

Friends of Silence

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“Is there enough Silence for the Word to be heard?”

Dear Friends ~ Last weekend, amid the slowly turning leaves of autumn, we held a celebration of Nan’s life and her gift of the Friends of Silence network. Walking the labyrinth accompanied by the graceful notes of the dulcimer, we listened together for the whispering wisdom that comes out of the silence of our hearts. The verse from Psalms for Praying that I carried with me into the labyrinth ended with this line: “Who will enter the Heart of Love?” When Nan began 30 years ago to gather friends together to pray for peace in turbulent times in Detroit, I think she was asking that question. This humble little community has grown over the years and yet it seems as though this is still the crux of it. Slender threads reach out and create what one participant over the weekend called the “synergistic silence.” Implicit in this is the belief that the inner, unseen work each one tends in silent solitude somehow reaches out and alters the cosmic energies so desperately in need of healing in our world. Cynthia Bourgeault wrote, “Mystical hope...has something to do with presence—not a future good outcome, but the immediate experience of being met, held in communion, by something intimately at hand.” May we in this synergistic silence, held together by many slender threads, carry for each other mystical hope.



We were born with silence, and as we grew up we lost the silence and we were filled with words. We lived in our hearts, and as time passed we moved into our heads. Now the reverse of this journey is enlightenment. It is the journey from the head back to the heart, from words back to silence; getting back to our innocence in spite of our intelligence.

~ Eckhart Tolle

...in the contemplative journey, as we swim down into those deeper waters toward the wellsprings of hope...the hidden spring of mercy deep within us is released in that touch and flows out from the

center...In plumbing deeply the hidden rootedness of the whole where all things are held together in the Mercy, we are released from the grip of personal fear and set free to minister with skillful means and true compassion to a world desperately in need of reconnection.

~from Psalm 90 in *Psalms for Praying*, Nan Merrill

~ from *MYSTICAL HOPE: TRUSTING*

IN THE MERCY OF GOD by Cynthia Bourgeault

In order to follow inner wisdom, we have to first know it. In order to know it, we have to hear it; to hear it, we have to be still. . . . I still have on my desk the conch shell I picked up at the beach on my second day of silence. *Listen*, it continues to remind me. *Listen to what you can hear when you are being still.*

~ from *LISTENING BELOW THE NOISE*
by Anne D. LeClaire



The gentle strains of great and noble Truths pass through the soul in every fleeting moment; and had we but a wish to hear, coupled with the will to be silent for a spell, we would soon detect the sound of our own eternity sounding out in that silence to which we then would hold so dear.

~ Guy Finley

Silence is the beautiful fruit of prayer. We must learn not only the silence of the mouth, but also the silence of the heart, of the eyes, of the ears and of the mind, which I call the five silences. Say it and memorize it on your five fingers.

~ Mother Teresa

And silence like a poultice comes to heal the blows of sound.

~ Oliver Wendell Holmes

In the attitudes of silence,
the soul finds the path
in a clearer light,
and what is elusive
and deceptive
resolves itself into
crystal clearness.
Our life is a long
and arduous quest
after truth.

~ M. Gandhi

The silence that is experienced in being quiet and alone is not the deepest and most satisfying silence to be had. The heart's desire is for the Eternal, a level of silence that is penetrating in its power to draw forth the secret communication of the soul. Here, we discover that silence speaks and we learn how poor we are when we do not abide in this dimension. In this great silence, our being finds its roots in God, is nurtured inwardly, and gradually expands into a form of life that is itself eternal.

~ Romeo J. Bonsaint in "Spiritual Life" Summer, 2004



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I swear, there is in me no wizardry of words.

I speak to you with silence like a cloud or a tree.

~ Czeslaw Milosz

The silence in which I live has opened my ears and eyes to the suffering of the world. In silence, you begin to hear the note of pain that informs so much of the anger and posturing that pervade social and political life. Solitude is also a teacher. Yearning makes the heart deep and makes you vulnerable. Silence and solitude strip away a skin and break down that protective shell of heartlessness which we cultivate in order to prevent ourselves from being overwhelmed by the suffering of the world that press in upon us on all sides.

~ from THE SPIRAL STAIRCASE by Karen Armstrong

When an event stirs great sadness and grief in us, after the wailing and the tears and the tearing of our hair, there comes a time when we have to fall silent. It is even beyond prayer. Prayers, which are also offered up at such moments, do not substitute for silence. Silence is the ultimate prayer.

~ from COMING TO OUR SENSES by John Kabot-Zinn

In the sanctuary of silence, we are surrounded by that clarity of mind and heart that allows us to walk without fear.

~ from AWAKENING THE SOUL by Rev. John C. Morgan



We send this November issue out to everyone, including those who receive the newsletter via e-mail, as an expression of gratitude to all our friends for your ongoing support and connection. From literacy classes prisoners hold for one another, to earth care and hospice care, peacemaking and social activism, we are encouraged and grateful for all the ways your contemplation spills out into the world in grace-filled acts of kindness and healing. Thank you.

Close the door of words
that the window of your heart may open.

To see what cannot be seen
turn your eyes inward
and listen, in silence.

~ Rumi