

Friends of Silence

Vol. XXXVII, No. 6

June 2024

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

Dear friends~ Slower, slower. Poorer, poorer. Smaller. Smaller.

This is slow work. It begins in poverty, and we become smaller, until we have enough being to be nothing. ~Bob



I am the vine; you are the branches.

If you remain in me and I in you, you will bear much fruit; apart from me you can do nothing.

~ John 15:5, NIV Bible



Shutterstock Images

The truly sacred attitude toward life is in no sense an escape from the sense of nothingness that assails us when we are left alone with ourselves. On the contrary, it penetrates into that darkness and that nothingness, realizing that the mercy of God has transformed our nothingness into his temple and believing that in our darkness his light has hidden itself. Hence, the sacred attitude is one that does not recoil from our own inner emptiness but rather penetrates into it with awe and reverence, and the awareness of mystery. This is a most important discovery in the interior life.

~ Thomas Merton in *THE INNER EXPERIENCE*

May I have enough being to be nothing.

~ Rafe, hermit monk at St. Benedict's monastery

In order to wish to be present, I must see that I am asleep. “I” am not here. I am enclosed in a circle of petty interests and avidity in which my “I” is lost. And it will remain lost unless I can relate to something higher.

I need to understand that by myself, without a relation with something higher, I am nothing. I can do nothing. By myself alone, I can only remain lost in this circle of interests. I have no quality that allows me to escape. I can escape only if I feel my absolute nothingness and begin to feel the need for help. I must feel the need to relate myself to something higher.

Nothing real in me can be hurt.

~ Madame de Salzmann in *THE REALITY OF BEING*

Progress comes through the voluntary acceptance of constriction and diminishment. And that's the unpleasant bottom line. Because all of us think that evolution comes through expansion. And we automatically equate our larger personhood with expanded space, expanded agency, endless opportunity, a whole canvas to paint on.

But it's actually, spiritually speaking, in the opposite direction. It's in the leaning into the conditions that you at first experience as intolerable, that you gradually realize that they are exactly the conditions that bring forth something new, something that can't be born forth in any other way.

~ Cynthia Bourgeault, 2023 *Wisdom School at Claymont*

We have entered a time of descent that takes us down into a different geography. In this shadowed terrain, we encounter a landscape familiar to soul—loss, grief, death, vulnerability, and fear. We have, in the old language of Alchemy, crossed into the Nigredo... This is a season of decay, of shedding and endings, of falling apart and undoing. This is not a time of rising and growth. It is not a time of confidence and ease. No. We are hunkered down. Down being the operative word. From the perspective of soul, down is holy ground.

~ Francis Weller in *IN THE ABSENCE OF THE ORDINARY*



Shutterstock Images

**Sometimes a grief like storm-wind sweeps away
All the words I found to bring to you
I shake helpless, silent as a corpse
'Be happy' you say 'Now you are nothing'**
~ Jalal-ud-Din Rumi in *A YEAR OF RUMI*



The divine way is indeed the downward way.
~ Henri Nouwen in *THE SELFLESS WAY OF CHRIST*

To awaken means to realize one's nothingness, that is, to realize one's complete and absolute mechanicalness, and one's complete and absolute helplessness. And it is not sufficient to realize it philosophically in words. It is necessary for us to realize it in clear, simple and concrete facts, in our own facts.

Until we reach the stage of realizing our own nothingness, we cannot change. To begin to realize one's own nothingness as a practical experience is to begin to cease identifying with oneself.

~ Maurice Nicoll in *PSYCHOLOGICAL COMMENTARIES ON THE TEACHING OF GURDJIEFF AND OUSPENSKY, VOL 1*

Awakening is messy. You don't transcend into some paradisiacal, elitist inner garden— It doesn't perfect you. You first come into all the reasons you've so wanted to stay asleep. And there are many good reasons. To awaken, really, is to begin to feel. Awakening is bit by bit coming out of denial around all the reasons you've needed to wield that terrible tool of othering— because so much is unbearable inside of our own self.

Awakening doesn't come from spiritual mastery defined as overcoming enough of our shortcomings. It is found in doing our fumbling best to grow into arms strong and loving enough to hold and hug our aching humanity. The myth that awakening looks anything like spiritual perfectionism is perhaps the best sleeping pill. Awakening is the at times compass-less and often inglorious inner odyssey toward the rough ruby of all that is bruised and true in our hearts. Awakening isn't only for special people. We're all on our way toward coming out of the sleep cycle.

~ Chelan Harkin in *WILD GRACE*

Find your practice and practice it. Find your teaching and follow it. Find your community and be faithful to it. Otherwise, you will tend to float around with no accountability system for what you too easily "believe" in your head. Your own ego will end up being the decider and chooser moment by moment.

At any given time we are likely to have not a single practice but rather a constellation of practices, often with one of them as our primary practice. Others may surround it, each carrying its own special place in our life... As the months and years go by the constellation changes. New practices emerge. Practices that have been present for years fall out of the picture.

~ James Finley from the "Contemplation and Action" podcast

**Don't let people pull you into their storm. But instead,
pull them into your peace and make all things new.**

~ Pema Chödrön in *WHEN THINGS FALL APART*

Give over thine own willing. Give over thine own running. Give over thine own desiring to know or be anything, and sink down to the seed which God chose in thy heart, and let that grow in thee, and be in thee, and breathe in thee, and act in thee, and thou shalt find by sweet experience that the Lord knows that, and loves and owns that, and will lead it to the inheritance of life, which is God's portion.

~ Isaac Penington, Quaker mystic, in *EXPLORING ISAAC PENINGTON*



**"You don't have to prove anything," my mother said.
"Just be ready for what God sends."**

I listened and put my hand out in the sun again. It was easy.

~ William Stafford, last poem before he died, "Are You Mr. William Stafford?" in *ASK ME: 100 ESSENTIAL POEMS*