

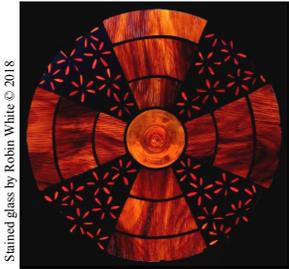
# Friends of Silence

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



Stained glass by Robin White © 2018

Dear Friends ~ There is perhaps a certain irony in collecting words that have been spoken and written about silence. Being human means navigating by way of language and we learn—some things anyway—by talking and listening, writing and reading. Yet the practice of contemplative silence seems more often to be about learning non-verbal ways to understand, to be present, to encounter; a time to sweep away the words in order to allow for the possibility of communion at a deeper level. How hard it is to just be, to open our hearts and minds, to create the space for experience beyond words.



saying nothing—  
the guest, the host  
the white chrysanthemum

~ Ryota Oshima

I remember years ago in Korea in the Peace Corps, how I felt the first time I partook of the daily culture of “just sitting” together with friends in informal tearooms in Seoul, without saying a word; at first I felt quite nervous and bored, but when I was able to relax my mind and just be, it was a refreshing communion... each moment’s meeting of a person or even a flower is precious and fleeting, it is to be savored completely, perhaps best in silence.



~ From textile in the Met collection COO

~ from *HAIKU MIND* by Patricia Donegan

The silence of prayer is the silence of listening.

~ Elizabeth O'Connor

At first silence had seemed a deprivation, a symbol of an unwanted isolation. I had resented the solitude of my life and fought it. But gradually the enveloping quiet became a positive element, almost a presence, which settled comfortably and caressingly around me like a soft shawl. It seemed to hum, gently but melodiously, and to orchestrate the ideas that I was contending with, until they started to sing too, to vibrate and reveal an unexpected resonance. After a time I found that I could almost listen to the silence, which had a dimension all of its own...I discovered that I felt at home and alive in the silence. Silence itself had become my teacher.

~ from *THE SPIRAL STAIRCASE* by Karen Armstrong

silent retreat—  
how loud  
my heartbeat

~ Jeannie Martin in  
*A CIRCLE OF  
BREATH*

For God  
To make love,  
For the divine alchemy to work,  
The Pitcher needs a still cup.

~ Hafiz, translated by Daniel Ladinsky  
in *THE GIFT*

The notion of silence appears to unsettle—or puzzle—no small number of people of all walks of life... Something as “unproductive” as silence is not often taken seriously. The evaluation of silence differs from culture to culture. In the West, if you notice that someone is silent for a prolonged period of time, the tendency might be to ask, “are you all right?” Or the silence might be interpreted as a sign of unbalanced introversion or isolation or passive aggression. In India, they would say of the silent one, *Ah muni!* (Ah, there is a *holy soul!*)

~ from *Elias Marechal* in *TEARS OF AN INNOCENT GOD*

If I were a physician and I were allowed to prescribe one remedy for all the ills of the world, I would prescribe silence. For even if the word of God were proclaimed in the modern world, how could one hear it with so much noise? Therefore, create silence!  
~ Soren Kierkegaard

The mind does nothing but talk, ask questions, search for meaning; the heart does not talk, does not ask questions, does not search for meaning. Silently, it moves toward God and surrenders. The heart is God's servant.

~ from *SAINT FRANCIS* by Nikos Kazantzakis

One day, as if I had lived alone for many years in the deep desert, I was taken by a stunning stillness, and without resistance I disappeared into Silence... It was my soul's homecoming, my heart's overflowing love, and my mind's eternal peace. In Silence, I felt my core identity, my essential nature, as a unity-in-love with all creation. I experienced freedom, clarity, and joy as my true Self... This Self, this Silence belongs to all of us—it is who we are, it is what we are. If we are to experience and embody authentic peace and love, if we are going to bring true healing to our wildly violent and endangered world, we are going to have to learn to live within this essence which joins us together as brothers and sisters.

~ from *THE HEALING POWER OF SILENCE*  
by Robert Rabbin

To deliver oneself up, to hand oneself over, entrust oneself completely to the silence of a wide landscape of woods and hills, or sea, or desert; to sit still while the sun comes up over that land and fills its silences with light. To pray and work in the morning and to labor and rest in the afternoon, and to sit still again in meditation in the evening when night falls upon that land and when the silence fills itself with darkness and with stars. This is a true and special vocation. There are few who are willing to belong completely to such silence, to let it soak into their bones, to breathe nothing but silence, to feed on silence, and to turn the very substance of their life into a living and vigilant silence.



Linda DeGraf © 2018

How much I long for the night to come again—  
I am restless all afternoon...  
How much I long for the huge stars to appear all  
over the heavens,  
And the black spaces between those stars...

~ from “*Waiting for the Stars*” by Robert Bly

~ from *THOUGHTS IN SOLITUDE* by Thomas Merton