

paper over embarrassment, or emptiness, or fear of the larger spaces that silence brings. “Words, words, words” commit us to positions we do not really hold, the imperatives of chatter; words are what we use for lies, false promises and gossip. We babble with strangers; with intimates we can be silent. We “make conversation” when we are at a loss; we unmake it when we are alone, or with those so close to us that we can afford to be alone with them. In love, we are speechless; in awe, we say, words fail us.

An important factor in the successful quest for understanding: self-discipline. To cultivate and maintain self-discipline, the naturalness of the state of solitude is requisite. Silence is a bit of heaven that comes down to earth. Silence is the language of nature. When one observes silence one finds oneself at one with nature, and surely there is no higher plane on which the human soul may exist.

One cannot, of course, remain silent in the absolute sense. When one appears to be silent, one is so for others, not for oneself. Remaining silent as far the external world goes, one starts conversing with one’s internal world. Observing silence is a great act. When one is silent one’s attention is diverted more to ‘heavenly’ matters than to ‘down-to-earth’ ones. One’s ears are turned more to the whispers of angels than to those of men. One’s focus becomes one’s own self rather than extraneous matters. One eschews superficiality & engages with deeper realities.

When we speak, we are in a limited domain, but when we are silent we find ourselves in the unlimited vastness of the universe.

Release your soul upon the rain that streams against your window. Or upon that moonbeam. Or upon that ray of sunshine. Or look upon the night sky...with its twinkling stars...breathtaking isn’t it...no, not the stars but the quietness. You ought to be prepared to be able to be sufficient for yourself and to be your own companion.

As you stand for prayer...is your mp3 player headset stuck in your ears...is even the Quran being played over all those digital noisemakers? The quieter it is the more pleasurable the experience in communicating with God.

Quiet Prayer: an antidote to the rampant unraveling of the very social fabric which has held us together for so long. Its tenets of reflection and contemplation encourages a disciplined unity while discouraging overindulgence in the physical world. It gently promotes a life of quiet contemplation and a gentle aesthetic principle that underscores a meditative

approach. Prayer demotes the role of the intellect and promotes an intuitive feel for life where relationships between people and their environments should be harmonious. By embodying the spirit to remind itself of its own mortality, it can elevate the quality of human life in a world that is fast losing its spirituality.

One of the biggest drains on our energy and emotion, and one of the greatest hindrances to peace, is our inability to be silent. We are constantly robbing ourselves of peace, because we choose to meddle in the affairs of others. We slander. We gossip. We have a difficult time dealing with blank spaces.

Noise Annoys: Loud “music” if it can be called that, brings “solace” if it can be called that, to those who have holes where once their souls occupied. Wild animals are more “civilized.” You’re “Christian” then investigate Isaiah 32:18: “...my people dwell in a **peaceful** abiding place and in residence of full confidence and in **undisturbed** resting places.”

Living in a permanent irritation of dissonance. Half-a-hundred thoughts wrestle for our attention. The world is constantly encroaching. Life is devoid of silence, then devoid of joy. Life’s meaningfulness is then lost. Life is flat and tasteless. We’re desensitized. We’re numb.

There is need to escape our over-entertained and over-informed world – to escape from the cacophony of too much of everything. We need oases of quiet in which sounds that nurture our sense of peace, compassion & imagination: like falling water, rustling foliage & birdsong – become audible again. If your silence is interrupted by the pounding madness emanating not from huge speakers, but in reality from the minds of those driven to insanity by Satan, then you’re being hampered from life’s most important pleasure...reflection. Loud “music” is an overwhelming mess of sound, designed to drive thought & growth out of our minds & God out of our hearts. Many driven to despair because of lack of action by politicians, police. All are impotent to bring “quietness, silence” because they themselves are inundated with the din of the world.

They need the Deen of Allah, of God...of the One Who Speaks through the words of Silence. Learn to use this Silence and you truly live. Truly blaze with the radiance of intelligence. We are satisfyingly nourished & blessed when we are surrounded by quiet. Silence allows us to acknowledge the limitations of our grasp on what lies within & without us, the knowledge that there’s something beyond the self. Our tranquil thoughts & silent imaginings determine the course of our hearts and behaviour. **Now, damn it, turn off that Surround Sound.** Ahh...silence is a friend; silence is comfortable; **silence is welcomed.**

Silence

Sit & listen to the fullness of the **quiet**, as an antipode to focused busyness

The sound of

Complete Silence

is Breathtaking

Human solitude is an essential method for acquiring the highest knowledge. It is in solitude, contemplation & a connection with nature that we transcend the frenzied & desperate existence imposed upon us by the **distortions** of a commodity culture.

It was the Prophet’s practice to retire often to a cave in the desert for Meditation.

With our cell phones constantly ringing, our incessant, nonsensical twittering, our foolish social networking status updates, we will find ourselves retiring to mental institutions & hospitals for **medications.**

Silence has become a Stranger. And so has God.

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Cave Hira. Silent. The city, Mecca. A cacophony of sound. One man. Steps out of the boundaries of this noise, walking upwards. Into the silence of the mountain, where the eye ranges freely through the still, pure air and fondly traces out the restful contours apparently built for eternity. Enters the cave. It's Quiet. It's Perfect. Perfect for a life-changing experience. The soul that has re-created itself in isolation has gained something of the humility of the grass, the rocks, the winds. All that lives is holy unto it; and it realizes, taught by the innumerable voices of Nature, a certain ultimate equality in everything that draws breath.

Glimpses of sky, motions of leaves, flickerings of sunlight & shadow, voyagings of clouds, roof-edges against infinite space, it is upon these things that we fix our eyes – consciously as well as unconsciously – while we are struggling to take a grim and stoical, rather than self-pitying, view of any particular circumstance. Wasn't the Prophet (p) perturbed over the condition of the people? He lived during the time of seething tribal wars & the worship of idols which formed the heart of his reflections on how an intelligent person copes with a world gone mad. That's why the quiet of Cave Hira was important.

And when that sought silence was broken, witnessed only by the Prophet (p) the sound that burst forth from the heavens has continuously consoled us and counseled us to regulate our life and our death.

So let's contemplate these words of *Pico Iyer* to understand silence as growth, as the soul's success. Every one of us knows the sensation of going up, on retreat, to a high place and feeling ourselves so lifted up that we can hardly imagine the circumstances of our usual lives, or all the things that make us fret. In such a place, in such a state, we start to recite the standard litany: that silence is sunshine, where company is clouds; that silence is rapture, where company is doubt; that silence is golden, where company is brass.

But silence is **not** so easily won. And before we race off to go prospecting in those hills, we might usefully recall that fool's gold is much more common and that gold has to be panned for, dug out from other substances. "All profound things and emotions of things are preceded and attended by Silence," wrote Herman Melville, one of the loftiest and most eloquent

of souls. Working himself up to an ever more thunderous cry of affirmation, he went on, "Silence is the general consecration of the universe. Silence is the invisible laying on of the Divine Hands upon the world. Silence is the only Voice of our God." For Melville, though, silence finally meant darkness and hopelessness and self-annihilation. Devastated by the silence that greeted his heartfelt novels, he retired into a public silence from which he did not emerge for more than 30 years. Then, just before his death, he came forth with his final utterance – the luminous tale of *Billy Budd* – and showed that silence is only as worthy as what we can bring back from it.

We have to earn silence, then, to work for it: to make it **not** an absence but a presence; **not** emptiness but repletion. Silence is something more than just a pause; it is that enchanted place where space is cleared and time is stayed and the horizon itself expands. In silence, we often say, we can hear ourselves think; but what is truer to say is that in silence we can hear ourselves **not** think, and so sink below our selves into a place far deeper than mere thought allows. In silence, we might truly say, we can hear Someone else's voice.

Or simply breathe. For silence is responsiveness, and in silence we can listen to something behind the clamour of the world. "A person who loves God, necessarily loves silence," wrote Thomas Merton, who was, as a Trappist, a connoisseur, a caretaker of silences. It is no coincidence that places of worship are places of silence: if idleness is the devil's playground, silence may be the angels'. It is no surprise that silence is an anagram of license. And it is only right that believers all but worship silence, for it is the place where everyone finds their God, however they may express it. Silence is an ecumenical state, beyond the doctrines and divisions created by the mind. If everyone has a spiritual story to tell of their life, everyone has a spiritual silence to preserve.

So it is that we might almost say silence is the tribute we pay to holiness; we slip off words when we enter a sacred space, just as we slip off shoes. A "moment of silence" is the highest honour we can pay someone; it is the point at which the mind stops and something else takes over (words run out when feelings rush in). A "vow of silence" is for holy men the highest devotional act. We hold our breath, we hold our words; we suspend our chattering selves and let ourselves "fall silent," and fall into the highest place of all. A vow of silence is observed

by both Zakariah and Maryam after their vision of the angel.

It often seems that the world is getting noisier these days: in Japan, which may be a model of our future, cars/buses have voices, doors/elevators speak. In a doctor's waiting room, for heaven's sake, **a doctor**, you have to listen to piped music. Some of it have the effect of fingernails scraping down a blackboard. It's all over this "piped noise," this psychological manipulation (supermarkets, malls, airports, cafes, hospitals, even in the funeral homes). At business expos the pounding decibel would delight none other than Jezebel. It makes you shuffle about like a creature from Dawn of the Dead. The answering machine talks to us, and for us, somewhere above the din of the TV; the MP3 player preserves a public silence but ensures that we need never – in the bathtub, a mountaintop, at our desks – be without the clangor of the world. White noise becomes the aural equivalent of the clash of images, the nonstop blast of fragments that **increasingly agitates our minds**. As Ben Okri, the Nigerian novelist says: "When chaos is the god of an era, **clamorous music is the deity's chief instrument**."

There is, of course, a place for noise, as there is for daily lives. There is a place for roaring, for the shouting exultation of a cricket game, for hymns and spoken prayers, for orchestras and cries of pleasure. Silence, like all the best things, is best appreciated in its absence: if noise is the signature tune of the world, silence is the music of the other world, the closest thing we know to the harmony of the spheres. But the greatest charm of noise is when it ceases.

In silence, suddenly, it seems as if all the windows of the world are thrown open and everything is as clear as on a morning after rain. Silence, ideally, hums. It charges the air. In Tibet, where the silence has a tragic cause, it is still quickened by the fluttering of prayer flags, the tolling of temple bells, the roar of wind across the plains, the memory of chant.

Silence, then, could be said to be the ultimate province of trust: it is the place where we trust ourselves to be alone; where we trust others to understand the things we do not say; where we trust a higher harmony to assert itself. We all know how treacherous are words, and how often we use them to

A Person who Loves God...

Necessarily Loves Silence