noise might be signaling for you?* Is there a need you’ve been neglecting? Is there a request to be made? Is there something you’re being called to accept or to let go?

## PRACTICES FOR FINDING DEEPER SILENCE

### 11. Take Your To-Do List for a Hike

Print out your to-do list and go to the most remote place in nature that you can reasonably access—like, say, a pond in a forest or a mountain overlook. When you get there, take an hour or more to center yourself and recalibrate your senses. When you feel as though your nerves have settled and you’ve absorbed some of the silence, take out your to-do list and *cross out everything that’s not really necessary*. Notice how some of the things you thought were important in your ordinary state of mind at home or at your office might not actually be important from this vantage point. As Gordon Hempton says, “The answers are in the silence.”

### 12. Take a Wordless Wednesday

*Try not speaking for a day.* Gandhi had a “day of silence” once a week. Beyond meditation and reflection, he sometimes read or even spent time with others. But he didn’t say a word. If the responsibilities of work or childcare or eldercare make a wordless day impossible, set aside just a few hours. The key to getting started is simple: Check in with the people around you who will be most affected. Tell them why a silent day is important to you. Describe your plan. See if they have any questions, and find agreement on the ground rules—like, for example, under what circumstances colleagues or loved ones should interrupt you. Ask for their full support (they might even ask to join you). Once you’ve prepared yourself, your environment, and those around you, *pay attention to what’s different for you when you’re not engaged in speech*. What comes into the foreground and what falls away? How might these observations inform your everyday life?

### 13. Go Floating in the Cloud of Unknowing

*Plan and prepare so you can enter profound quiet.* As *The Cloud of Unknowing* explains, it’s important to temporarily forget all the challenging circumstances of life in order to engage in the deepest prayer or contemplation. But *how* do we let go? Reserve a few hours or a full day to be in silent contemplation—in nature or somewhere peaceful by yourself. As a preparation, do what you can to *set the stage for inner quiet*. Clear off some genuinely important items from the to-do list. If you know you’re not going

to be able to let go into the space of internal silence because you haven't sent that email, made that phone call, taken out the trash, or cleaned the fridge, then just do it. In the time immediately before you enter your period of silence, do what you need to prepare your body and mind—like exercising or journaling. No need to be too ambitious here. Just see what you can do to clear away some of the simple contributors to internal noise. This will make it easier to *go floating*.

#### 14. Into the Deep

*Create a DIY silent retreat.* It doesn't need to be lengthy or pricey or far from home to be substantive. You can organize it for yourself and "create the container" according to your own circumstances. For example, rearrange the furniture in your room. Or pet sit for a neighbor. Or swap apartments with a friend. Arranging a new setting or ambience can enable a psychological shift. While a simple DIY retreat might not be as immersive as something long and remote, even a short time in silence can shift your perspective and amplify your clarity.

#### 15. Fuzzy Puppies Licking Your Face

*Consider what it means to identify and address your deepest sources of internal noise.* The Iraq War veteran and PTSD survivor Jon Lubecky says, "The deeper the trauma, the louder the internal noise." He adds that, unlike for auditory silence, there's no "sensory deprivation tank" for finding internal silence. *We have to do the work.* For Jon, this work first came through an MDMA-assisted psychotherapy session that felt, in his words, like "being hugged by the person who you know loves you the most on this planet while being buried in fuzzy puppies licking your face." The power of the treatment was in enabling him to safely access a memory that would otherwise be too painful. The work of identifying and addressing trauma doesn't necessarily involve work with psychedelic medicines or entheogens. But the key is to find a serious means of unraveling the origin of any debilitating internal noise.

## 16. Deep Play

*Bring childlike wonder to something you love.* In her book *Deep Play*, Diane Ackerman writes of “play” as “a refuge from ordinary life, a sanctuary of the mind, where one is exempt from life’s customs, methods, and decrees.” And “deep play” is what she calls the ecstatic form of play. It’s the kind of experience that brings us into a prayer-like state of beholding. While Ackerman says that “deep play” is classified more by mood than by activity, there are some kinds of activities that are especially likely to prompt it: “art, religion, risk-taking, and some sports—especially those that take place in relatively remote, silent, and floaty environments, such as scuba diving, parachuting, hang gliding, mountain climbing.” As you seek to overcome the noise of the modern world, consider these questions: What brings you closest to a childlike way of perceiving? How can you carry these ways of beholding into everyday life?

## EVERYDAY PRACTICES WITH CO-WORKERS AND COLLABORATORS

### 17. Get Experimental

Consider what you really want or need with respect to silence in your workplace. Start a conversation. Envision an experiment. At some organizations, it's "no email Fridays" or "no meeting Wednesdays." At others, it's eliminating the expectation of being available and on electronic devices during weekends or after 5:00 p.m. For some workplaces, a redesign of the floor plan might help specific kinds of workers get the focus they need. *Launch your experiment. Harvest lessons learned. Refine your experiment. Iterate.* Make sure it's safe for the experiment to fail. Design to learn, not to get it right the first time. With a little creativity, you can transform seemingly intractable norms of noise.

### 18. *Ma* on the Job

Enshrine the value of *Ma*—reverence for the empty spaces "in between"—in the culture of your organization. *Start with group activities:* For example, build in sanctioned time for quiet reflection, even within large discussions. In group brainstorming, safeguard the option to "sleep on a question," revisiting an inquiry fresh the next day. Consider new possibilities, like nonverbal report-outs, or Post-it note galleries of ideas on the walls so people can silently peruse and vote on ideas anonymously. Make space in order to encourage quieter voices and more marginalized perspectives to reach the center. *You can bring the value of Ma into the structure of the workday, too.* Schedule time for preparation—before starting a new project or heading into a meeting. Block off time for transitions between meetings and events; avoid scheduling back-to-back. Even five minutes—even five breaths—can make a difference. And finally, remember to schedule time for reflection and integration, especially for important and difficult projects.

### 19. Deep Work, Together

*Find a partner and make a pact to support each other's pristine attention.* This may be a fellow team member or, if you work independently, another freelancer in need of focused work time.

Set SMART (specific, measurable, attainable, relevant, and time-based) goals together. Work in parallel. Be accountable to each other. Work together to avoid distraction, like how the members of the Curie family worked together to find “perfect concentration.”

#### 20. Sitting in the Fire

Next time you and your team are in conflict, consider gently requesting a couple minutes of silence before continuing. If the matter is heated and needs more space, consider asking for a recess until the following day (or the following week). The idea is to create adequate space for people to shift from purely oppositional stances. The more a team *turns to silence* in these moments, the more effective this method will become and the more enduring your group decisions will be.

#### 21. Slow Down, There Isn't Much Time

When you find yourself grappling with a problem that is both urgent and important, go against the grain: *slow down*. Rather than amping up the sound and intensity, seek quiet. If it's possible, take a break. Or have a nap. Read some poetry. Play catch with your dog. Make art. Head out into nature. Take a bath. Rest. Engage in an activity (or non-activity) that helps you *feel and be expansive*. In this expanded state, open yourself to new information. Invite in divergent thinking. Let ideas marinate over one good night's sleep. Then gather again to focus on the issue. Notice what emerges.

## EVERYDAY PRACTICES FOR FAMILIES AND FRIENDS

### 22. Pumpernickel!

What do you do when the soundscape of life becomes too discordant and the volume gets too high? Rosin Coven, a talented and delightfully eccentric musical ensemble, has a protocol for that. When the sound gets too crowded and the musicality is lost, someone shouts “Pumpernickel!” A declaration of “Pumpernickel!” is like the pulling of a rip cord. “It means ‘what we really need is a subtractive process right now’ in order to create space and silence,” their front woman, Midnight Rose, tells us. In your life at home or among friends, find a lighthearted way to signal when it’s time for shared quiet.

### 23. Remember the Sabbath Day

If you don’t have the time or inclination to hold a traditional weekend Sabbath day, then pick a day of the week for *a meal that can be different from all others*—where everyone commits to sharing time. *Make it a ritual.* Firm up your agreements about use of technology. Have a few things you always do like going around the table with a highlight and/or a lowlight from the week. Invite guests, break bread together. Leave the day-to-day worries of the workweek behind.

### 24. Intention and Attention

Quiet with young kids isn’t always so quiet. It often comes through moving, doodling, or building with blocks. Rather than a state of auditory silence, it’s a state of presence. Still, there are moments when it’s possible and powerful to be with children in a more literal state of silence. When you ask a child a meaningful question—like “what are you grateful for?”—leave an empty space for reflection. Let kids have ample time to tune in to the “still, small voice” that lives within.

### 25. Small Is Beautiful

We can’t always engineer a beautiful moment of shared silence. The poignancy of such moments may be due, in part, to their spontaneity. Still, there’s one recommendation that helps us cultivate these experiences: Keep the silence small. Snack-sized, in

fact. When you go on a hike or walk with a friend or loved one for an hour, see if you can spend five minutes—perhaps at a comfortable bench or beautiful vista—to be quiet together. Minimize the worries that arise with lofty plans for lengthy silence. Focus on quality rather than quantity.

## 26. Collective Effervescence

When have you experienced a flow state *in a group*? Was it at a concert or a ceremony or a sporting event? The next time you find the opportunity, see how deeply you can enter the internal silence among other people. These moments of shared transcendence are relatively rare, but—as Bob Jesse’s experience with the dance-based church reveals—there are elements of a gathering that you might be able to intentionally co-design to facilitate flow. The next time you plan a group event, think about brainstorming some ground rules or principles to help participants relax into what the French sociologist Émile Durkheim called “collective effervescence.”

## 27. Tuning In, Together

*The power of silence is magnified when it’s shared.* But the degree to which it’s magnified can depend on the degree of preparation. The pioneering psychologist Ralph Metzner believed in the power of “preparing the vessel” to be in silence. In his medicine circles, participants joined together for preparatory workshops for learning, meditation, and exercises by day so they could jointly prepare themselves for the most rapturous shared silence at night. When you have the opportunity to be in silence with others in a ceremonial way, what can you do to come together and prepare?

## 28. Healing Presence

*Schedule a retreat with your friend or your partner.* While you may not be totally wordless for the entire retreat, you can predetermine some periods of silence interspersed with bracketed time for verbal connection. Perhaps you have creative projects under way or you’re both bird-watchers or meditators or writers or readers. If you can, avoid using phones, sending emails, or doing anything else that might distract from pure presence. As Sheila Kappeler-Finn explains, a simple practice like rearranging your furniture at home can create a container for the sacred—one

of many ways that you can establish a “temple.” In a shared retreat with a partner or friend, the silence itself can be one of the pillars of the temple. When two people are together observing a commitment to silence, a rare ambience emerges. “Silence alters what the space feels like between two people,” Sheila says. “It builds the tensile strength.”

## CHANGING PUBLIC POLICY AND CULTURE

### 29. Invest in Public Sanctuaries

Think of a special public space—*like a forested reserve, a rose garden, a pocket park between skyscrapers, or an inviting library*—where you’ve been able to rest your nerves and recover your clarity. While quiet time is too often an exclusive luxury for people who can afford it, public sanctuaries democratize the power of silence. Consider what you can do to expand such sanctuaries. Maybe it’s advocating for funding in the municipal budget; maybe it’s envisioning a new public amenity and working with others in the community to create it.

### 30. Innovate Like the Amish

Think carefully about what you value in life, and then work to ensure that any new technology you adopt really improves your well-being and honors your values. As part of his philosophy of “digital minimalism,” Cal Newport suggests this way of relating to tech. His idea was inspired by the Amish, who, contrary to popular belief, aren’t antitechnology. They simply subject new technologies to rigorous cost-benefit analysis before they adopt them as a community. As a society, we should consider the possibility of applying this ethos writ large. For example, just as the U.S. Food and Drug Administration assesses and reports on the side effects of drugs, governments could require clinical trials and independent cost-benefit analyses of certain new technologies that may have serious unintended consequences for our social, emotional, and cognitive health.

### 31. Measure What Matters

How do you measure the success of your society? For the past century, our foremost indicator of collective success has been “growth”—factors like production, efficiency, and income. But “growth” often correlates with the roar of industrial machines, the number of hours that managers can keep employees glued to their computers, and the effectiveness of algorithms in steering us to buy products and services while diverting our attention away from what we intend to be doing. In order to transform a world of noise, we need to start measuring what matters—including preservation of nature and opportunities for rest, human connection, and quiet time. While we outline a variety of ways

that governments can shift economic measurement, we can also start as individuals, families, and organizations by assessing our priorities with respect to the value of silence.

### 32. Enshrine the Right to Attention

Most of us now spend a majority of our waking hours on computers, phones, TVs, and other electronic media on which advertisers compete for our attention. Yet—in contrast to other valuable and scarce resources—there are still few public rules that govern the manipulation of human attention. Consider how you can advocate for the defense of attention. It might be through political activism, demanding, for example, that governments “articulate what is off-limits” in terms of algorithms that seek to deliberately extract attention and send users, including children, down “rabbit holes” of endless watching or scrolling. As a worker, you can stand up for your “right to disconnect” from email, laptops, phones, and other “electronic leashes” after the workday has ended. Get creative in finding ways to manage the claims on our attention and reduce the burden of noise.

### 33. Deliberate Like the Quakers

When you’re grappling with a difficult question in public policy or the future of your community, let silence be an ally. In a Quaker business meeting, when it’s clear that the participants aren’t listening to each other, the clerk will typically ask for a period of silence. It’s an opportunity to re-center, to take a few deep breaths, and to connect to the higher purpose of the meeting. The silence isn’t forcing a resolution before the group is actually ready. It’s simply helping people to get out of their own narrative, get present, and listen. What can you do to bring this ethos of *discernment* into public deliberation and the social discourse where you live?



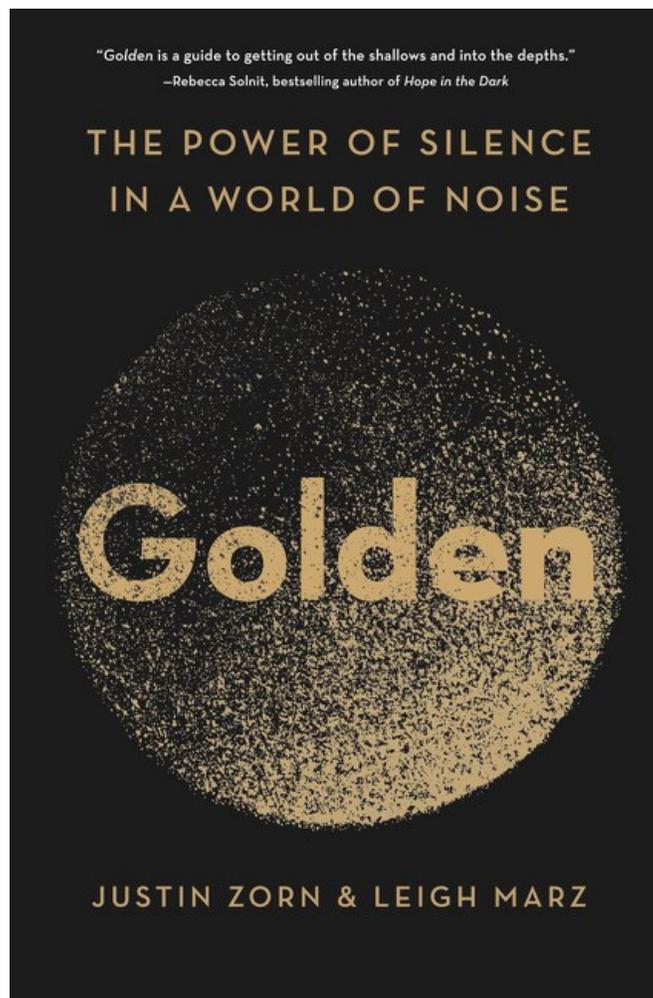
## About the Authors



Justin Talbot Zorn has served as both a policymaker and a meditation teacher in the U.S. Congress. A Harvard- and Oxford-trained specialist in the economics and psychology of well-being, Justin has written for the *Washington Post*, *The Atlantic*, *Harvard Business Review*, *Foreign Policy*, and other publications. He is cofounder of Astrea Strategies, a consultancy that bridges contemplation and action, helping leaders and teams envision and communicate solutions to complex challenges. He lives in Santa Fe, New Mexico, with his wife and three children.



Leigh Marz is a collaboration consultant 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. In her professional work, she has led diverse initiatives, including a training program to promote an experimental mindset among teams at NASA and a decade-long cross-sector collaboration to reduce toxic chemicals in products, in partnership with Green Science Policy Institute, Harvard University, IKEA, Google, and Kaiser Permanente. She is the cofounder of Astrea Strategies. Leigh lives in Berkeley, California, with her husband and daughter.



*Golden: The Power of Silence in a World of Noise*

By Justin Zorn and Leigh Marz

On Sale: May 17, 2022

ISBN: 9780063027602

Hardcover, \$28.99 USD



HARPER WAVE