

A SILENCE THAT IS

Tess Veenker MSC



Recently, as I was enjoying my daily walk, with my mind, as always, racing ahead I was suddenly struck by an overwhelming silence that seemed to engulf me. It was early on a Saturday morning, the mist was just lifting, the streets were bare when, walking around a corner, I found myself to be totally enveloped in a quiet **stillness**. As I stood still, I breathed in the silent aura which surrounded me and **listened** attentively to nothingness. Every now and then the song of a bird would enter this seemingly empty void. I saw only bare streets ahead of me. All was silent. As I raised my head the misty blue skies and soft white clouds were forming. My whole being was caught up in a sensation of inner peace and calm. In this silence I felt totally at one with **nature**.

All of this did not last very long but the experience of this 'at-oneness in silence' was very powerful. The silence seemed to integrate **my very Being**. In that moment I felt myself drawn into a Oneness with Silence. In a very strange way, I too had *become* Silence. It was a most unusual experience which I am still trying, with difficulty, to articulate. I am grappling with words as I write, yet in my mind's eye, I can recall it vividly. It truly was a powerful, memorable, beautiful experience that has left its imprint upon me.

I walked on again once this sensation had lifted and I remembered the many times that I had yearned for inner silence whilst battling with my own all-consuming thoughts and fears. I remembered my daily contemplative prayer times where I gently and constantly let my distractions float quietly away as I struggled to come to stillness, to a place of inner centring. Yet here, on this ordinary day, as I walked, totally preoccupied with 'my' life, the silence had graciously and mysteriously descended upon me without any effort on my part. I could not help but wonder, has this silence revealed itself to me or has this silence always existed and it is I, who in this moment, simply become more **conscious** of it?

I recalled a similar experience when first I dared to go for a walk during the early stages of Covid lockdown. Then the streets were also quiet, empty, and bare. It felt quite surreal as I walked those streets, mindful of a heightened fear, concern, and uncertainty within me, and very aware of the pending unknown challenges which now lay before all of us. We were confronting the invasion of a virus for which we had no protection or vaccinations. We had suddenly been thrust from our 'normal' way of living into the global chaos of uncertainty. As I walked on that occasion, I was not really **conscious** of the silence yet now, as I recall its memory, I see it clearly and remember it vividly.

As I continued my walk on this crisp Saturday morning, my thoughts began to journey to other quiet streets. I remembered the bombed-out streets of Ukraine and those of other war-torn countries in

our world. I imagined all these people experiencing the same silence that I had experienced this morning yet holding it very differently. Theirs would be an eerie silence as they wait in anticipation and fear for the next bomb to hit or the next wave of gun fire to sound out and rain upon them. The silence of my peaceful streets and the silence of war-torn countries appear to be poles apart, yet, in both contexts the **silence simply IS**. It is ever present.

As I contemplate this, I realise that it is my conscious awareness of silence that makes all the difference. It is we as human beings, that sense, perceive, and interpret the silence – **the silence that IS**. For me, on this particular day it was peace-filled, and it drew me beyond myself towards a greater consciousness of Oneness. But for those who are caught up in life-threatening wars, silence holds fear, terror, and the anticipation of impending disaster. For these people silence is that precious moment to breathe, that moment of space between life and death. Their consciousness of silence becomes very limited due to the circumstances in which they find themselves. Yet there is a silent Oneness in their resilience and deep love for their country, family and friends.



I am reminded of another war long ago when on Christmas Eve a silence fell, and one brave soldier dared to sing the carol 'Silent Night'. Then slowly, out of the trenches, soldiers from both sides began to sing as One. The sacredness of that song enabled them to emerge from the trenches and experience, albeit for a short time, a peace that only silence could give and with it, a moment of Oneness before, sadly, they once again returned to their trenches.

'Silent Night, Holy Night, all is calm all is bright...' These words have for generations touched the hearts and souls of all peoples regardless of country, race, or culture. I sense that these same words have continued to touch and penetrate the human soul, revealing the very **essence** of goodness and kindness. This silent, sacred carol continues to touch the hearts of all humanity as, with its music of hope, it draws us beyond ourselves into a Oneness of Love.

I sense that as we continue to evolve, we will slowly be drawn into an ever-greater united consciousness of mind and heart. We will be drawn to see more clearly with 'far-seeing eyes' and **listen** more intensely and intuitively with ears that truly hear. We will become **enlightened** with a deeper wisdom, insight and understanding. Our creative imaginations will be stimulated to enable us to envision new horizons, new possibilities beyond our present comprehension. All this will require inner and outer silence.

For us now to be silent is to be still, to be quiet within, to focus, to centre. This can be an immense challenge in our overactive, consumer focused world today, yet it remains a call, an invitation. As evolutionary forces silently continue to give birth to new life through chaos, the **silence that IS** remains ever present. We are urged to mindfully draw this silence into our consciousness as we journey on in our everyday lives.

As I conclude, I invite you to reflect upon your own experiences of silence – the silences that have drawn you into a deeper Oneness within yourself and beyond yourself.

Some examples for me have been:

- The silence of snowflakes softly falling.
- The silence of gazing into a starry night, and so being drawn into the universe.
- The silence of autumn leaves quietly changing colour, falling, letting go.
- The silence of spring of small buds slowly emerging into life.
- The silence of gazing into the eyes of a loved one.
- The silence of 'at-oneness' with the pain of all sufferings.
- The enveloping silence of entering a sacred space.

As you consciously grow in awareness of the **Silence that IS** what words would you chose to describe this 'Silence'?

In this reflection I have noted the following:



S – Stillness

I – 'I' of my Being

L – Listening deeply

E – Enlightenment drawn into a deeper knowing

N – Nature's whisperings and revelations

C – Consciousness of mind and heart

E – Essence of Being

As we enter into our CEN time and allow ourselves to become immersed in the **Silence that IS**, perhaps we can hear, whispered within our breathing:

"I AM YOUR SILENCE BE STILL AND KNOW!"

Shh.... **listen...**

