

Episode 30 – Barb Breaks Her Silence on Her Silent Retreat
Barb Knows Best
Transcripts

Michelle Maros: [00:00:14] Hello. Hi, everyone. Hi, Mom.

Barb Schmidt: [00:00:18] Hi, Michelle.

Michelle Maros: [00:00:19] Welcome back.

Barb Schmidt: [00:00:20] Thank you I am back.

Michelle Maros: [00:00:23] Welcome, everyone. Listening to Barb Knows Best, the podcast. I'm Michelle Maros, your co-host. I feel like we don't know what we're doing right now because we haven't actually recorded in quite a few weeks because for reasons that we're going to get into in this episode. But we are back and it's so nice to be sitting across the table from you mother.

Barb Schmidt: [00:00:46] It's fantastic. I have missed you. And, but I had a wonderful time away.

Michelle Maros: [00:00:51] Yes.

Barb Schmidt: [00:00:51] That as you said, we will talk about in this episode. And I'm really energized and excited and really, really, really happy to be back.

Michelle Maros: [00:01:00] Yes, she is in rare, rare form today. And I am thrilled to encapsulate that energy into this episode.

Barb Schmidt: [00:01:09] Into a recording today.

Michelle Maros: [00:01:13] So yeah, it's been a few weeks since we recorded. And the reason for that is that you went on a silent retreat out in California. Which, of course, would prohibit you from recording episodes.

Barb Schmidt: [00:01:29] Yeah. Yes.

Michelle Maros: [00:01:32] So that's what we want to talk about this week.

Barb Schmidt: [00:01:35] Yeah because I am not sure. I mean, those of you who know me, if you follow on social media and stuff, I certainly I post about, you know, the things that I do in my meditation practice. Obviously, that's the foundation of my life, you know, but because of the pandemic and COVID and all the things, I haven't been on a retreat. and Michelle and I were talking about this this morning. I haven't been on a retreat in over four years, which is completely unlike me.

Michelle Maros: [00:01:59] Yes.

Barb Schmidt: [00:02:01] I've been on over 100 retreats. I know when I did my TEDx talk, I remember, you know, talking about the retreats and just thinking about what it was I wanted to share. And I thought, well, in my 38 year practice, it's well over 100 retreats. So retreats and going, going and taking time for myself and centering myself. And they've not always been silent. And the one I'll talk about today is the one I just came back from. It was a silent retreat. But, you know, it's what I do. It's really something that really is a massive self care practice that I do for myself, that I've done for my 38 years of recovery from bulimia. That is really expanded into every aspect of my life.

Michelle Maros: [00:02:40] Absolutely. And that's part of the reason why we wanted to talk about it or I wanted to I know I came to you and I said, be ready to talk about your retreat. Because I think that as we've been talking for years and years and years on all of the platforms about self-care practices and meditation and mindfulness and specifically your journey, people are very curious about how you've gotten to where you are today and what has sustained you and strengthened you and fortified you from within. And as someone who has lived with you or has known you for my whole life, obviously certainly retreats. And that time away has been your replenishing experiences. And of course, throughout the COVID times of the past few years and just life being the chaos that it is, you hadn't been on one in quite a long time, and you were able to to do that this summer. And I just really wanted to take this episode to pick your brain, so to speak, about what what your process is and why this helps you and what it helps you uncover and what you think you could say to people about the things, your

takeaways from it. And maybe just I think a lot of people are curious about silent retreats and retreats and you're going to get into the the nitty gritty of it all. But just opening up about your experience because as someone I mean, most people have been on zero retreats, but as someone who has been on hundreds and really taken in wisdom from teachers and experiences, I think that's worth a lot. So I really just wanted to give you this space to. Delve it all out.

Barb Schmidt: [00:04:36] I love it. I love that that we're doing this. And I love that you had this idea like, mom, let's ask you some questions and let's go through this and really, really share with people because you have seen you have witnessed how it has changed my life. Yeah, I was going on retreats before you were born, so it really is. But if we even maybe let's just kind of start with the idea of what the word retreat, you know, what does the word retreat even mean?

Michelle Maros: [00:05:01] And if Webster's Dictionary says that retreat means what?

Barb Schmidt: [00:05:04] Well, if you look it up, it means the act of giving up or withdrawing or taking time away in quiet in a secluded place where you can actually relax. And so I love that definition because certainly retreat is used a lot in the military and that idea of withdrawing or waving the white flag and stuff, because that's kind of what if I think about how this started for me. So those of you that have been listening, you know, I went into treatment for bulimia when I was 28 years old in 1984. So I've been in recovery for 38 years. And I remember when I checked myself into treatment and October 31st, 1984. So we're coming up on 38 years at the end of October this year. I remember when I checked myself in, I was scared. At first I thought, Oh my gosh, what did I do? There's no phone, there's no television. There's no there's no interaction with the outside world at all. Like, I don't get to talk to anyone. I don't get to do anything. And then it didn't take very long. I would say maybe a day or two or three, certainly within the first week, but I would say within the first several days where I remember going to bed at night one night saying, Oh my gosh, this is fantastic.

Barb Schmidt: [00:06:18] I get to leave the world with all of my anxiety, all of my stress, all of the things that are causing me to feel like I'm not enough or what all the things I actually have checked out of the world. And now I'm here. And I remember thinking I wasn't thinking about

the thought, okay, now I've got to do something about myself, because actually when you check out of the world and you go into it, especially a silent retreat, now my recovery treatment center wasn't silent, but when you go on retreat, you are leaving the outside world behind for that amount of time and you're actually working on yourself. And so if I was in recovery, I was working I was having therapy every day, group therapy every day, all the yoga and meditation and things. But when you go on a retreat like I went on, you're literally especially if it's silent, you're literally just you with your thoughts. And I think I said this in my TED talk. If you haven't heard my TED talk.

Michelle Maros: [00:07:07] Plug, Barb's TED Talk.

Barb Schmidt: [00:07:08] No, no, no.

Michelle Maros: [00:07:09] We'll link it in the show notes.

Barb Schmidt: [00:07:11] And I think I said this in a retreat or what is it in recovery? And you're taking all the stuff in because people are talking to you. I mean, we had some sessions and things and I'll go through this schedule a little bit just to give you a flavor of it. But in a retreat, you're taking everything in. But if you're in a silent retreat, nothing is coming out. Mm hmm. And that is really cool that you think about that, but hard. And I'll go into that more. But nothing is. You are processing everything internally, so you really are not engaging the outside world at all. So you are forced to engage with yourself internally.

Michelle Maros: [00:07:46] Right. It is interesting to think about and I've never been on a silent retreat before, but I have been on other retreats. And I've done some extended unplugging from the world and. It was fascinating to me just in my experience, to really grasp and contemplate how much we take in every single day through our phones, through the people around us, through our experiences. We're taking in other people's thoughts, opinions, emotions. And for me, what was so fascinating, even just from my unplugging, is really realizing like. What is actually mine and what is not? What is what are the things that I what are my original thoughts and what are things that I'm thinking in reaction to the world or something that I saw online or that I've been reading and. You know, that can get a little heady thinking about it. But it it was helpful for me to to remember that there is a separation and that if I want

to really tap into my self and my own thoughts and my own beliefs, that disconnect from the outside and connecting to myself is, is how I can really get that through line of it.

Barb Schmidt: [00:09:08] It's really powerfully said, Michelle. I don't even think it really is too heady. I think it's so. That is the power of a retreat, whether it is silent or not, because even if it's not a silent retreat, you're not really engaging much with the outside world because you're in you're in practice and you're in with the teachers and you're in with the whole mode of learning and growing and all the things. So it's exactly what you said. You're truly seeing a delineation between what it is that the outside world is wanting you to believe and what are you to think and how it interacts with what you actually do believe from the inside out. So I love what you just said and then you couple that with it being silent.

Michelle Maros: [00:09:44] Yes. Silence. A whole other layer.

Barb Schmidt: [00:09:45] It's a whole other level of you really aren't in conversation. You're not processing what you're feeling or you're not processing what you're thinking or what you're learning and how you're becoming or all the aha moments that you're having all throughout the week outside of you, you're processing it all internally. And so I think as I share this, it was a silent retreat and it was a Vipassana retreat, which I'd never been on before. I've been on many different kinds of retreats.

Michelle Maros: [00:10:14] We've been on silent retreats.

Barb Schmidt: [00:10:15] Before, but I've been on many silent retreats before, but not this particular kind of silent retreat. And so really all that Vipassana meditation retreat means it's a way of self transformation through self observation, observation of the thoughts and and more than anything else, certainly the thoughts because, I say that I'm an expert in the mind because I have been on so many retreats of the mind. But what I loved about this particular retreat, it was also self observation of my feelings of what's happening in my in my emotions, what's happening in my body. Right. And being in silence and and noticing the thoughts, which I'm very comfortable and really practiced at doing. I it's interesting to really then couple that with noticing the emotions that I'm feeling and what's happening within my body. And this is a very ancient practice. It's just really about retraining the mind. And what you said actually, Michelle,

how do I start to delineate what are my thoughts, what am I thinking, what are my thoughts causing me to feel and what do I do about it? Or they thoughts that are that make sense and how do I instead of pushing them away, I think this is what I love the most about this practice and about every practice with meditation or mindfulness. It's really not about pushing anything away. We're not trying to get rid of things or actually trying to observe our thoughts or observe our emotions or observe the sensations that are happening without judgment.

Michelle Maros: [00:11:43] Well, yeah. And you have no distraction in that setting.

Barb Schmidt: [00:11:48] You have your own mind.

Michelle Maros: [00:11:49] Well, yeah, but you're forced to sit there and I mean, if your mind is distracting you, that you're still having to sit with it, but you have, even without the ability to speak, you can't go talk about something else or you can't go read something else or go do something else. You really have to sit with it and feel it, which is really powerful, especially for you after these few years of a lot of ups and downs and difficulty. I think that was exactly what you needed, and we're going to get into that.

Barb Schmidt: [00:12:18] But could I just add something to what you just said? Because it's really powerful that. Yes, even though even though I'm sitting with my thoughts and I'm sitting there, what I what I really realized a lot this week that we were going to get into is even though I don't have the outside world to go back and forth with it about and get distracted from, I still recognize that there's a tendency inside, probably all of us. We don't like to sit with pain. We don't. We don't I don't want to think these thoughts of the past and ruminate about the past. I have been going through a tremendous upheaval in the past couple of years in my life is really turning totally upside down, which will be its own episode one day soon once I get through it. But we don't like that. We don't like to sit with pain.

Michelle Maros: [00:13:04] We some of us, some masochists and I like to.

Barb Schmidt: [00:13:07] But I am just saying, we we tend to when something is painful or when something doesn't make sense or when we're not liking something. If we don't like

something, we tend to want to push it away. We tend to want to not have it exist or how can I get rid of this? Or How can I fix this?

Michelle Maros: [00:13:21] I say that just because I think about myself in your experience, like I can sit in it. I can be silent, like. For me, that's almost to the silence. And the sitting and the pain is almost too comfortable for me.

Barb Schmidt: [00:13:36] So I think it would be wonderful if you actually did it because...

Michelle Maros: [00:13:40] We'll see.

Barb Schmidt: [00:13:41] Because what ends up happening. Because I get what you're saying, but truly what ends up happening when you actually sit with your pain are you actually sit with the suffering? And and I'll get into this in one of my huge takeaways. You you sit with it so you feel it because you're not exuding any energy to release it externally. You cry. You actually feel the emotions of what's happening for you instead of writing stories about them or instead of trying to make them make sense or whatever it is. So it's really interesting for me that this is not a religious retreat, even though the Vipassana meditation and some of the silent retreats I've been on are types of meditation that we're taught by the Buddha 2500 years ago, in all of the retreats I've been on, I have some steeped teachings from all the great traditions of the world. I've been in Christian retreats, Buddhist, Hindu, Judaism, all the things because if you know me, you know, I went through this whole ten year study of all of the great religions of the world. So this one happened to be based in teachings from the Buddha, but it's not religious. They are not teaching religion. They are not espousing for you to become a Buddhist or become religious. It's really about and I met so many people and it's so cool. You meet so many people from different traditions, but you don't even know because you're not talking to them. It's very diverse.

Michelle Maros: [00:15:00] Yeah. So she came out I was like did you make any friends. She was like, No, because we didn't talk, talk to anybody.

Barb Schmidt: [00:15:06] So they don't teach religion. They just teach. They teach the practice of how to become the most extraordinary. Magnificent. You know, the extraordinary, magnificent human being that we already are from the inside out. So.

Michelle Maros: [00:15:19] Just so, so lovely. So. All right. You can see she's got a lot to say.

Barb Schmidt: [00:15:24] I do.

Michelle Maros: [00:15:25] And.

Barb Schmidt: [00:15:25] You might need to rein me in.

Michelle Maros: [00:15:26] I'm trying, but that is the end result of this experience for her. She's, like fired up and ready to go. So the reason why I wanted to talk about this is because obviously to hear from your experiences and things like that, but very few of us have ever been on a retreat. So I just wanted to kind of roll it back a little bit, you know, after of course, nobody could go on retreats during COVID years and now that things are opened up. But I guess to start what within you was like that call to even get you to sign up because, you know, you've been on hundreds of retreats, as we've already said, and you've done the silent thing. You're a daily meditator. We talk about this stuff every single week, your self-care, journaling, mindfulness, being present. You do all of the things. But you had not been on a retreat in quite a few years. So I guess what was the feeling within you that made you feel like, A, I need to go because whatever I'm doing in my daily practice is not necessarily enough. And B, I can imagine to being so out of the retreat practice, was there some sort of fear of like being so out of your regular routine and in this retreat routine that how did you break through that to commit to doing it? So to two fold questions.

Barb Schmidt: [00:17:01] Two fold questions. That's really a great question. And as I said, I for the past three years before COVID and the pandemic started, I had stepped into this unfolding of an upheaval of my life, which I will get into it in another episode. I'm not a fan of discussing things when I'm in the middle of them, especially if it's a really heart wrenching thing. I just don't I don't think that that's not who I am. And it's not how I teach and it's not how I am. So I like to because I want to go through it. I want to be able to share everything because it's so it's

so up and down. We all know that when we're going through a really great life change, it's a lot. And so I want to preserve my energy and really go through it and then teach you when I'm done or teach you what I've been through when I'm done and really let you know. So I will do that when I'm through it. So that started before the pandemic. And then my dog, you know, my my precious dog that I have for my 15 year old dog, she halfway halfway through the pandemic, she ruptured some decent her spine. And so I saw that real, real I saw that she was obviously 15 years old and on her way out. So that was tremendous suffering as well.

Barb Schmidt: [00:18:14] So I had both of those things going on and then we're in the middle of a pandemic. And so all the suffering, the collective suffering in the world that you talk about so beautifully in your blogs, this whole pandemic, but it was just a lot. And then not having been on a retreat, because I am a person, I love structure. And I think it's why my meditation practice, it's I have a 38 year practice and I meditate every day for twice a day. And then going on a retreat, you meditate more than twice a day, the retreats that I go on. So it's even more practice of being with yourself and and establishing that relationship with yourself. So to answer your question, I hadn't lost the relationship with myself. But I needed to be able to take myself out of the world and get clear. I had lost some clarity. I had lost my ability to move through life with any sort of ease. I was, you know, I'd wake up in the morning ready to go. And by mid-afternoon, I was done. I was spent. Even if I stop watching the news, even if I stopped engaging, even if I stopped doing the things, it still was not enough. I had so much going on internally with this life change and then with my dog and not getting enough sleep. So I did know that I wasn't doing all of the self care things that I needed with all of the extraordinary suffering that I was going through internally.

Barb Schmidt: [00:19:37] So the balance was off and I couldn't go to the retreat, so I was trying to replicate that in the house and it just wasn't enough for me. And I think that's the beauty of a practice you use. And we talk about this so much. How do you know your self so fully that you know what you need? So I knew that I needed that, but we couldn't do it. So I was trying to make the best of it. So the minute things started opening, it was interesting. The minute the world started opening and retreats started becoming back in person. Lee dies in April. So it was the perfect you know, it was all of that sadness knowing that that was coming. But we still feel the sadness of a loss. So it just all unfolded in the way that it needed to. And I also was recognizing inside of me not getting enough sleep, not doing all of the things that I used to do in

terms of being able to do in the outside world. I also noticed that my mind was so caught in fixing. It was so caught in ruminating about the past, and I'm not really a ruminates about the past, and I'm really not much of a person that fears the future so much. I'm able to really be able to....

Barb Schmidt: [00:20:49] Okay, Barb, you're thinking about the past. Sit down here for a few minutes and let's work this out. But whatever was happening, because I wasn't able to actually have those retreat times that I know that I need. I was stuck. I was really stuck in how can I need to fix? You know, I needed to... Ellie was dying. I needed to fix it. The upheaval of my personal life, I need to fix it. So I was in this mode of fixing, fixing, fixing, fixing. Well, you know, you can't you can't fix you can't fix problems with I believe you can't only fix problems with the mind. You also have to fix problems with your feelings and your emotions and all of the things and create and really understand the reality that's happening around you. So all of that combined and when when the world opened up again and there were in-person retreats, I think what led me to sign up immediately and not only did I did a one week silent retreat, then I went to it was in Northern California, so I went to the redwoods. I love the redwoods. I love trees. I love being in nature. So then after the retreat was over, Michelle will attest to this. I picked up my phone but called her or texted her. I can't remember which I did.

Michelle Maros: [00:21:59] No.

Barb Schmidt: [00:21:59] I texted you, that's what I do. .

Michelle Maros: [00:22:00] No. This is not true.

Barb Schmidt: [00:22:02] Okay.

Michelle Maros: [00:22:03] She got her phone back and she did not want to turn it back on. So.

Barb Schmidt: [00:22:06] No I did not want to turn it back on.

Michelle Maros: [00:22:07] So we all knew that the certain date was the date that the silence was ending. And we would expect to hear from her and I knew that I would probably hear from

her, but I didn't think anybody else was going to hear from her. But as the day went on, I didn't hear from her and some of our other family and friends hadn't heard from her. And they started texting me. They're like, She's done today, right? We haven't heard from her. Have you heard from her? I said, No, I haven't heard from her. And then people were like, Well, do you think she's okay? Do we do we need to call someone? And I'm like, No, I don't think so yet. Maybe, maybe tomorrow. But you did not want to... You were not eager to jump back in.

Barb Schmidt: [00:22:48] I was.... And as I share some of the I want to share some of my takeaways and some of the aha moments. When it was over. I wanted to have the space and I knew that you had everything under control at home. I knew there was no reason there was there was nothing that was saying, oh, my gosh, Barb, you must check back in. So I knew that you had everything under control. Everything was fine. All of our beautiful colleagues that we work with, everything was just fantastic. And before I left, you all said to me, you said, mom and Lauren and Heather, and everybody all said to me, We got it here. You just go do everything that you need to do. Which was such a blessing that you all gave me. So I knew that I didn't need to. I did not feel the pressure to do that. So I did know what I did need was now to process everything that I had uncovered and learned about myself and felt I did know that I now wanted to be by myself, without teachers, without people. And I wanted to go walk in the woods and I wanted to go be by myself and have a be it a little in there in northern California and really kind of process it all and and take in now the external world.

Michelle Maros: [00:23:56] She was having an Emerson moment.

Barb Schmidt: [00:23:58] Yeah, it's beautifully said. Exactly. I wanted to take in the external world without actually taking in the, the conversation with the external world, but not being in structure where I was on. I mean, you know, if I walk through the schedule of a basic meditation schedule, a basic meditation retreat schedule, it's, you know, they have every this particular one, you you woke up I woke up at 5:00 every morning and everyone is asked to do one little job of sleeping or kitchen duty or whatever. So I signed up to do I was the one that made the coffee and the tea and got the milks and the the creamers and the the oat milks and all the things ready for the morning breakfast. So I was up at 430 every morning, got down there and had it ready by 530. And then we our first seated meditation is at 6 a.m. and then at 7:00 AM, the bell is they ring the bell and you go down for breakfast and then you have

breakfast and then you have some time to get ready. And then at 8:30 a.m., they ring the bell and you have your first session with a teacher and a meditation. And then from 8:30 all the way until lunchtime, which was at 1:01 p.m., you're either meditating for 30 minutes or you're doing a walking meditation, which is which is so beautiful.

Barb Schmidt: [00:25:09] Because for any of you that have met on a retreat, meditation isn't just sitting, you know, really, meditation is all about how can I be mindful? How can I be in this present moment with the present moment? So it can be walking, it can be sitting, it can be sleeping, it can be driving, it can be swimming, it can be any range of things. So we alternated between a 30 minute sit and a 30 minute walk and a 30 minute sit and a 30 minute walk. And then they wove in some teachings later in the afternoon. We'd have a teaching after lunch and then we'd have a final teaching before bedtime around 8:30 p.m. before bedtime and then after dinner. So that is the schedule for seven days. And the beautiful thing about this that I love so much besides. Not having interaction with the outside world as I didn't even have a watch on because you don't there's no schedule. They don't give you the timing. You just when they ring the bell when they ring the bell.

Michelle Maros: [00:26:07] You have no you have nowhere to be.

Barb Schmidt: [00:26:09] Right.

Michelle Maros: [00:26:10] And nothing to do except for the things that are in front of you.

Barb Schmidt: [00:26:15] So just when they ring the bell you are Okay, now it's time for me to go eat when they ring the bell. Now it's time for me to go sit and my meditation practice when they ring the bell. Now it's time for me to go do a walking, beautiful walking meditation in the valleys and in the mountains of of Northern California. So it was really wonderful. And the topics are on meditation, compassion, letting go, loving kindness, all of the things that were. You know, looking at ourselves, trying to become when we're living in the outside world, how can we be the absolute best version of who we already are from the inside out? And in this particular retreat, we didn't they encourage us not to do any reading and not to do any writing, really, just to take it all...

Michelle Maros: [00:26:57] Not journaling at all.

Barb Schmidt: [00:26:58] Nothing. You're just taking it because you want nothing to come out into the paper, into the world. You want to really process. Because I really realized what happened for me was processing my feelings, processing my emotions without any distractions at all, without any release from the pen, without any release from the journaling, without any release from the reading that happened. So. And they gave you...

Michelle Maros: [00:27:23] No distractions.

Barb Schmidt: [00:27:24] Just a few distractions as possible. So the only distractions would be people coughing, maybe when they're meditating or when you're on the outside world looking at the beauty of the mountains. And they gave us a recording of every single teaching that we had. So it was.. they thought of everything. So we didn't have to sit at home. You write it down. Let me get it all. Ooh, this was so cool. Let me get it. No, I got a record. We got a recording of everything.

Michelle Maros: [00:27:47] So curious, though, how did you sleep during it?

Barb Schmidt: [00:27:51] The first that you know, this is the thing. When you take yourself out of pluck yourself out of society and out of the world and out of your work, and you come in. So the first thing they did is we had a ceremony of turning over our phones. We actually had to turn our phones. We didn't have to. I use the word half to because I love structure,

Michelle Maros: [00:28:10] Right.

Barb Schmidt: [00:28:10] And so I couldn't wait to write my name on a piece of of tape and hand my phone overseas. They had a little ceremony of turning your phone over that idea of and they have emergency phones and there is no way that you're not going to be 24 hours.

Michelle Maros: [00:28:24] You're safe.

Barb Schmidt: [00:28:25] You're safe. You are you felt safe. You didn't feel like you weren't safe. And you agree in that ceremony to practice silence. And there was not one person that ever tried to talk to me and I didn't try to talk to someone else. It really was honored. Like almost a code of silence or an honor of silence or a vow of silence really was honored that we were there for the particular reason. So it was really cool and there are about 100 of us. I do want to say though, for twice during the week we were split up into smaller groups. So we were in a group of maybe four or five where we met with one of the teachers to talk about whatever we wanted to talk about for 30 minutes, five of us for 30 minutes. You can figure to the math on how long we had just to ask any questions or or to say what we might be feeling. So it was interesting because you learn a lot from other people's feelings or what they're going through or what's happening. And certainly the teachers gave their, you know, their thoughts and their views. And it was just a really wonderful flow for me exactly what I needed. And then, of course, at the end, they lift the vow of silence or the code of silence and you can talk.

Michelle Maros: [00:29:30] Okay. But my question was, how was your sleep?

Barb Schmidt: [00:29:34] It was great. I forgot that that's what you asked me, because I went into the whole..

Michelle Maros: [00:29:37] Not once did we talk about sleep and any of that answer. I was waiting.

Barb Schmidt: [00:29:41] You're so right. I guess where I was going with that was it takes a minute or two to come out

Michelle Maros: [00:29:45] I'm just wondering, because if it was someone who has ...you are used to a slow, silent, peaceful existence. Granted, your life lately has not been that. Especially when you still had Elie. She was loud and end a distraction. But most people, when it comes to sleep time, have a lot of distraction around them. Some people fall asleep to things and sounds and lights and television and.

Barb Schmidt: [00:30:14] I don't do that.

Michelle Maros: [00:30:15] I know, but I'm just saying, I was just curious if even the act of silence and not emoting and speaking, was your mind racing? Like did you find any benefit to sleep? How was your sleep? I just want to know about the sleep.

Barb Schmidt: [00:30:28] My sleep was fantastic. You're right.

Michelle Maros: [00:30:32] You weren't ruminating about things throughout the night or tossing and turning, worrying or whatever.

Barb Schmidt: [00:30:37] The first night. Yes, that's where I got I think I got a little derailed in the in the schedule because I think the schedule was perfect so that you could hear what the day was like. And so once I got into the flow of the day and felt once we turned our phones over, once I literally had that ceremony of turning my phone over, I disconnected from the outside world. So I think my sleep was, not I think, my sleep was phenomenal that whole week. But that first night I was like, Is this for real? Like, Do I really get to disconnect from the world? This is unbelievable. Can I really do this? And all I kept thinking about was, Hey, Michelle, and all your colleagues said do it. I mean, we're fine. We're fine, we're fine. So I trusted all of you because I really needed this and wanted this. So I think once I gave over my phone. I didn't put my watch on and just live by the schedule that they presented us with for this retreat, for the purpose of really connecting within to our emotions and what's happening within our bodies and our minds. It was wonderful.

Michelle Maros: [00:31:40] Great. Thank you for answering the question.

Barb Schmidt: [00:31:42] But I think that one of the things that is true about what you said, my life has been where I always get up about 430 or five every single morning. So not having an alarm, not having my phone, not having my watch, it was easy. I had to get up at 430 because I had to have the coffee ready because that's what I signed up for, because I love getting up early in the morning and it was like clockwork. I would open my eyes. It would be 430. I get dressed, I'd walk down, go out of my room, walk down to the hall, the dining hall, and make the coffee. And there'd be people outside waiting for the coffee to be made.

Michelle Maros: [00:32:15] Wow.

Barb Schmidt: [00:32:15] So it what I love also about it, even though we're in silence, it really is a practice of living in community and it truly is. My deepest desire in life is for all of us to feel like we can live in a sense of community, that we actually can love and trust and really live in a sense of community being our best selves, but also allowing other people to do the same. So when you're in this place of retreat, whether you're talking or not, you're truly living in a sense of kindness and community.

Michelle Maros: [00:32:44] Hmm. I love that. So do you want to get into now some of your key takeaways from your experience?

Barb Schmidt: [00:32:53] I also, yes, I do.

Michelle Maros: [00:32:54] You told me before we came that I had to keep you on a tight...

Barb Schmidt: [00:32:59] I did.

Michelle Maros: [00:33:00] Leash because you could talk about this forever. So I'm giving you your little heads up that it's time to get into the lessons.

Barb Schmidt: [00:33:11] Yes. I just want to say one thing.

Michelle Maros: [00:33:12] Not to sound like a parent.

Barb Schmidt: [00:33:12] No, no, I appreciate that. Of course, I do want to say one thing that in my my own experience, I've attended a lot of retreats, as we know, and I've attended, you know, silent retreats. But I also attend non silent retreats. So I just want to, as a caveat, just for people to like silent retreats aren't for everyone. And I almost don't even recommend one unless you've tried it before, because sometimes it can be very jarring to be in silence because you are connecting. And this particular retreat I was on, it was pretty intense. We meditated, as I said, sitting, walking, sitting, walking, sitting, walking. So I choose retreats based on the teachers and based on the teachings and what I personally need. So I'm really connected within myself and books that I've read of teachers are online things and entrusted friends. So make

sure that if you're signing up for retreat, making sure that you know, that you have you have the guidance that's needed and may make sure if you're going through any traumas or things like that, like I would not have chosen a silent retreat with all the trauma that I feel like I've been through in the past three years with this upheaval, I'm not sure I would have chosen a silent retreat if I hadn't already been on many before and so I just want to give that little caveat. So because it's hard not talking, it's hard not doing all the things.

Michelle Maros: [00:34:23] Well Certainly as you've been reintegrating into the world and talking to people back home, everyone is like silent for a week. I could never, I could never. And we're not used to that. So that is a good caveat. And, you know, if you have questions about these things, of course, feel free to send us a message or reach out if you want to know more. But that is a good caveat.

Barb Schmidt: [00:34:49] So one of my first takeaways, one of the first things that we did besides.

Michelle Maros: [00:34:53] Tangible take aways.

Barb Schmidt: [00:34:54] Yes, one of the first things that we did besides turn over our phones was we took this vow. And I look at vows as being a promise or a commitment. So we took this commitment for the one week that we were there. We took this commitment where they presented one of the teachers presented to us that one of the things that the mind does the most are three things that our minds do the most. And I think we all can relate to this when I say them one of the things. So we took this commitment that every time the mind did one of these three things, we would notice that, Oh wow, my mind is doing this and then let it go. We took the commitment that we weren't going to engage in the dialog in the mind of it. So it was the commitment to vow to have no judging, no comparing and no fixing and expanding on this a little bit. It was so huge for me why this was such a huge takeaway. Now, I've talked so much in my in my work about judgment and comparisons and all of the things. But what really stuck for me and this, it's really fascinating. If you want to try this at home, maybe make the commitment for one day that you're just going to notice. And I've done this before in my life, in my practice, that you're not going to judge. And it doesn't mean we're not going to judge. It means you're not going to engage in the conversation about it. So please be clear on that. It

doesn't mean the mind isn't going to try to judge because it does all day long or try to compare because it does all day long try to fix because that's what it does. It means that you are not going to engage with the mind and you'll see how quickly it dissipates. But why this was such an aha moment for me in such one of my key takeaways, I never really thought about the fixing part of the mind for whatever reason I didn't.

Michelle Maros: [00:36:33] Which is funny.

Barb Schmidt: [00:36:34] I didn't. For 38 years I've certainly understood my mind likes to judge and compare. And so this was profound for me for a week because this is where I'm stuck. This is what I realize at the end of the seven day retreat and kind of what you asked me, why did I even sign up for a retreat to begin with? Because I realized that I was trying to change the past or I was trying to make sense of it, or I was trying to ruminate it or I was ruminating about it. I never used the word fix. And it was powerful. It was. Transformational for me and life changing. I have been trying to fix my life. I've been trying to fix why is my life going through this upheaval? I was trying to fix it.

Michelle Maros: [00:37:15] I mean, I was going to say I would. Respectfully label you as a fixer?

Barb Schmidt: [00:37:21] Totally. That's why this is so funny. And that's what I love you guys. I hope you can feel my.... That's what I love about my life. That's what I love about my practice. That's what I love about retreats. That's what I love about having a practice in life. That's what I love. Because it is the most incredibly glaring, glaring. Like...

Michelle Maros: [00:37:42] You're got to be hit in the head with it.

Barb Schmidt: [00:37:44] I can see your face because I haven't just disclaimer I have not discussed my retreat at all with Michelle because I wanted to have this as a real, real, true conversation where she's hearing all these things for the first time. So if you could have seen her face when I said the most profound part of this thing for me was the no fixing.

Michelle Maros: [00:38:04] Because I say that because and I don't know if you're going to like this, but, you know, for most of our lives together, someone in our family would equate you to say that you were. Do you know what I'm going to say?

Barb Schmidt: [00:38:16] No, but I can imagine.

Michelle Maros: [00:38:18] Oh, they would always say that you're someone that will jump between the boat and the dock so that the boat doesn't get its paint scratched. Yeah, and that is how someone in our family would describe you as, like, someone who would put their own.

Barb Schmidt: [00:38:33] Life in danger.

Michelle Maros: [00:38:34] wellbeing to fix or save something else.

Barb Schmidt: [00:38:38] Or someone else.

Michelle Maros: [00:38:38] Or someone else.

Barb Schmidt: [00:38:40] Right. And I'm the person you want to be in the foxhole with someday.

Michelle Maros: [00:38:43] Yeah, I would take you into the foxhole for sure, but we used to kind of joke about that with you. And I think as years and years have gone on that visual I've noticed you to take more offense to it in some ways because that's not how you want to be and people can take advantage of that nature. And obviously another episode. But. The Fixer. Hello.

Barb Schmidt: [00:39:13] I am the fixer and that would be a cool episode to talk about judging, comparing a fixing, but just to keep this reined in for the for this episode. Yeah. And it's what I teach. I'm a mind expert, so I truly got deeper into the workings of my own mind. And isn't that what we're here to do? We're here to learn, we're here to grow, and we're here to become the greatest version of who we are. So one of my greatest one of my greatest takeaways was that that I am the fixer. That I have been ruminating for three years about trying to fix whatever's happened in the past and what did I do wrong and what I realized and that whole thing and this

is the second takeaway that came from that was that I had really started to lose my own self worth, that I was really value. I was really placing, not valuing. I was really placing my self worth in the external world that I got to fix this because that's I just I have to do this. I have to do this. So what I realized as I'm for a whole week not engaging the mind and fixing but the mind is trying to fix it was like it was a bombardment of fixing thoughts coming on. In my mind it was easy for me to just bypass the no comparing and the no judging.

Barb Schmidt: [00:40:25] Every time my mind wanted to judge, I say, Oh, you're trying to judge. Yeah, goodbye. So it was really fascinating for me. And what the second takeaway from really getting clearer and understanding the no fixing mind or the mind that wanted to fix and trying to have a mind that wasn't trying to fix and be present in the moment. Because remember, everything is about being in the present moment. That is what life is about. How can I engage this present moment and not be judging, comparing, fixing, and all the things that the mind wants to do? So it really showed me that. And I remember even one of my little one of those two small group conversations. The teacher had asked me a question and I said, I started to cry because I said, Wow. I realized that I really wrapped my self worth up into the external world, into other people, into other things, into whatever. I kind of lost my balance in there and it all was tied into this idea of fixing, Am I not good enough and I'm not smart enough? Am I not loving enough and I'm not compassionate enough? Am I not whatever enough. Like I was not enough. And so of course I had to try to fix it all. So it was really interesting to see it all.

Michelle Maros: [00:41:31] Combination of one and two.

Barb Schmidt: [00:41:33] Yes.

Michelle Maros: [00:41:34] So not to get too much, but what was the realization to realize that you didn't need to be fixed? But also you don't need to do anything to be worthy or just. It was a reminder of all that.

Barb Schmidt: [00:41:47] I think that's the beauty of really getting in touch with the feelings and the emotions and the body and feeling it in my body and then the crying. And then once you were able to release it. Wow, this is what's happening, Barb. So once you really... I'm such a believer in the minute. I mean, we've talked about this on many episodes. Jill Bolte Taylor, the

minute you realize what the feeling is, what the emotion is, once you acknowledge it and stop trying to push it away. I realize in the three years I've been trying to push all this away, I don't want to feel this way. I don't want to feel well. This can't be true. I don't feel that you're negating it. I was judging it. I was trying to push it away. I did not want to feel it fully. And so in this space, I was able to feel it fully. And I wasn't trying to push it away and I wasn't trying to judge it and I wasn't trying to compare it and I wasn't trying to fix anything. I was actually just raw emotion, feeling it. So I think when I felt it, wow, you're not feeling worthy. It dissipated because then. But I am worthy. I love, I mean, I am worthy. So it's when you know that that's not true. I am worthy. Wow. That's a really weird thing, because even I could see your face when I said that, you're like, What do you mean, you don't feel worthy? What you don't feel loving and kind and good enough?

Michelle Maros: [00:43:04] No, my face was not for that. And if you heard me chuckle during her answer, it's because maybe this should have been an episode that was video recorded as well, because the whole time I've been trying to slow her down. So you might need to listen to this episode on Half Speed.

Barb Schmidt: [00:43:21] Is it too fast?

Michelle Maros: [00:43:22] No, but I'm just. I'm trying to keep the pace, so. But that's very beautiful. And I love that because I would never peg you as someone who would need a reminder of worthiness, but it makes sense to me that after stripping everything away and sitting with yourself, that's what came up. And that's fascinating. And I think those are the kinds of things that do come up when you take everything away. And that's that is I don't know what your other takeaways are, but that is a huge takeaway of sometimes you just don't know what's beneath the surface because you're distracted by so many other things.

Barb Schmidt: [00:44:01] Exactly. And how would I have ever known it? I didn't think that I was unworthy going to this retreat.

Michelle Maros: [00:44:05] Right.

Barb Schmidt: [00:44:06] If we record an episode before the retreat about, I would have said, of course I'm worthy. I had no idea it blindsided me. If you want to use that word. Wow, it blindsided me. And that's why I started to cry because like, oh my gosh, I have goosebumps right now saying it again because it was so powerful. It was like, Wow, this is what's happening, Barbara. This is what's going on with you. And so.

Michelle Maros: [00:44:30] It's an uncovering.

Barb Schmidt: [00:44:31] It's an uncovering. And I do believe everything within us we talk about this too is peeling the layers of an onion back. So you peel it back a little more and you peel it back a little more and we're never perfect and we're never over, you know, at the root of everything is something else. And so it was so profound for me that that was at the root, that I'm not feeling worthy. So I need to fix everything that's happening. And I think then Ellie dying my dog, it was like, I can't fix that now. I'm now I'm lost. And so I was able then with this retreat, the idea of this retreat is feeling your emotions and feeling what's happening in your body. It uncovered it. So so my big third takeaway, I want to read a poem to you. This poem is I've never heard it before. It's by Judi Sore Brown, one of our teachers read this poem, and then she gave a whole beautiful, beautiful talk on it. I'm going to read it and I'll give you my take, very, very brief take on it. Maybe we'll do another episode on this. It's for me, it pierced my heart. It was. I started to cry again while she was giving us our little talk. So it's by Judy Sorum Brown and it's called Trough. There is a trough in waves, a low spot where horizon disappears and only sky and water are our company. And there we lose our way unless we rest, knowing the wave will bring us to its crest again. There we may drown if we let fear hold us within its grip and shake us side to side.

Barb Schmidt: [00:46:11] And leave us flailing. Torn. Disoriented. But if we rest there in the trough, our silent being with the low part of the wave, keeping our energy and noticing the shape of things, the flow, then time alone will bring us to another place where we can see the horizon again, see the land again, regain our sense of where we are and where we need to swim. So I almost cried just reading it again, because I think why this, I don't know if the other hundred people that were there with me got this, but for me it was. This is where I've been. I've been in a trough and I was in the waves and I could. I could see the sky and I could feel the water. But I couldn't see the horizon. I couldn't see. Where the heck am I going? What? What is

happening? So in trying to fix it all and feeling unworthy, I'm like, Oh my gosh. I was feeling like I was starting to lose my way. I didn't realize that. And so you asked me, why did I sign up for a retreat? Now, in hindsight, I was feeling like I was losing my way, losing my mind sometimes, too, but losing my way. And so unless we rest. So retreats for me are my rest. They're my massive rest, everything else, my practice, my mindfulness, my meditation, or my rest too. But this rest, knowing that I had this deep, knowing that I was able to uncover the deep, knowing that the wave would bring us bring me the way will bring me to the crest again.

Barb Schmidt: [00:47:47] I didn't want to allow my fear to shake me from side to side. And it was. It was fear. That's why I had to fix it. That's why I have to do all of these things. It was shaking me, disoriented me, losing my temper, all of the things. And so I think if we can just be in the trough and that's what this meditation is all about, just being with the feelings, being with the emotions in a safe space. Be in the trough. And being silent, you know, being in the low part of the wave where I've been and noticing the shape of things, noticing the flow of feeling the flow of being in the present moment. Sitting meditation. Walking meditation. The mindfulness of being here now being where my feet are and allowing the flow and allowing my alone time to bring me to the place where I can now see the horizon again. I see this guy. I see the horizon. I see the water. So I regained in this week and then the time in the mirror woods. I've regained this sense of where I am, who I am, and where I need to swim. Being really clear of what I need to do. What. What are some of the steps I need to take? No. Trying to fix the past. No trying to predict what the future is going to bring. Just being in the present moment. And then that'll show me where I need to swim.

Michelle Maros: [00:48:59] That's really a lovely.

Barb Schmidt: [00:49:00] Yeah, it's a beautiful. I'd never heard this poem before, and I didn't even know of this poet, but it was really a profound one.

Michelle Maros: [00:49:05] And then it was like the retreat was your compass.

Barb Schmidt: [00:49:10] Yeah. Wow.

Michelle Maros: [00:49:11] Like where you wanted to go.

Barb Schmidt: [00:49:13] Beautiful, Michelle. Yeah, beautiful. Michelle. That's exactly right. And I think that you need a whole week. I believe you need a whole week just because you know, you need a day to acclimate. You need a day to whatever. And then you start getting into it and then you really get into the like my crying when I'm unworthy and my trying to fix and just all the things, all the emotions that you're going through. Probably also why I wanted didn't want to connect right away and needed some more time. I could have probably used maybe another, but I didn't. I don't think I necessarily needed any more teachings. I just needed another time to process and to really read this poem over and over and really get it on a deeper level. So. And then the last takeaway I wanted to share was in Buddhism, they call, the teachings and the literature and Buddhism that are the backbone of the teachings of the Buddha. And remember, this is not a religion. This is just I love hearing teachings from all diverse areas. So this particular teaching is called a sutta and it is the backbone of the teachings of the Buddha. And this particular sutta also blew me away. It's like, Oh my gosh, this is it. This is what's been happening for you Barb. So in Buddhism they have what's called devas, which are Buddhist deities who kind of act in angelic ways.

Barb Schmidt: [00:50:29] So you can kind of think of them as angels in different places, but they actually go around guarding and praying for people. So one of the devas in the dark of the night, this is the Sutta, a deva and the dark of the night with her extreme radiance. So picture it's someone who prays and cares for other people. In her extreme radiance. It was lighting up the entire area where the Buddha was sitting. And so she approached him and bowed to him. And she stood to one side and she said, Tell me, dear sir, how you crossed over the flood. And he said, I crossed over the flood without pushing forward and without staying in place. She says but how, dear sir, did you cross over the flood without pushing forward and without staying in place? And he said, the Buddha said, when I pushed forward, I was whirled about. When I stayed in place, I sank. And so I crossed over the flood without pushing forward and without staying in place. And so the deva thought for a minute and she said. At long last I see you totally free. Who, without pushing forward and without staying in place, has crossed over the entanglements of the world. And the Buddha, the teacher approved, and she realized that the teacher has approved of me. So she was finished. He bowed to him and left. So this, I guess water was my thing on this retreat.

Michelle Maros: [00:52:11] Well, you are a Scorpio.

Barb Schmidt: [00:52:12] I am a Scorpio. So this really freed, it gave me a great sense of freedom, and I was crying some more, in this idea of life that I was trying to fix. I was trying to change. I was trying to do whatever I could. Like I was at, like, gripping. I could feel. And you're seeing me now gripping my hands. And I could feel this in my meditation. I was just I had to do something. I had there had to be a way that I could fix this. There had to be a way that I could make this all okay. There had to be a way. So in that sutta, I was pushing forward. I was trying to get my way. I was trying to make it work. Not going with the flow of water, not going with the flow of life. Not I was trying to. So I realized that I was really being very all these months in this whole three years. Very. I wouldn't use the word anxious or anxiety ridden, but just out of control. Like forcing myself. Like I'm the only one that can make this happen. I've got to make this happen. And then when the sutta says, and you can't just do nothing like in life. We're not supposed to just stand still. Mindfulness and meditation and practice is not about, oh, la, la, la, everything's okay. I don't need to do a thing. We have to do the work. But we also have to be in alignment and in the flow of the present moment of what can we do without pushing our will or without pushing like, Oh, I got to make this happen no matter what.

Barb Schmidt: [00:53:49] So I think this sutta really, really got me when when the Davis says you've crossed over the entanglements of the world. And so for me I was thinking, what are all the entanglements that I have been in in the past three years? What are all the things which just kind of was coming to me in my walking meditation and my sitting meditation? What are all those entanglements and what are the entanglements that we all we get trapped in entanglement. So how do we..... So I guess I would leave this episode and leave my last words in this retreat is how can we look at whatever we're entangled in, like a spider and a web? For some reason, I always equate spiders with Scorpios to. I don't know why. I just I've always thought that Scorpio people have a have a thing with spiders, because I always have a thing.

Michelle Maros: [00:54:37] Well you have a thing with spiders.

Barb Schmidt: [00:54:37] I do. Exactly. So I just think that every Scorpio does. But anyway, I just... How can we start to, I'll leave this. If you're looking at all these things that I've shared with you, you could actually practice. Now, give up the judging, give up the comparing, give up

the fixing. And I don't mean give it up. You're never going to think it again, you know, just notice that and then allow that that to come to you in this whole way of is that actually eroding your self worth? Are you feeling like you're not enough or not worthy? And that's why you're trying to judge compare effects. And then this poem Trough, go look it up, Judy Sorum Brown.

Michelle Maros: [00:55:12] We could probably post it.

Barb Schmidt: [00:55:13] We will. I'm just I'm just saying I would love for if you're listening to this, you know, maybe take a couple of minutes before you go to bed tonight and think about ways that you might feel, you know, in a trough or trapped or I know I felt like I couldn't move forward. I really felt stuck. I didn't know and trapped. I wanted to be free. I know when I signed up for this retreat, I thought, this retreat is going to set me free because I felt like I needed some freedom. So maybe thinking about where you're not seeing the horizon, you're not seeing what's the next step that you can take along the path? Because remember, Martin Luther King Jr said, we don't need to see the whole staircase, just need to take the first step. And then the last one, this idea that if you're really trying to push your way or you're really trying to fix something that can't be fixed, it just needs to be felt. That's what I got out of all this. Stop trying to fix things in the mind, Barbara. Really start feeling them deeply so you can understand what's happening and or if you're standing in place hoping that you know that it'll get fixed on its own, where can you start to cross the waters or cross the flood that you're feeling? Maybe in the life of the entanglements of the world? Where can you start to really feel where your power is and where your freedom lies? So I appreciate I appreciate this episode so much. So I appreciate you being.

Michelle Maros: [00:56:24] Filled to the gills of wisdom in this episode. I think I spoke zero, which is great.

Barb Schmidt: [00:56:29] Well, you were you actually helped facilitate all of this. And your your presence and your calmness and your love and your care has helped me be able to feel really confident and really comfortable to be able to share all this. And I know that that's why we're here. We love to share our experiences. So thank you. I love all of you so much.

Michelle Maros: [00:56:45] Thank you for sharing that and for being so open and vulnerable and sharing those experiences. Because, like I said quite a few times already, not all of us get to experience this. And even if we never get to experience it, it's very cool to hear from your personal experience and sharing the lessons so that we can it can trickle down into us.

Barb Schmidt: [00:57:08] And I will be sharing more on my Instagram and Facebook.

Michelle Maros: [00:57:14] She'll always be sharing more, which we look very much forward too. And of course, if you guys have any questions about what she talked about, please feel free to send them in. And if we get enough questions, maybe we'll do a Q&A about this or or whatever. You all just let us know.

Barb Schmidt: [00:57:30] Yeah that would be fun.

Michelle Maros: [00:57:30] But thank you so much, Mother, and thank you so much to all of our listeners for tuning into this episode as always and for being such a beautiful support for Barb Knows Best, The podcast. We Love, Love, Love being with you all every single week. And it's such a joy to share our life's ins and outs with all of you. If you haven't yet, please make sure you're connected with us so that you can ask the questions and share potential topics with us at Barb knows best pod, at Peaceful_Barb and at Michelle Maros. That is the best way to stay in touch with us. And of course, if you haven't already, please make sure you're liked and subscribed to the podcast wherever you listen to podcasts. And lastly, if you haven't already, please make sure to give us a five star rating and. Leave a nice review on iTunes because that helps us so much and that makes us so very happy. So if you haven't yet, please make sure you do so. And I think those are all the things. So thank you so much for listening. Have a beautiful week and we'll talk to you next week because as we know, Barb knows best.