

In the book of Ecclesiastes we find this wise observation: "To everything there is a season and a time for every purpose under heaven...a time to speak, and a time to keep silence." In our complex way of life today, though many of us pride ourselves in the way in which we order our lives, I wonder how many of us really find the time or make the time to keep silence?

Everyone of us has a deep and compelling need for solitude, for quietness. Not only do we not realize this need, but we even poke fun at such statements as, "I want to be alone." Anyone who does not constantly mingle with people and sustain a perpetual babble of meaningless conversation is thought of as odd, unfriendly, a "terrible bore." Little do we realize that a person who wants to be alone might very well be doing the most important thing of his life, exercising his creative imagination, and conditioning his mind to an open relationship with the Infinite.

In the complexities of urban living most of us are surrounded by noise. The hammering of factories, the rumble of subways, the roar of traffic fill our ears from morning through the night. Our system becomes so accommodated to noise that we feel lonely and insecure when noise ceases. Many a city dweller has reacted to his first night in the country with the statement, "The quiet was so deafening that I couldn't sleep." Many of our modern inventions are designed to keep people from the "calamity" of being without sound entertainment. It is not uncommon to have a radio or television set in every room of a home. A man may not know where he is going, but he can watch the early show or the late movie while he walks there.

I have heard people complain that they never have any original ideas, that they never feel the flow of inspiration. I usually suggest, "Why not take time to get still and listen?" It is impossible for one who surrounds himself with activity and noise and a ceaseless babble of conversation to experience the inflow of creative ideas as it is for pure water to flow through a pipe that is carrying crude oil.

In the Gospel of John we find a reference to "the same light that lighteth every man coming into the world." The implication is that there is a common mind, a common source of inspiration within us all, and that each of us contains within him the same fountainhead of ideas and power that is occasionally revealed by the genius. Only a few act upon it, but the Truth is that man is a spiritual being with an inner potential guidance and strength. Anyone who cares to may cultivate the inner side of his life, and release a tremendous potential. Emerson says, "Man is an inlet and may become an outlet of all there is in God." However, this requires an habitual cultivation of the silence.

It could be said that the most common ailment of man that may take many forms is being out of tune with the inner side of life, with the basic rhythm of the universe. Thus, we lose our essential unity. So, we hurry and worry, struggle and strain. But this doesn't re-establish our atunement any more than racing your engine when it is out of gear will get you anywhere. It is true that many turn to prayer to correct the problems of life, but there is prayer and there is prayer. For the average person, prayer is an attempt to contact an outer agency through which his experiences can be righted. His prayer may be words, form, ritual, in which there is no letting go, no stillness, no inner contact.

There is a kind of prayer that is called "The Silence." It is inner prayer, not just a prayer of words, but a time of quiet realization, inner communion, stillness, oneness. And the interesting thing is that all the really great people of all time have unconsciously realized that to make the journey through life solitude and silence must be practiced. All knew that occasional retreat from the surface rippling of experiences into the hidden depths of silence within is the source of the best vistas, the newest ideas, the closest contact with the Great Heart of allness.

It is well to remind ourselves that the true power is inner power, and the true man is the inner man, and thus the true way of prayer is inner prayer. There is that within you that knows your needs. Jesus said, "The Father knoweth what things you have need of even before you ask him." And in the Old Testament we read, "Before they call, I will answer." Has it ever occurred to you that whenever you have a need or a problem of any kind, the answer, the guidance, the help is as close to you as your inmost self? We live too much at the circumference of life. We act and react on the level of the human, the material, the superficial. We feel strain and tension and mental and physical depletion because we are out of tune. The need is to relax and let go, to be still and know our spiritual unity is with God, to be charged and re-charged by the Creative Spirit of God within us.

Man is never quite mature in a spiritual sense until he cultivates the silence, this inward stillness, until he realizes his unity with the Infinite and takes time regularly to listen to the inner voice. Bennet Cerf said recently, "Nobody listens anymore." He was referring to the typical practice of conversation where, in order to sustain a perpetual babble, while one is talking the other is thinking of what he is going to say as soon as he has the chance. This is probably also true in the typical practice of prayer. For most people, prayer consists chiefly of a babble of words. We pray to God, we say our prayers. But how much prayer is listening? If we really believed "that the Father knoweth what things we have need of...", we would speak less and listen more. We act as if God were some great super man of the skies, a kind of absentee landlord who first must be found, and then must be motivated to come to our aid, by special appeals or by promises of future goodness.

Perhaps the words of prayer are not for God at all, but for ourselves to condition our minds and hearts to become receptive to the voice, the spirit, the feeling of the Infinite. Perhaps our words need to be directed to our errant thoughts, our tense minds, our worried hearts--to cultivate the true feeling of "letting go" so that we can truly "let God." This requires humility, relaxation, and a complete trust in the Truth of the inward reality. We must be willing to accept the fact that our own imperfect thoughts are insufficient, and that of ourselves we can do nothing. We must make a supreme effort to get completely relaxed, and this means finding the time and the place. And we must stir up the belief that we are spiritual beings, and that when we let go, God takes over. One important point relative to inner prayer--though we usually pray when we have a problem, we pray for help or healing or supply, the practice of the Silence has no other goal than the refreshment of spiritual breathing. It is based upon the concept that even as an electrical appliance cannot function unless it is plugged in, so man is inadequate and incomplete until he is in tune with the Presence within.

This evening as you retire, resolve to spend the last few moments "laboring for an inner stillness." Become relaxed and still, and then quietly breathe some words, such as, "There is nothing in my life but God. I live in God, and God expresses through me. Without God I can do nothing; with God I can do all things. I and the Father are one." Just relax; know that you too are one with the Father, that the Infinite Power of the Universe is your resource, your help in every need. Just relax and accept it. If you go to sleep tonight feeling this unitive relationship with the Infinite, you will awaken in the morning feeling like a new person. If you practice this Silence every day...you will be a new person.