

Silence

Our Eye On Eternity

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IN THE BOOK OF WISDOM, we read the following verses: "When a peaceful silence lay over all, and the night had run half of her swift course, down from the heavens, from the royal throne, leapt your all powerful word." (Wisdom 18:14, 15)

Thus a peaceful silence will characterize our expectant listening for this all powerful word. As Friends, we are most familiar with the practice of silence in connection with our worship, a voluntary, purposeful and disciplined undertaking in which members of our spiritual community gather deliberately to practice the giving of a corporate, loving attention to God. But the present reflection considers the practice of inner silence in everyday life. Let us consider particularly the way the practice of inner silence in everyday life can provide a window to the Divine which is supportive of our practice of corporate worship on First Day mornings and other times.

All of us carry within us a great question. In fact, our very life is a quest, a search. Sometimes we are more acutely aware of this than at other times. Sometimes this question is sharply etched. Sometimes it is vague and unformulated. When Jesus said that we cannot live by bread alone, he was speaking of this great question and of our hunger for a corresponding great answer.

This great answer which we seek is indeed accessible to us. For it is within us and around us and seeking to make itself known to us. Sometimes it is given to a person in a blinding flash, suddenly, in an instant. To other people it comes slowly and gradually over time. But however it arrives, there comes upon us a great

one
possesses
only
so much
wisdom
as he
puts
into
practice.

"tantum homo habet de scientia, quantum operatur"
Saint Francis of Assisi

*Quotation from St. Francis of Assisi
penned by the author*

experience of absolute Spirit and a leading to transform the way we live out our life in the world. Thus, the answer comes both as *insight* and as *practice*. It comes both as a new awareness and as a transformed way of being, of acting.

To understand better the value of silence in daily life, and its relation to this spiritual transformation for

which we yearn, it is useful first to consider the limitation of language, of words.

The first thing we might note about our use of language is that words follow experience. First we experience something, then we seek to describe it. This is true not only of external events but also of internal states. We experience an event or an internal state or impulse, then we put it into words. These words may form in our own mind the split second after the event; they may be used to convey the experience to others hours or years later. The important thing to realize is that all language deals with things "posthumously."

Second, language deals with those aspects of reality which things have in common. The word "tree" or the word "love" has meaning because it gives expression to the characteristics common to all trees and to all love. To describe a particular tree or a particular love becomes more difficult, because again we will begin to use adjectives which derive from the commonality of things and experiences. Language is a great gift and a miracle, and we can scarcely imagine being human without it; yet we must also recognize its limitations—its posthumous character and its tendency to reduce all things and all experience to a kind of generalization. These limitations of language become particularly acute when it comes to dealing with anything which is not like anything else—especially when it comes to dealing with our incomparable experiences of the Divine. Those who have an experience of absolute Spirit always insist that it is indescribable. George Fox speaks of it as being "beyond what words can utter." Dante, in spite of his incomparable skill and art in the use of words, writes:

“My vision, becoming purified, entered deeper and deeper into the ray of that Supernatural Light which in itself is true. Thenceforth my vision was greater than our language, which fails such a sight.”

It is next useful to contemplate the limitations of logical reasoning.

All sanctity is born of conflict—of contradictions resolved, finally, into union. Logical reasoning has limited usefulness. For the landscape of human-kind’s spiritual world, the world in which we realize our most noble accomplishments and in which we suffer our most crushing defeats, is a landscape of intellectually unresolvable dichotomies. Freedom versus order; self-help salvation versus grace, or even predestination; tradition and innovation; the simultaneous fallenness and exaltedness of human nature; eternity and time; the one and the many; stability and change; justice versus mercy. (Saint Thomas Aquinas observed that justice without mercy is cruelty, while mercy without justice is the mother of dissolution.) Imagine trying to have a debate about whether God’s nature was immanent or transcendent! In his many wonderful paintings entitled *The Peaceable Kingdom*, the Quaker artist Edward Hicks charmingly symbolizes for us an ideal of sanctity which involves the reconciliation of such opposites. The logical mind is offended by these dichotomies and seeks to come down on one side or the other of them; the same dichotomies provoke and stimulate the higher human faculties, the spiritual faculties, the faculties without which human beings are nothing but very clever animals. People of great sanctity somehow transcend these dichotomies without abandoning the truth on either side of them.

Humankind's particular vocation, then, is a precarious balancing act. It is a vocation that can be carried out successfully only with wisdom and love. It is a vocation which cannot be guided by dogmatic assertions, which by their nature tend simply to prefer one side or the other of these dichotomies. The gospels have in common with the techniques of Socrates and of Zen masters the fact that they question us, rather than tell us things. Legalism, lawyerliness, and literalism are the enemies of all true spirituality. Poetry and parable are its friends. When spiritual discourse is reduced to lawyer-like debates, everyone loses.

It is interesting that Jesus never claimed to be a philosopher or an analyst. Indeed, very few of his sermons, at least as they are passed down to us in the gospels, could even be said to follow an outline. It is hard to imagine these sermons being spoken without long intervals of silence interspersed, the silence of wisdom listening. Often Jesus spoke in somewhat obscure anecdotes and parables. On several occasions he simply said, "I am the Truth." He did not say, "I have come to give you great ideas or penetrating philosophies." He simply said, "I am the Truth." One of these occasions occurred during an interview with Pontius Pilate. Pilate's response to this strange assertion was to ask the question, "And what is Truth?" In asking the question this way, Pilate was perhaps revealing his background in Hellenistic culture with its penchant for philosophizing. And as if to indicate that there was little possibility for rapprochement between one who claimed to "be" the Truth, and another ready to dispute about it, Pilate, without waiting for any response from Jesus, turned

away and, ultimately, washed his hands of the entire matter which ensued.

Our practice of silence as a doorway to Truth is, then, related to our understanding of the limitations of language and of formal logic.

The first thing that we must recognize when we think of this practice of silence which goes beyond language and beyond cerebration is that we are seeking an internal silence as well as a silence of physical externals. It is not the idea of the meditative silence practiced in Quakerism that those undertaking it will be engaged with private mental movies, while merely maintaining an external hush in the physical realm. Hopefully, as we practice silence, whether in worship or as we go about our daily activities, we will not be preoccupied with the social engagement to which we must hurry once the present activity is finished, nor with the next steps to take on that important project back at work, nor with last year's vacation or next year's vacation. In true silence all these circling thoughts, inner conversations and imaginings are laid aside.

The great Quaker leader, Isaac Pennington, encouraged us to still what he called "the wanderings and roving of mind." Robert Barclay, one of the earliest and most persuasive apologists for Quakerism, repeatedly in his writings commended to us that we repair to that measure of grace within ourselves which can be sensed, if we refrain not only from outward words but from inward thoughts and desires. Caroline Stephen writes: "The silence we value is not the mere outward silence of the lips. It is a deep quietness of heart and mind, a laying aside of all preoccupation with passing things—

yes, even with the workings of our own minds; a resolute fixing of the heart upon that which is unchangeable and eternal." Indeed, to the extent that we can lay down our preoccupations with cravings, with transient concerns, with our businesses, with our special likes and dislikes, with all the accidental phenomenal and passing things which preoccupy us, we will begin to make space within ourselves where universal and eternal things can be heard. Thus through inner silence we become poor in spirit, and becoming poor in spirit brings us closer to the "Kingdom" of Heaven.

Indeed, Friends believe that even the thinking of theological thoughts should be laid aside during the practice of silence. For just as reading a description of bread, or perhaps reading a recipe of instruction as to how it is made, is a far different thing than actually tasting the bread, so is it true that there is a difference between thinking about theological concepts and actually experiencing Divine presence. Indeed, going back to the prophets of Israel and to the ancient Jewish prohibition against speaking the name of God, and carrying on through a long line of Christian masters of the spiritual life, it has been well understood that our thoughts about God are at best misleading, and at worst a form of idolatry, a worship of our own notions. Simone Weil, a twentieth-century woman of towering sanctity, expressed it thus: "I know that God exists because I feel the love in my heart which can have no other source; yet I also know that anything which my mind can conceive of as God could not possibly exist."

Inner silence is known by the quality of "presence;" to be inwardly silent is to bring ourselves wholly into the

present moment, to bring our spirits wholly to where our bodies are by stopping the circling thoughts which take our minds elsewhere. One practicing inner silence has the quality of being thoroughly present here and now.

This inner silence or presence is admittedly not easy to achieve. It is important that those seeking to strengthen this practice avoid sitting in judgment of their own success or lack of success. Self-rebuke is not a form of inner silence. Those seeking to strengthen their experience of present-centeredness often find it helpful to give their attention to the senses, for the senses operate only in the present, not in the past or the future. One can bring oneself into the present by gently allowing the awareness to rest upon the play of air or sunlight about one. Opening the listening very wide is another useful exercise, becoming aware of all the sounds around one without naming them.

Simple manual tasks, the kind we often seek to obliterate by playing the radio while we work, are actually precious opportunities to strengthen our capacity for inner silence. For with the radio off we can use the activity to practice resting our awareness on the working surface—the place where the newspaper touches the window we are washing, or where the broom's bristles sweep the floor. If our attention strays we can simply and gently notice that it has, and return it to the working surface. This practice gradually weakens the hold upon us of hectic, self-propelled imaginings and inner conversations, streams of consciousness which seem to be thinking of us as helpless bystanders, rather than we thinking of them. There is no need when undertaking this practice to keep score regarding how many times the

mind wanders. The act of returning the attention to the present is what is useful. Nor is it wise to try to beat stray thoughts out of our heads, for our annoyance reinforces them. We tend to strengthen whatever it is to which we give our attention. So the practice of inner silence is a gentle practice simply of letting stray thoughts fall away as we notice them, and returning our attention to the present.

The practice of a craft can supplement the opportunities provided by household tasks for the practice of inner silence. Calligraphy, pottery, woodworking, weaving and flower arranging are typical inner-silence inducing activities, but there are many others as well.

Gandhi began a weaving program during the Indian independence movement. In part, the production of homespun fabrics was an attempt to free India from economic dependence on the mills and factories of "mother" England. But Gandhi was quite clear that this spinning project was also meant to provide a devotional practice for members of a movement which was based on nonviolence. Gandhi claimed that he could tell the quality of inner silence and centeredness of a person by examining the homespun he or she had made, for it was impossible to produce even threads and a regular weave by manual methods if one's mind was wandering. Gandhi himself practiced weaving, even though it could have been argued that his cloth production was insignificant and his time might have been better spent at other leadership tasks. But for Gandhi the present-centeredness and inner silence which the practice of weaving strengthened was essential to nonviolence. For violence is always, at root, a willingness to do something



Flower arrangement by the author. The vase was made by the author in the Pendle Hill pottery studio.

ugly in the here and now in the hope of producing some imagined good result in the future. The possibility of such a future good result is, of course, an illusion. But the successful practice of nonviolence depends not only on the philosophical conviction that this is so, but also on a capacity to be attentive to the truth and to the reality of what is occurring now. It requires inner silence and present-centeredness.

The craft I practice in spite of my very limited skill, calligraphy, is valuable on many levels. Only one needs mention here. To attend to the evenness and uniformity of the letters and to the unique flow of ink produced by any particular combination of nib and parchment requires full attention. A good result cannot be produced if one's mind is wandering elsewhere.

The pottery studio at Pendle Hill is a meditative space. The production of an excellent piece of pottery requires both inner silence and obedience. The makers of mugs, bowls, and vases are, first, obedient to the needs of the users whom the objects are meant to serve. The makers' intelligence and skill, devoid of any merely egotistical idiosyncrasies, are bent to joyful, useful and efficient service. Second, there is obedience to the materials at hand. The molding and shaping must be compatible with the inner nature of the materials. One must be fully alert to the messages one is being given through the sense of touch and through the eyes. It is not practical to try to throw a pot at the wheel when one is preoccupied with something else, at least as an amateur. But out of an inner silence even beginners can produce objects the lines of which are remarkably pleasing to the eye and the forms of which are admirably

suited to comfortable and efficient service.

While it is true that a production potter or a professional calligrapher may eventually be able to produce work absentmindedly and by rote, just as one can sweep the floor while distracted by the high fidelity system, for the committed and attentive professional, as well as for the amateur, a craft often provides an excellent way to experience the "letting go" which is characteristic of inner silence. This is why the activities of manual work and of crafts are so important in the program of spiritual study which is offered at Pendle Hill.

The inner silence, or presence, which we seek is the key to authentic living. Consider the following observation of Thich Nhat Hanh, the well-known Vietnamese Buddhist monk: "If while washing the dishes we think only of the cup of tea that awaits us, thus hurrying to get the dishes out of the way as if they were a nuisance, then we are . . . not alive during the time we are washing dishes. In fact, we are completely incapable of realizing the miracle of life while standing at the sink. If we can't wash dishes, the chances are we won't be able to drink our tea either. While drinking the cup of tea, we will only be thinking of other things, barely aware of the cup in our hands. Thus we are sucked away to the future—and we are incapable of actually living one minute of life."

Or consider the words of Blaise Pascal: "We never keep to the present. . . . We anticipate the future as if we found it too slow in coming and were trying to hurry it up. Or we recall the past as if to stay its too rapid flight. We are so unwise that we wander about in times that do not belong to us, and do not think of the only one that does. Thus we never actually live, but only hope to live."

Silence is important to healing. I once read an account of a woman who had a close friend who was sorely troubled in spirit. The writer thought that perhaps a drive in the country would be a renewing experience, and so she took the troubled friend on a day's excursion in bright sunny weather. But once driving among the lakes, mountains, forests, and farm fields, she observed that her friend hardly noticed the surroundings. When she sought to call his attention to them, he seemed to attend only for a second or two before returning to the reiteration of his sad tale of disappointment, anger, and betrayal. And so at the end of the trip it seemed to the woman that the effort that she had made, together with all the healing glories of the natural world, had been eclipsed by those things which her friend had been carrying around in his mind and heart. Thus, a lack of inner silence deprived him of an opportunity for healing.

I once accompanied a group of teenagers to New York Yearly Meeting's conference center, Powell House, so they could experience a three-day retreat after having spent a summer in Brooklyn as volunteers in community service. In addition to being a time for discussion and reflection about the experiences they had had working in their inner city neighborhood, and about the meaning of service in their future lives, the retreat was visualized as a kind of reward to them after a summer of difficult, unpaid work. Those of us who organized the retreat allowed plenty of free time, thinking that in this new environment the young people would scatter to the bird sanctuary, explore the hiking trails, walk along the country lanes bordered by lush green fields on which

thoroughbred horses graze, or climb to the nearby overlook which affords a magnificent view of a lovely farm valley. Instead, when the free time came, the peaceful atmosphere was filled with the sound of music—rock music from the cassette tapes which they were conveniently carrying in their back pockets. The young people proceeded to spend their free time much as they would have done back in the Brooklyn church basement where they had worked all summer. They played ping pong, disco danced, and played cards, all within twenty feet of the din produced by the Powell House youth center's hi-fi system. Now these young people were a good-spirited and energetic group, and seemingly not in need of the sort of spiritual healing which the woman who brought her friend for a drive in the country sought to provide. Yet it did seem a shame that to the extent that the environment had anything new to offer, the young volunteers returned to Brooklyn much as they had arrived.

Most of us do not carry tape cassettes in our hip pockets, but we do, nevertheless, carry our own sounds around with us in our heads and in our hearts. Indeed, these sounds may never be precisely articulated in our thoughts, but they are there, nevertheless, coloring our world. "I am not a complete person unless I am attached to a member of the opposite sex," or "I can't learn math," or "I am a wise guy and everywhere I go I have to put on a show to attract attention," or "Smoking cigarettes is adult and sophisticated." These examples are both admittedly trivial and extreme, but it is important to recognize that they symbolize the tendencies of mind which do so much to structure the quality of the experience we have of the world.

I am told that the average American child who watches an average amount of television sees depicted over 3,000 murders by the time she or he is twelve years old! From everywhere, it seems, we are bombarded with the idea that our nature is innately violent, that our chief preoccupation is with our sexuality, and that our main purpose in life is the acquirement of ever more nifty possessions. It is very easy for us to become "programmed" by the disordered environment in which we live. Indeed, it is only through the practice of inner silence that we can begin to disentangle ourselves from our culture and its illusions.

People who practice inner silence, in addition to becoming aware of and putting in perspective the literal sounds and the emotional sounds they carry about within themselves in their inwardness, also become aware of the language of physical gestures. A person who is truly present is mindful of how he or she places objects on the table, and knows that it takes no more time or energy to place them in a way which expresses the poise, balance, harmony, and peace which is the natural destiny of the Creation than it does simply to toss them down in a helter-skelter fashion. A cluttered monastery is a contradiction in terms simply because it is unlikely that people who are living in constant awareness of the presence of God, who are silent within, will be oblivious about how they place things. Inner silence makes us aware that our bodies and our spirits are not hermetically sealed off from each other, and that what goes on in one affects the other. Thus, the quaint benches characteristic of old Quaker meetinghouses reflect the understanding that an upright posture is

more conducive to an alert inner silence than is a lounging posture.

When I first began trying seriously to practice inner silence in everyday life, I began to notice something interesting about how I would treat my own body. I would barrel down the subway steps, fling myself through the turnstile, plop myself on a bench on the subway platform, tear open my book, and begin devouring some sublime philosophy! Of course, the mental tone that went along with this behavior was a feeling of being under perpetual assault or harassment, a feeling which I usually blamed on my employer, the American Friends Service Committee, and on the overwhelming job it had laid upon me! I will not pretend the job I did for the American Friends Service Committee was easy. I always felt I had to move swiftly, but I came eventually to understand that to the extent that I could practice a presence which enabled my swiftness to be poised and balanced, I avoided institutionalizing within myself a sense that life was treating me like a dishrag.

If we have a problem at the office, it can happen that if we take a vacation, the vacation will provide us with a respite which will enable us, when we return, to take a whole new approach. The problem when we return may be very much the same as when we left. What is different is our capacity to grapple with it, the new perspective we have gained simply by having laid it aside for a while. But how do we take a vacation from the sounds we carry around in our heads wherever we go? How do we gain that rest which gives new refreshment and a new perspective? Sleep usually does not suffice, because even though we often cannot remember it, our

minds are quite active in sleep. How many of us, if we are troubled, either cannot sleep or else have the capacity to wake up from a long and deep sleep feeling more tired than ever? Sleep is necessary for the body, but it is the practice of wakeful inner silence which provides refreshment to the consciousness—to the mind and heart. "Silence is to the spirit what sleep is to the body, nourishment and refreshment." (William Penn)

Some time ago a close friend of mine suffered a heart attack at the tender age of thirty-eight years. This obviously was a cause of great anxiety and inner agitation among those of us who cared about him. The first time I went to visit him at the hospital I arrived in the middle of a torrential rainfall. Being March in New York City, this was a very cold, driving rain with lots of wind. As I emerged from the car in the hospital parking lot, I saw at the other end of the lot another person also struggling against the elements while getting out of a car, and the two of us proceeded towards the hospital doors, each of us hunched under our umbrellas and leaning against the driving wind while getting drenched by the cold rain. As we arrived at the doors simultaneously, the woman looked at me and said, "What a miserable day! About the only thing you can be thankful for is that you are walking around on two feet!" We then had to enter the first set of doors, cross a very shallow vestibule, and enter a second set. When we got through the second doors, the woman turned to me brightly and said, "I guess that is a great deal to be thankful for, isn't it?" In those few seconds there had been a complete change of spiritual state. Although it was she who had made the first comment outside the door, I might as well

have said it, for my mood was quite similar. Yet with her second comment we both proceeded in a much better condition to carry out whatever healing mission had brought us to the hospital.

Obviously, I have no way of knowing exactly what went on within the woman which produced this change of spirit. But it is interesting to reflect that the fact that we were dealing with unfamiliar doors, that we had to attend to the direction in which we would shake our umbrellas so as not to shower the other, that we needed to observe how the doors were hinged and who would hold which door while the other passed through it, did in some sense force us to lay down our preoccupations and enter into the present attentively, and in the moment of inner silence which this required, the sound which had been made echoed with its true import. Here we were, entering a building housing many gravely ill and even dying people, and we were complaining about being wet by the rain, regarding the gift of our freedom to walk about as "the only thing" grudgingly to be thankful for.

And it is further interesting to reflect that in the enforced moment of inner silence and presence, the perspective enlarged, the preoccupation with ourselves was displaced by an awareness of the people about us and their condition, and perhaps even by a realization of the blessings brought by the freshness of spring rain, especially the cleansing of the air and the nourishment of crops. Thus does silence enable one to relieve the seriousness with which one takes one's own individual and separate self, to realize that to live selfishly is to bear life as an intolerable burden, and to get a glimmering of that sort of enlargement of vision which is the only

source of any true joy of life, which is spiritual joy. With inner silence we begin to take the limitations of our egos off center stage as the defining context with which we experience the creation in its glories.

Now the need for two hospital visitors to choreograph their way through an unfamiliar set of doors was a way in which the practice of presence and of inner silence was induced by a circumstance external to the practitioners. How much more advanced and valuable it is as a spiritual exercise if this practice of presence is not the accidental result of circumstances, but is a devotional effort on the part of people who recognize its spiritual validity!

Finally, the relationship of inner silence to the perception of truth and to the realization of authentic service should be brought into view.

An experiment was once performed using two groups of educators. Each group was shown the same film of a child at play, but one group was told the child came from a broken home and had siblings who were drug addicts and delinquents. The other group was told that the child was the offspring of happily married professional parents and had brothers and sisters who were attending well-known schools. Each group was asked to analyze the child's play behavior as revealed in the film. Needless to say, the results showed that very little true observation took place, as each group tended to superimpose the agitations of their own minds on the data presented by the film. Inner silence is the key to the accurate perception of things as they really are.

Thus the practice of inner silence or presence is commended to us by sages not only for periods of worship but for all times. For only by being present and mentally

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सर्वभूतस्थितं यो मां

भजत्येकत्वमास्थितः।

सर्वथा वर्तमानोऽपि स

योगी मयि वर्तते ॥

Bhagavad Gita VI:31

Verse 31 from Chapter 6 of The Bhagavad Gita rendered in Sanskrit by the author. The passage in English translation reads: One who in the oneness of love, loves me in whatever he sees, wherever such a person may live, in truth he lives in me.

silent can we see the truth of the situations we are in, and can we know what response is called for from us in truth. Without such mindfulness, our ability to respond precisely and compassionately in everyday affairs is crippled, and if we cannot serve our spouse, children, parents, co-workers, and friends, how will we serve society—of what use will be our grand theories of politics and social change?

Our practice of silence, then, must not be confused with a mere hush in the physical realm. In fact, inner silence can be achieved in the midst of noise. Such silence is characterized by presence, is important to healing, is capable of enlarging our vision, and supports authentic service. It enables us to transcend the limitations of words and of formal logic without betraying the intellect.

For inner silence, the calming of the agitations of our hearts and minds of all that is stubborn and grasping, is essentially an expression of the love of Truth. To be dispassionate, not to let one's own needs or emotions or prejudices color one's actions, is essentially to put Truth before everything else. To love Truth in this way is to love God, who is Truth. Thus the practice of inner silence is the same as the love of God. To practice it successfully, if we can, means that we can participate in political and social life in its fullest sense without demanding anything for ourselves, without there being any narrowness or pettiness of soul to poison our work. It is to establish an inner peace, an inner harmony, which will allow us authentically to contribute to the establishment of an outer peace and an outer harmony in the world at large.

George Fox encouraged us to let our lives preach. He said this to make us realize that although we cannot adequately articulate the Truth, we can enact it. And at our silent center we can perceive this quality of enactment in one great and exemplary Life. For after all the beautiful and simple words have been spoken, it is still the pattern of that Life which compels the attention: its obscure and humble birth; its education in poverty; its temptation, mortification, and solitude; its acts of compassion and service; its desolation at moments of apparent abandonment by the Divine; its painful death of the self; and its final absorption into the Source.

Out of the divine spark within us we, too, must fashion a way to *be* Truth, so that that which is unutterable will be made visible by the way we live.

*(Wisdom speaks:) From Eternity, in the beginning,
he created me, and for eternity I shall remain . . .*

*Whoever listens to me will never have to blush,
whoever acts as I dictate will never sin.*

*And see, my conduit has grown into a river,
and my river has grown into a sea . . .*

*Now I shall make discipline shine out,
I shall send its light far and wide.*

*I shall pour out teaching like prophecy,
as a legacy to all future generations.*

*Observe that I have not toiled for myself alone,
But for all who are seeking wisdom.*

ECCLESIASTICUS 24:14, 22, 32-43
JERUSALEM BIBLE

There is a wisdom which is from the Lord, created from eternity in the beginning, and remaining until eternity at the end. It is a wisdom which we are told the Lord has poured out on all his works to be with human-kind forever as his gift. (Jerusalem Bible—Ecclesiasticus 1:9, 10). But this eternal wisdom is not something we can know with our minds. Rather it is something we are, it is a quality of being. We apprehend it in a silent place within us. We cannot contain what contains us nor comprehend what comprehends us. Those who have a grasp of this are very wary of debates about spiritual matters. They know that the Truth is to be lived, not merely to be pronounced by the mouth.

I once had the privilege of making an excursion to the bottom of the Grand Canyon. The Canyon is over 5,000 feet deep, that is, its walls are almost five times as high as the World Trade Center in New York City. As one descends into the Canyon, one passes layer after layer of rock of increasing age. Some of this rock has imbedded in it the fossilized remains of water creatures left from a remote time when this now arid region was once the bed of a sea. Ultimately, at the very bottom of the Canyon, one comes to rock which is a solidified form of the earth's central plasma—rocks thought to be fully half as old as our planet itself. And as one gazes upward from the bottom of the Canyon, past all the strata of rock from different ages and eons, up to the very rim, one realizes that the time that human beings have walked upon this earth is represented only by the top two or three inches of all these layers, and one is awestruck at the great and long creative process which has raised us up to where we are.

A true simplicity and stillness of heart allows us to know in any given moment if we are acting so as to be at one with this great Creative Principle, or if we are not.

Who shall stay the human heart, asks Saint Augustine, that it may stand in stillness and see how eternity, ever motionless, neither of the past nor of the future, nevertheless utters time past and time to come?

We are told that in the beginning there was but one Word, a Word which is the Mother of all things, a Word of grace and truth. This Word abides within each and every one of us, and within every human being ever called to life. Existing in the beginning before all other things were made, this primordial saving Word was uttered out of silence, and to silence we must return if we hope to hear it again. When all voices, sounds, agitations, and mental debates are put away, and a pure stillness and peace and reconciliation are present, then God speaks to us, expressing herself fully. To enter such silence is to let go of everything, even of every wish and desire, for as we are told, "the Truth awaits eyes unclouded by longing." Out of this inner silence our hearts are touched by something deeper than all our reasonings, something more comprehensive than all contradictions, something that can support all problems without the need for humanly devised solutions. We discover that one moment of true listening will yield what no amount of grappling can wrestle from life. When we drop our questions, paradoxically we find the answers, almost as if the answers had been waiting for us to discover them but had been drowned out by the noise of our questions. Out of such silence leaps the all powerful word of God and we find ourselves seized with meaning.



Verse 16 of Chapter IV of the First Letter of John, penned by the author with the initial letter illuminated in gold.. In English the verse reads: God is love: one who dwells in love dwells in God, and God dwells in him.

The more profound possibilities of our human nature become visible to us, enabling us gradually to grow into what we know we are meant to be. And in the same measure that we come alive to our own possibilities, we become alive and alert as well to the needs and to the possibilities of others. Thus we discover a way of life worthy of our profoundest enthusiasm, and by living it fully and faithfully we, in fact, do not labor for ourselves alone. For so to live is to let our lives pour out teaching like prophecy; so to live is to prepare a place worthy of all people—so to live is to prepare a place where future generations can make their home.

