



Mysticism of Silence
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Beloved Brothers and Sisters,

The title of this lecture is the Mysticism of Silence.

You may be thinking how is Nuria going to present on the Mysticism of Silence. Are we going to sit in silence for the time of her presentation? I can tell you from personally spending long times in silence that would certainly be a worthy endeavor and time well spent, but alas – no. I do have some “pointing out instructions” (as my Tibetan Buddhist teachers would call it). I have some indications to share of the significance of silence, and the benefit of an attitude in life that embraces the silence and the “gaps” in life.

In the *Gamakas*, defined as meaning “*feelings in the Poet’s heart, keyed to various notes,*” Hazrat Inayat Khan said: “*People often ask me questions I cannot very well answer in words, and it makes me sad to think they are unable to hear the voice of my silence.*”

Hazrat Inayat Khan also teaches us:

Self-realization is where the word is silent. The object of the Sufi is to enter into the silence, to learn to leave the form and the external world with all its attributes, to cease striving for anything but the goal. God is not in time; therefore He is in the silence. Sound is part of the world of time. The sage cannot say more than this, for the subject is so vast; when we come to this conception we find that it is altogether too subtle, too vast, to express.

Before entering fully into the words of the subject of the Mysticism of Silence, let us take a few moments to silence and still ourselves. I have brought here with me a Tibetan singing bowl, sometimes called a medicine bowl. The bowl was made in Tibet and is made of seven metals. Bowls such as this one are used in meditation and in the healing arts of Tibet.

Listen carefully to the sounds of the bowl, the overtones, and as importantly see if you can enter into the “gaps”, the silence between tones. When the sound begins to dissipate, follow the sound into the silence and rest there for a little while. Allow yourself to enter into the Presence of the Silence. I will meet you soon on the other side of the silence.

Hazrat Inayat Khan teaches us:

“Tuning ourselves to the infinite is achieved by the way of silence, by the way of meditation, by the way of thinking of something which is beyond and above all things of this mortal world. By giving some moments of our life to the thought of getting in tune with that which is the source and goal of all of us, realizing that in that source alone is the secret of our happiness and peace.”

In this way, I personally think of silence as a bridge, and way of connecting us to something as Hazrat Inayat Khan says, *“to something which is beyond and above all things of this mortal world”*.

Think of it – moments of silence, those significant gaps, dynamic, full, held in equipoise. Let me give you a few examples. Think about those silent moments when a baby has been birthed into the world, and has left the mother’s womb. How many of us can recall those silent moments before the newborn took their first breath. Can you recall that silence? That silence was like an eternal moment in which all hopes, aspirations, prayers were held in equipoise. Can you remember that silence? Those of you who are parents

know and those who have had the privilege of witnessing a birth; I am sure you can recall that moment.

The gap, the silence, the space, the moment – Let me give you another example. A friend of mine of the Jewish faith poignantly expressed this idea of the gap to me. She had asked me to recite a particular prayer for her so that she could write it down. When I said the word, God, she wrote it G_d, and then she mused and said, “Old habit”. I said, “What?” and she said, “You know in Judaism we don’t speak the word of God, it is the inexpressible, it is in the silence that we meet God, and so I always write God as G_d, because the inexpressibility of God is the that gap.

One of my mentors and friends along the spiritual path is the late Guruji Pandit Pran Nath. Guruji used to say in a very slow deliberate, metered speech, “Don’t stand on the notes, the music is between the notes.”

That concept can be understood very much in relationship to music, but also applies to life. In our ordinary life a lot of time and energy coalesces around pivotal moments in life. We make our plans and then we wait for them to unfold. We wait in anticipation for that next step, but what about the gap, the silence, the energy in the “in between”.

Chogyam Trunpa Rinpoche in his book titled *Journey Without Goal: The Tantric Wisdom of the Buddha* describes this journey as, “...*the in-between is the most important part of life, [spiritual] practice, and what ultimately leads us to realization.*”

Mother Teresa reminds us: “*We need to find God, and God cannot be found in noise and restlessness. God is the friend of silence. See how nature - trees, flowers, grass- grows in silence; see the stars, the moon and the sun, how they move in silence... We need silence to be able to touch souls.*”

We need silence to be able to touch souls – think of it – how profound is that statement.
We need silence to be able to touch souls.

Some of you know that I live in Kansas City, Missouri. About 15 minutes from my home is the worldwide headquarters for the Unity Movement. I have been asked from time to time to lead those in retreat toward their goal of silent meditation. Sometimes individuals have confided in me that they actually fear the silence. When I have asked them “why” they say they don’t know but they are afraid. Gently asking the question again, “Why are you afraid of the silence?” Then the answer comes, “Because I am afraid to be alone with my own thoughts”. Then I say, “You are not alone with your own thoughts, God is with you, and what is more, God is in you and in your thoughts. Take the time to listen deeply.”

Henry David Thoreau is quoted as saying, “*Silence is the universal refuge.*” This feeling of silence as a refuge is highlighted in a play titled *Amin* by Hazrat Inayat Khan. In the play the main character Amin goes through the process of developing from a boy to a man. In the final act Amin is wandering alone in the desert, and he is involved in an internal dialogue in his search toward tuning to the Infinite. As you listen to the story, a universal story really, see if your own internal musings are similar to that of Amin’s internal voice, which tells him:

“Home is a world; the life outside home is the underworld, but this wilderness is my Paradise.”

“I feel myself only when I am by myself. It is then that I look at the whole world as an onlooker. There must be some reason why I am attracted to this spot.”

Amin continues, “*There are many reasons, but how many can be explained? The heavy responsibility of home life and the continual struggle with the outside world; the smallness of human character; the ever-changing nature of life; the falsehood that exists in the life of the generality; the absence of justice and the lack of wisdom; all these and*

many other things make life unbearable for me. Besides, the ever-jarring influences coming from all around work upon my sensitive heart and make me feel lost sometimes. It is only here, away from the continual turmoil of life in the world that I find some rest..."

Amin goes on, *"And yet I wonder if my heart is really at rest. No, my heart cannot be really rested. If I am here away from the world and my fellow men are in the midst of the turmoil, it cannot give me the peace I want; it keeps my mind uneasy..."*

Amin asks himself, *"What could I do to make the condition of my people better? Shall I work and be rich, and help them with my riches? But how far will those riches go to provide for their endless needs! Shall I be powerful and control them and rule them? What will that do? It will only turn them from servants into slaves. Shall I teach them goodness? But where does goodness belong? It belongs to God."*

"I must seek God myself first before I speak of goodness to my fellow men. And where shall I find Him? If He is to be found anywhere, it is here in the solitude where my soul feels free. I become attuned to nature. I could sit silent here for days, looking at this wide space with endless horizon, where not even a bird makes a sound by the fluttering of its wings. I need not try to be silent here; silence reigns here, the spheres are silence itself... Oh, Thou, longed-for Beloved, if Thou are anywhere to be found, it is here. I do not speak, I will not speak; I only listen, I will listen. Speak to me!"

Amin sits silent. A VOICE comes to him, and says. "Cry on the Name of thy Lord! Cry on the Name of thy Lord! Cry on the Name of thy Lord."

Amin invokes the sacred Name of God, and again he sits silent.

After this silence, Amin reflects inwardly, *"Through the whispering of the breeze, through the cooing of the wind, through the rippling of the water, through the cracking of the thunder, through the fluttering of the leaves, I hear Thy gentle whisper in answer to my heart's cry."*

Like Amin we sometimes experience dissatisfaction with life and in life, and like Amin we too realize that our hearts cannot be really rested if we are away from the world. So there is this question. How can we be in the world and not consumed by the world, overcome and overrun by the world? For me the answer is clear and obvious, through an inner silence.

So there are lessons here for all of us. And each one of us will interpret this little story of Amin in our own unique way. Yet burning questions arise, at least for me is, Do we take time to listen within – in the stillness, in the silence? Do we take the time to listen to the whisper of the breeze, the cooing of the wind, the rippling of the water, the fluttering of leaves, in which lies the constant and gentle whisper in answer to our heart’s cry?”

The Tibetan Buddhist Master, Sogyal Rinpoche, writes, *“How many of us are swept away by what [can be] to call “active laziness”? “...laziness...consists of cramming our lives with compulsive activity so there is not time left to confront the real issues. If we look into our lives, we will see clearly how many unimportant tasks, so-called “responsibilities” accumulate to fill them up. We tell ourselves we want to spend time on the important things of life, but there never is any time. Helpless, we watch our days fill up with telephone calls and petty projects, with so many responsibilities --- or should we call them “irresponsibilities”?”*

So I wonder what shape our lives would take if we took as our primary responsibility to find some time everyday to be silent and still and receptive, listening for the gentle whispering in answer to our hearts’ cry. Like a musician tuning a fine instrument we can tune ourselves to our perfect pitch!

This past spring I was on sabbatical leave from my professorial post, and I spent two months in India performing part of my research. It was during that time that I met a man who had come from Germany to study the Indian style of raga called Drupad. Because I knew this was the musical style in the tradition of Hazrat Inayat Khan I asked my friend if I might sit in on one of his music lessons. He said, “I don’t know if my Guruji will

accept you being there, but come, and we shall ask”. The music master gentle accepted my presence, and what is more invited me back again and again. What I witnessed during these visits was a very dynamic teaching style that did not rely on words but the sharing of breath, space, and refined vocal expressions.

One afternoon, this musical Guruji repetitively sang the beginning of a raga. He repeated this cycle again and again. My friend dutifully repeated the same musical phraseology, but that was not what the teacher was asking him to do. Finally the teacher broke the space of music with words, and this is what he told his student.

“What I am asking you to do is complete the phrase, to pick the next note, but you must be very awake, very aware, very concentrated, very still. You must hear the next note. And that note will change based on the causes and conditions of the moment. You will know the note if you are present to the silence and to the space.

In that moment of silence you must feel the dynamic space between you and your audience. In the moment of silence you have the captivated attention of your audience, and they are waiting poised in the silence waiting for the next note. It is a very important moment in a concert. Because if you feel the dynamic energy present in the silence and you pick the perfect note in time and space, then the audience will think you are a genius and you will give new meaning to the raga. If you are unable to listen and feel the meaning of the silent moment, and if you go along with the safe and predictable next note of the raga, the audience will think of you as quite mediocre. This great Indian music master’s name is, Ustad Wasifuddin Dagar, and he gave a great life lesson there in that single music lesson, and pointed that out the most profound and meaningful choices are born out of silence.

So the question is, do we listen into the silence from which arises our next note, our next step, our sacred task?

Hazrat Inayat Khan teaches, *“It is by going into that silence where one can forget the limitations of the self, that one can get in touch with that part of one's being which is called perfection....”*

And I saw the wisdom of these words being instructed during that music lesson. Because what the teacher was asking of his student was for the student to forget the raga, forget himself, and get in touch with the perfection of the note echoing out of the silence.

This was the most tender, patient, and profound exchange that I could have witnessed. The teacher was giving the student an opportunity again and again to grasp the lesson. With each note I could see in the teachers eyes the expression of love pouring forth, a kind of encouragement for the student to take the next step, a calling forth for something that the student himself did not know was deep within him. I believe God is constantly calling forth from within us. Do we take the time to listen?

I can say that during that music lesson I experienced the living expression of this statement by Hazrat Inayat Khan, *“The earnest feelings of one heart can pierce the heart of another; they speak in the silence, spreading out into the sphere, so that the very atmosphere of a person's presence proclaims his thoughts and emotions. The vibrations of the soul are the most powerful and far-reaching, they run like an electric current from soul to soul.”*

When Hazrat Inayat Khan spoke those words, the vibrations of the soul are the most powerful and far-reaching, I wonder if He was catching a glimpse into the future of scientific investigations into deep space. Let me explain, The Hubble Deep Field Theory has been revolutionary. It has been discovered that by pointing the Hubble telescope into deep space, into the gaps between the celestial bodies in our universe and the universes beyond what exist there in those gaps are before unseen, unimagined, and extraordinarily beautiful dynamic, living, vast collections of celestial bodies in space. And all these discoveries are emerging through observation into the deep, vast, silent gaps in space.

While it is wondrous to look out into deep space think of the wonder that may occur by inverting our view and looking at the deep space within our very being. In this very moment, in every moment, we have the potentiality to converge in a single unique moment of the present. And this present moment is the very moment that can lead us to the gift of the Divine Presence within our very being.

Sogyal Rinpoche says it in this way: *“In the stillness and silence of meditation, we glimpse and return to that deep inner nature that we so long ago lost sight of amid the busyness and distraction of our minds.”*

Mahatma Gandhi teaches, *“In the attitude of silence the soul finds the path in a clearer light, and what is elusive and deceptive resolves itself into crystal clearness.”*

The Tao teaches us: *“If waters are placid, the moon will be mirrored perfectly. If we still ourselves, we can mirror the divine perfectly.”*

“True stillness comes naturally from moments of solitude where we allow our minds to settle. Just as water seeks its own level, the mind will gravitate toward the holy. Muddy water will become clear if allowed to stand undisturbed, and so too will the mind become clear if it is allowed to be still.”

Allow me to close this offering on the Mysticism of Silence with Hazrat Inayat Khan’s own words:

“The object of the Sufi is to enter into the silence, to learn to leave the form and the external world with all its attributes, to cease striving for anything but the goal. God is not in time; therefore He is in the silence.”

“What all the prophets and masters have done in all ages is to express that mystery in words, in deeds, in thoughts, in feelings; but most of the mystery is expressed by them in silence. For then the mystery is in its place. To bring the mystery down to earth is like

pulling down a king on to the ground from his throne; but allowing the mystery to remain in its own place, in the silent spheres, is like giving homage to the King to whom all homage is due.”

“It by going into that silence where one can forget the limitations of the self, that one can get in touch with that part of one's being which is called perfection; and this can best be attained by those who have realized the meaning of life.”

And finally let us remember again these words, *“The earnest feelings of one heart can pierce the heart of another; they speak in the silence, spreading out into the sphere, so that the very atmosphere of a person's presence proclaims his thoughts and emotions. The vibrations of the soul are the most powerful and far-reaching, they run like an electric current from soul to soul.”* [Hazrat Inayat Khan]

Let us close our time here together in the silence. In the Mysticism of Silence, where our souls can meet, and where truth can be exchanged!

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