

# **“Autism and My Zen Practice:” Meditation as a Tool for Self-Discovery**

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**Over the holidays, I had the opportunity to meet Anne-Laure Davin, a lovely woman from the Bay Area (by way of France) living with autism. Anne-Laure, like many autistic people, struggles with hypersensitivity to outside stimuli. Individuals with hypersensitivity experience sensations up to 100 times more acutely than neurotypical individuals. Seemingly ordinary stimuli such as traffic noise, slamming doors and ringing phones, artificial fragrances, and bright lights can be utterly debilitating. Here’s how Anne-Laure explains it:**

**“Imagine that you, a neurotypical person, are standing next to me on the street, and we are hit by the same sensory wave—a sound, a smell, something seemingly insignificant to you. This wave, however, has vibrations. For you, these vibrations may stop quickly, but for me, they will not stop for a few days.**

**“When I attempt to communicate with another person, and these vibrations still resonate within me, they disrupt the**

**interaction and the resulting failure to communicate causes anxiety. If a person I am speaking with becomes critical of me, I can no longer hear him. If there are noises around me, I cannot process information or speak.”**

**Anne-Laure spent her entire life attempting to gain an understanding of her inner machinations, but it wasn't until a yoga teacher pointed her in the direction of a Zen meditation center in Marin County, CA that she found a method that she says *“helped, quite literally, bring me back to my senses. Sitting zazen has helped me realize what a blessing my autism is: it brought me to Zen. And what a blessing Zen is: It brought me to myself.”***

**Of the autistic experience, Anne-Laure says *“we are different and unable to function in typical ways. We speak a tongue that seems familiar, but has a different logic. Yes, a different logic, but not a lesser one.”***

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