

**WHAT
DOES
SILENCE
SOUND LIKE?**

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Contents

Introduction	4
Searching In The Wrong Places	5
What Is Silence?	6
Finding Peace In Silence	7
Finding Wisdom In Silence	8
If You Want To Make Good Decisions, Make Room For Silence	9
How To Find Silence	10
Guard Your Silence	12
So, What Does Silence Sound Like?	13

Introduction

There's only one place to find the peace we want. And each of us is capable of finding it.

The secret, is *silence*.

Peace is found in silence, because silence is home. Silence is where truth resides. Silence is where God speaks.

It's not easy to put this idea into words, as words are so rudimentary. Words tell only part of the story. We have to discover these things for ourselves. We have to make room for our own silence. To go beyond the chatter in our mind. To reach the mind beyond the mind.

I hope my words will help lead you there.

Searching In The Wrong Places

We tend to look for fulfillment outside ourselves. Through the opinions of others. Through material possessions. Through promotions at work, etc. We forget to turn back to ourselves. To go within.

We run from ourselves. We create a false self. One that will fit in with the other false selves we meet in the world. We get sucked into the world's noise. We get seduced by it. And we get seduced by our own thoughts. We fall into traps of negative thinking, over-thinking, over-planning, and over-confidence.

We also get sucked into other people's drama, fears, greed, and expectations of us. The latter is a big one—as the world runs on expectations. What people think of us, is often the most important thing to us.

We want to be respected and we want to fit in. It's a survival instinct. And we want to matter. But we forget that fitting in is not the most important thing. And that fitting in is as likely to get us in trouble as it is to benefit us.

Finding time for silence is essential to our well-being. We need to eliminate distractions from our daily life, otherwise we won't be ourselves. We'll be disturbed, confused, frustrated, anxious, inauthentic, and easily misled.

We tend to run from silence, because that's where we come face to face with our problems. It's easier to do something more entertaining. There's no shortage of things to distract us from the sobering reality silence can provide. But by avoiding silence, we miss out on something special.

Silence is a great teacher. Silence helps us be more aware of how we're feeling. To be aware of our negative thought patterns. To recognize holes in our character. To see ourselves as part of the bigger picture. To be reminded of what's truly important. To stop searching for peace and love in the wrong places. Silence is a gateway to connection with God.

What Is Silence?

By *silence*, I don't mean the absence of sound. I mean the absence of noise, distractions, disturbances, etc. Including our own inner dialogue—the conversations we have with ourselves. As one mindfulness teacher once said, "I'm just trying to help my students hear the birds sing."

Inviting silence into our life is an act of letting go. It's a letting go of our desire to figure everything out. It's a letting go of the running narrative in our mind. It's a letting go of obsessive judgment. It's surrender to the present moment. It's surrender to a deep inner awareness. It's surrender to the presence of God within us.

In short, it's a letting go of the false self. The false self is deeply insecure. But the true self is peace.

Silence is not really silence, it's stillness. Stillness is not really stillness, it's oneness. The purpose of life is related to the knowledge of oneness. To see beyond mere appearances and understand that this life is bigger than ourselves. Buddhists would call this "enlightenment". Christianity would say that it's the beginning of the road toward "salvation".

Finding Peace In Silence

Silence invites us to go with the flow of life. Instead of fighting against it, or trying to bend it to our will. Silence can help guide us to make better decisions—to know when it's time to take action and when it's time to wait.

But the greatest benefit is the sense of deep peace and compassion it can unlock within us. You can't find this in the hustle and bustle of modern life.

When we're in the world, we're usually not ourselves—we're the person we think we have to be, to get what we think we need. But when our mind is quiet, we're more connected to our true self. When our mind is quiet, we're able to contemplate life more deeply and be more honest with ourselves.

We're all in search of peace. We tend to search for it in the next thing we buy, or the next promotion, vacation, relationship, etc. But the secret is to appreciate what we already have, and to go within.

To *go within* means to quiet the chatter in our mind. And to switch off the movie screen we play our fantasies on in our mind. It's about being in the present moment. It's to realize that we've been running from our true self. That we've been running from reality. That we've been trying to fill a void that can't be filled by external pursuits or by fantasies.

Finding Wisdom In Silence

We only experience reality in part. And what we experience, is largely an illusion. Our *experience* is real, but the fundamental nature of reality itself is a mystery.

The experience of reality found in silence is formless. It transcends the exterior life. It cuts through physical manifestations of reality.

Thoughts originate in silence. That's the only place they can come from. Because sound is an illusion. Without the ability to hear, there is no sound, only the vibration of air molecules colliding.

Even our thoughts are silent. They can seem noisy, in our mind, but there's no actual sound associated with them. So all thoughts emerge from silence.

The wisdom we find in silence, is in some way linked to our unconscious mind. The brain remembers everything it has ever experienced. This has an impact on our behavior, without us even realizing it.

Sometimes this deep-seated knowledge comes back to us at unexpected times. It can happen when we visit a familiar place. When we smell or taste something familiar (smell has the strongest relationship to memory). Or when we dream. Or in a "fight or flight" situation. It can also happen when we quiet our busy mind.

When we silence the monkeys in our mind, things that we didn't realize we knew, will come to us. Some of this knowledge comes from past experiences. Some of it may come from what Carl Jung called the "collective unconscious" (the collective memory of humanity, in which we're all connected in a mysterious way). And some of it may come from our connection with the divine (God).

Wisdom is always there, wanting to guide us. If we quiet our mind we'll be open to receive it. A quiet mind is a mind that invites truth. Truth speaks through silence.

If You Want To Make Good Decisions, Make Room For Silence

Imagine a judge making an important trial verdict while sitting in a crowded place with lots of people talking, instead of going to his or her chambers to be alone.

Or imagine someone comes into the judge's chambers every five minutes to ask a question.

How effective would that judge be? Would you want that judge making decisions that will effect someone's future, or the safety of your community?

I'd rather have a judge who goes somewhere to be alone, with no distractions.

And that's the way we should be when making important life decisions. Wisdom is rarely found in crowds, it's found in moments of quiet reflection.

Madness is often found in crowds. If everyone who was about to take part in a violent protest would go spend some time in a quiet place, it's unlikely a riot would occur.

The same thing happens in the stock market. Many investors make rash, emotional decisions, based on news stories, and the opinions of pundits. Meanwhile, intelligent investors ignore the noise and only make a move when it makes sense to do so, after careful reflection.

No matter how much information you get from the "experts", you still have to think for yourself and make your own decisions. Silence helps.

How To Find Silence

We can't all be monastics, or live alone in a cabin in the woods. But it's important that we find time for solitude on a daily basis. Just as we find time for food, sleep, exercise, brushing our teeth, etc.

It's not practical for everyone to spend large amounts of time in solitude. But when it is available it's wise to take advantage of it. We can start with a few minutes per day and work our way up, like we would with a new exercise regime. The key is to start making it a habit.

When we spend too much time around other people we start to become like them. Their ideas, their fears, their negativity, all start to rub off on us. There are many positive things about spending time with others as well. But when we spend a disproportionate amount of time with others, we start to lose ourselves. We have to filter the influence of others through moments of silence—through communion with our true self and God.

Prayer and mindful breathing

You may find that silence is empty without some form of prayer. This has been true for me. To me, it's about surrender to God.

Prayer can help us quiet our mind and enjoy the fruits of silence. Your prayer doesn't need to be elaborate, and you don't have to quote any scripture. Just be honest. Give your cares to God and trust that you'll be guided.

Prayer helps get us out of our distracted thought patterns and simply be in the moment. Prayer is an act of letting go. It's a surrender to something bigger than ourselves. This helps us stop over-thinking, and allows us to hear God's whisper.

Even in a crowded room we can experience such silence of mind. But it's more difficult. The voices and actions of others can be very distracting. Even after we've left the company of others, their influence can remain active in our mind. As well as the emotions we felt while we were with them. But if we say a prayer and focus on our breathing, our mind can become more still.

When we're around others, we can still practice inner silence. We can pray right where we are. A simple, "God I give it all to you", is enough. Then, focus on our breathing.

Being aware of our in-breath and out-breath is a way of getting out of our head and being centered in the moment.

None of this is perfect, of course. We'll fall off the wagon many times. But that's okay. It's not a competition. And there's nobody to impress. Just say another prayer and return to your breathing.

Sit with your silence

There's something very natural about sitting in silence. It's a return to a more natural state of being.

Sometimes you have to sit with your silence for awhile before you have any insights. While writing this paragraph (as with most things I write), I had no idea what I was going to write. I sat in silence and waited for something to come to me. This is the power of the unconscious mind at work.

You never know what's in there until you quiet the conscious mind and simply listen. That's what it's about. It's about listening. I sit with my silence and listen for the next thing that wants to be written. I never know what it's going to be.

The idea is to stay with your silence as long as you can, and continue returning to it as often as you can. It's not about chasing perfection and then feeling bad when you realize you can't catch it. It's about returning to a place of refuge. Or as it says in the bible, it's a *continuous renewing of the mind*.

Be close to nature

Nature provides a wonderful escape into silence. Nature has a way of quieting the mind. In nature, there's no one to judge you. No one to impress. No one to dump their fears and expectations on you. And nothing artificial.

Nature has a way of speaking to us. Nature has a way of inviting us to look at things more deeply, and to see that we're not so separate from our environment.

Guard Your Silence

The pace of society has gotten too fast. We need to slow things down and make room for silence and solitude. If we did this, we would also find more worthy pursuits. Too many people are doing jobs they hate, to buy things they don't need.

Protect your silence. Be aware of what you expose yourself to. Be aware of what company you invite into your sanctuary (your home and your mind). It's very easy to get muddied-up by the things of the world. Be selective. This includes what you put on T.V., or what you listen to on the radio, what websites you visit, etc.

It's not about cutting ourselves off from the world. It's about being "in the world, but not of the world".

So, What Does Silence Sound Like?

Silence is the sound of yourself breathing. It's the sound of birds chirping. It's the wind blowing the leaves on the trees. It's waves crashing on the beach.

It's a state of inner stillness. This is our natural state of being. This is home base -- our sanctuary. We should return home to our sanctuaries as often as possible.

I hope this little book has helped lead you back home.

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