

Reflections on the Power of Silence

“Where can I find Silence?” asked the Wanderer of himself. “I have looked for it most of my life. Is it just absence of noise, emptiness, a vacuum waiting for Noise to rush in and assert the hegemony of Sound? Sometimes I have thought I caught the tail of it, deep in the night, when the wind is still and all moving things are asleep. But so very fragile -- the bark of a dog, the rustle of a leaf, the distant passing of a car breaks it. Even my breath intrudes.... Is there even such a thing as true Silence in this busy world?”

Then Silence spoke. It spoke in a voice so quiet it could split rocks. And this is what it said:

“I never cease from speaking. I am never absent. I am simply ignored. Once I spoke the world into being. Now I rest in its underbelly, supporting, caressing, upholding the productions of noise lest they implode in a cacophony of destruction.

And here is how to find me:

Listen. Let your breath grow still and recognise the silence all around you, within and without. It will be like a substance, vast and filling all space, diaphanous as a veil, thick like the fabric of time itself. And into that substance you can reach an arm. With your hand you can touch, caress and swirl it, and then open out your hand. Something will be there. Perhaps a white rose rising. Or a lotus-flower. Or a new life taking form; a birth out of silence.

What is this hand you can reach out?

It is your attention—nothing more. It is where you turn in silence, when you inhabit, acknowledge and give attention to its substance everywhere-- inside and out. The truly creative happens where noise is not.”

The wanderer was unconvinced. “The world I live in is a noisy place” he said. “You are an outcast; a ghost at the feast. Not many welcome your presence. You are too like death for most people, and if not banging saucepan lids to stave off spectres, most people are desperate to turn up the volume on any appliance which can generate a bit of noise and fill up the absence.”

‘Ah, that’s just it!’ spoke Silence. “Death is absence, but I am presence. I am full with the potentiality of all things. I gestate the future. I am full with movement and the very first swirlings of life. But to know, you have to touch; to reach out

and touch. The touch of your hand is an expression of your heart and your head working together, complementarily.”

“Then what do I have to do for this touch?”

“Simply turn off noise. You cannot create silence, but if you turn off noise, mysteriously, silence will manifest. Then I will be where I am.”

“I see”. The wanderer mused aloud. “I think I would have more chance of catching a waterfall in a cup. Apart from those times, very briefly, when I cease wandering and fix both body and mind, in normal activity my thoughts never cease to flow and my heart is like a wild horse. I have encountered you, Silence, but you do not obey my command.”

“You have not commanded me. You have tried to catch me unawares, hiding in mountains in the lee of the wind, sneaking up at night under a sky full of stars in the hope of finding me hidden between those cold far distant fires. I am there of course, but you cannot hold me, or touch me with your hand. Only ruthlessness can enable you to do that.

Turning off noise is a ruthless exercise. You must flip the switches, press the buttons, slide the sliders wherever noise emanates, in your head, in your heart, in the great world on its metalled ways. And hardest of all is nice noise - the siren song your impatient head and restless heart crave, for fear of what may lie in silence.

All things lie in silence. Their origin, their sustenance and their resolution are my gift to you. The gift you can give is loving attention, reaching into silence and calling forth the myriad creatures of your imaginings. They will emerge shyly, listening, needful of care and attention, and feeding from the hand which has given them life.”

The wanderer breathed out.

“Silence, I hear you. I hear you now. And when I lose your voice in the uproar of life, I will remind myself of your power all around me, in every man-created object, in the silent soil, in the fall of a leaf, and in the atoms of us all.

And then I may find strength to press the off-button...’

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*with thanks to Clean Language*

