



Allure Article – for Sunday, July 2009

Want Answers? Try Silence

If you ask for guidance but don't feel you receive the answers you need, perhaps there is something *less* you can do. Yes, I said less not more. We've been trained to seek solutions with active tools like researching, brainstorming, seeking advice from friends or experts. At the same time we constantly review various options in our thoughts. These are great tools but they have limits. They are all based in the intellect. What if there is an approach that can take you beyond the intellect? What if there is a simple way to receive brilliant answers, one that seems too easy to be true?

There is. It's called listening in silence. I'm not talking about merely keeping your mouth closed. It begins with that but is much deeper. Opening the profound silence inside yourself allows you to enter the space of the Eternal, the infinite—the place where all wisdom and understanding reside.

In general, we are experts at asking the Universe for things we want. We ask for help, for money, for our country to change—for resolution to the conflicts in our lives. We take time to pray. It is important to express our heart's desires, asking the Divine for help. Ironically most of us have not yet learned to take time to listen for the answers we are requesting.

We forget that prayer is only the beginning point for communication with the Divine. The next essential step is listening. I find it odd that it doesn't naturally occur to us that we need to give God an opportunity to respond. Good communication with anyone requires both speaking and listening. Most of us are better at speaking.

To listen you must be silent. Take note of the eerily similar composition of these two words: S-I-L-E-N-T and L-I-S-T-E-N. Both are composed of the same six letters. If we are to hear a Voice beyond our intellect, we must listen. Only when we are still can we listen, opening ourselves to inspiration, intuition, and deeper knowing. There is great wisdom in the words of the Hebrew sage Solomon ibn Gabirol, "The beginning of wisdom is silence. The second stage is listening." Spiritual leader Michael Beckwith adds: the first step in humility is listening. It is humbling to admit we don't know the answer and allow ourselves to be shown.

The secret to having a happier, more effortless journey through life is one most people haven't discovered: in the silence, the Universe is continually whispering to us. The answers we need are always available. We are usually too busy to be quiet and hear.

Physically we are busy, busy, busy. We fill our schedules with endless activity. When we do sit down to relax, we put on music or the TV; then the cell phone rings and, of course, we take the call. We have become accustomed to constant noise.

Even when we do find a moment for total quiet, our minds begin to chatter. They are busy, busy, busy too. Why are moments of silence so difficult? Could it be that we like stewing over our problems? Our

habits indicate we'd rather do that than listen for answers. Maybe we are so addicted to thinking and talking about our issues that we've come to find our identity in them.

Like children, we demand transcendent help in the form we think best. When this deliverance doesn't immediately appear, we give up, disappointed, and go back to our incessant mental fretting and figuring. Yet our problem is we are not truly willing to listen in silence. We are not giving the Universe opportunity to stretch our understanding with surprising new insights.

You may be smiling as you read this. It's a joke we are playing on ourselves, isn't it?

Just as we learned to practice diligent prayer, we must also establish a habit of stopping regularly to listen patiently and receive the answers we are offered. These answers will guide us to new levels of growth and transformation.

Answers arrive in silence. The art of quieting our minds and opening to moments of stillness takes practice. The rewards are immense. Not only do we begin to hear guidance, we also start to feel more relaxed and peaceful.

So, how do you begin to learn this art of listening? It's actually easier than you think.

There are many different paths to enter into silence. Here are a few. Experiment with them and find the combination that works best for you.

First, sit quietly for a moment and just breathe. Notice your breath. Give it your total focus. Experience it going in and out. Listen to it. Feel it. Become aware that your breath gives you life. Are you breathing or being breathed? If your mind begins to churn, just acknowledge the parade of thoughts marching through and release them by turning back to your breath.

You can take this breathing a step further. Turn your attention inside. Go deeper. Become aware of the energy moving inside your body. Feel it in your toes and fingertips. Feel it coursing through your limbs. Feel it in your belly, your chest and your head. Experience the energy of Life in your body. When you focus on your breath and body you are pulling your attention into the Present. You are offering your finite mind a way to quiet itself so that you can connect to the Infinite, the Mind of God.

Mantras are another tool. Choose a word or phrase that centers you. It may be the name you have for the Creator or a feeling you want to experience such as peace, hope, love, abundance, joy or light. It could be a short affirmation: I open. I surrender. I relax. Repeat this word or phrase between breaths. Say it softly to yourself or in your mind. Allow the words to move in a gentle rhythm with your breath. Do this for as long as it feels comfortable.

Music can also be an avenue into stillness. Find music that evokes harmony and peace in you. Allow yourself to enter the music and let the music enter you. As you listen, let yourself become the melody line. Experience the rhythm as a heartbeat.

Walking is another method of quieting yourself. Choose a slow or moderate pace. The goal is not to exercise but to center. Give your full attention to what you are seeing. Be awake and aware. Slow your thinking by focusing on each object as you pass. Notice color, texture, shape. Do not to judge; just enjoy with fresh eyes.

You can also practice a mindful walking that focuses on the body. Move as slowly as you possibly can. Put one foot in front of the other noticing the role each muscle plays as you engage it. Let yourself be fully absorbed in the process of walking.

There are no rules for using these practices. Let them show you how they want to be used. Have fun experimenting.

Times of silence create inner spaciousness. The inner storm begins to calm. The mental and emotional clutter begins to dissolve. In this new space wonderful gifts arise from deep within: clarity, creativity, fresh perspectives and even those brilliant “a-ha-s.”

If you long for answers, enter the silence each day. With regular practice you will find a timeless space that opens you to realms of new possibility. As you listen you will learn to hear the perfect next step for you to take in your journey.

Your assignment this week is to schedule five minutes each day to explore the techniques described above. Try a variety. What works well for you? What best helps you calm your racing mind?

Food For Thought

“...Take time to be still,
to be silent,
to allow God to fill you up
with deep peace and love.”

Mairead Corrigan Maguire, Nobel Peace Prize Winner

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