

July, 2008 Newsletter

Becoming the Silence

The more we meditate in the silence, the more our lives reflect its wisdom.

I remember a violent storm - high wind, heavy rain, hail. The contrast between how noisy it was outside and how silent, how very still, it was inside was almost palpable. As I listened, I found myself thinking about how the stillness is always here, even in the mist of a storm. You just have to know how to find it.

There are so many ways to savor the stillness. One of my favorite ways used to be sitting on the deck at the close of the day and listening to children play. It was fun to watch them - they were spontaneous and free. I could even be comfortable with the level of noise they created, which sometimes was just short of a sonic boom, or so it seemed. Their laughter and rowdy play just seemed to accelerate the longer they were together. Then, after they all were gone to their homes, the sweetness of the memories and the comfort of the silence induced a smile that lingered on my face.

As I sat and relished the quiet, the contrast between their presence and their absence was profound. At first it seemed more like the absence of noise. Only later, when I had a chance to settle into the quiet, did I become aware that there was something deeper there, something that had its roots in the depths of my being, something I longed to touch with all my heart.

That's the message contrast offers, I think. Contrast, particularly great contrast, is nearly always profound, isn't it? Whether we're talking about silence, or life, or love and all their opposites, contrast continually brings substance to our experience and meaning to our days. Of course, to really experience the silence, we must learn to quiet our mind.

That's where most of the noise in life is, it seems. To do this requires shifting attention away from the clamor of busy thoughts, a shift, which for many, is best accomplished through meditation.

True meditation is more than just quieting the mind. It's about becoming aware. Not awareness of something, but simply being aware. The deeper the awareness, the more profound the silence. When you are aware, you consciously enter into the stillness that underlies all creation. That stillness is your essential nature. It is the very fabric of your soul.

When you begin meditating, your mind does not want to release its hold on you. It continually offers things to think about, things to do, things you should attend to now, things it thinks cannot wait. Reminders especially have a way of cropping up at the beginning of meditation. "Oh! You forgot to do this!" or "Oh, you must do that!" Of course, the impulse is to get up and do them. The discipline is in saying, "No, not now. Later."

Once your mind understands that you aren't going to get up and do it now, that it really must quiet down, there is still the body to contend with. The body, too, has its needs, so, level by level, you start to relax, and your body settles into a quieter state. As you do, your breathing gets quieter, your thoughts fewer until, almost without your knowing it, an awareness develops within. Like the fragrance of a rose, without your ever knowing where it came from, you slip into the part of you that is. This is the part that is always quiet, that always sees, always knows, is never sick, does not die. Some call it the witness, others call it the soul, and some call it the Self. Even though you may try to give it a name, it is the nameless aspect of your being. It cannot be described, nor can it be defined. However, when you are truly in the silence, all that doesn't matter - just to be there, just to be immersed in the awareness of that, fills one with a peace and a joy beyond description.

If we are attentive, if we surrender to the process, gradually we find ourselves totally absorbed, totally caught up in this pure consciousness until finally we move beyond our mind altogether into a state that can be described as Is-ness. Here we touch upon a state of being which is so pure, so deep, that we realize there is nothing else, only this. And we know just as the ancient sages did that that's all there is. There simply is no other.

After awhile, as we continue offering ourselves to these depths, we notice how that same presence, that same inner silence, has begun appearing not just when we meditate, but in our daily life too. Our pace becomes more

sane, our mind not so frantic. Even our patience seems to have gained a new dimension. In ways both large and small the truth of our being, of our very nature, begins to seep into our lives at every level. We find we're not as easily upset. We laugh more. Our perspective seems broader, more mellow. Life just doesn't seem so frenzied anymore.

Changes such as these are signs a sort of alchemy is at work. I'm talking about an alchemy that happens deep within us as we become the peace we were seeking. Much like a wave in a great mystical ocean, the silence expands within us and flows out into our day. It's easier to relax now, for somehow we know that all is as it should be, whether it seems so or not. We trust and we smile, for we know that love is having its way with us. We are content, because love's way is all we could have hoped for, all we could have asked.

More and more, we begin to tune into that ineffable otherness that underlies all our daily-ness. We notice it when we're walking, or doing the dishes, or driving down the street. It's just always there.

If this is so, then why didn't we see it before? Why aren't we in touch with it now? Could it be because we aren't looking? Because we aren't paying attention? Because we simply aren't aware?

So where is the silence for you today? Can you feel it between your thoughts? Between your words? Your Actions? Can you rest in it? Can you taste the sense of being that underlies all that you are? Can you feel it move you? Guide you?

If you haven't connected with the silence lately, just stop what you are doing - right now - and listen. Just be aware.

If you practice the stillness often enough, that awareness will become part of the fabric of your life. Being still inwardly will become as natural to you as breathing or eating or sleeping. You'll be more alert to its promptings, and you'll trust more.

As you go back into your day now, practice being aware. Every chance you can, just be. Your deepest truths have their being in the silence of your heart.