Columns
Spirituality



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Great is the ability of social media to "link" people. It makes it so easy to get connected with friends and acquaintances of all seasons — from our childhood to the latest person we meet on the street. It's amazing to watch networks being created so easily and instantly. Yet, what amazes me is the quality of actual relationships that we have today! Those who are on Facebook enjoy having many "likes" and many "friends" on the virtual scene, yet in real life, there seems to be strong disconnects! There is fragmentation, separation and polarization all over!

One of the reasons for this fragmentation is the inner clutter and the outer noise, and we cannot escape both, given the fact that we live in societies. Unaware but true is the role of the entertainment industry in our lives, from dawn to dusk! Film, music, media, sports, museums, performance arts, cultural events, video games, night economy, etc., are "part" of our lives today and all these are "noisy." While entertainment and recreation offer relaxation, they come at a cost — the loss of interiority! Someone rightly said that the crisis of our age is not the daily challenges of life but rather the loss of interiority itself. While noise itself is not problematic, being perennially caught up in it is truly a problem, and the worst part is that many of us are not even aware that we are completely surrounded by the din caused by noise!

Is there no way out? Yes, there is, if only one is aware of both sound and silence. The present crisis is not permanent and can be reversed if we look for ways to move beyond noise. Entering into a state of silence and being in it may be initially difficult but not impossible. When one starts to "listen" to silence, an inner tranquility slowly emerges. By its very nature, silence is deep and vast, like the depths and vastness of the ocean. It unlocks creativity and unearths hidden innovative ideas. Immersing oneself in it transforms one's own perception of the self and others. Unfortunately, many think that seeking silence is futile as it cannot directly solve life's problems.



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However, what many fail to notice is though it may not come as a direct help in resolving issues, it sets the groundwork for it by clearing the inner clutter and making space for clear thinking.

A young lady once came to me for an informal chat with a disturbed mind. She was disturbed about her stammering, and this affected her social relationships and her profession negatively. She also confided about the inferiority complex that she went through and the negative impact it had on her. I listened to her patiently and gently invited her to calm down. Then, I shared with her a symbol from African mythology.

This symbol is of the "Sankofa" bird. The Witness Stones Project, sourcing The Spirituals Project of the University of Denver, provides more information. According to The Spirituals Project, the symbol "depicts a mythical bird flying forward with its head turned backward" and an egg in its mouth. The egg "represents the 'gems' or knowledge of the past" that can benefit the present and the future.

According to the Witness Stones Project, this concept is from the Asante Twi language of the Akan tribe of Western Africa (Ghana). As the project explains, the etymology of the word Sankofa is: *san* ("to return"); *ko* ("to go"); *fa* ("to fetch, to seek, and take"); the meaning of this word is: "to return and get it." It also means that as new learning takes place, "the knowledge of the past" must not be missed either. Just like this Sankofa bird, silence too reconnects us with our past and offers us wisdom. This wisdom cannot be obtained if one does not "recollect" and "reconnect" with oneself.

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This young lady was quick enough to understand the message. She realized that for new learning to take root in her, she would have to spend time in silence. Despite her hectic schedule, she managed to find time every day to disconnect herself from external noise and reconnect with her inner self. She slowly was able to recall her past with deep appreciation, and this helped her to launch out in a meaningful way into the future.

Gradually over the months, she was filled with awe for the progress that she had made in overcoming her inferiority complex. She was able to enter the realm of depth and interiority, in which she also discovered "vastness" within — a vastness that helped her to see the bigger picture of life, instead of being bogged down by small incidents of life. This bigger picture of life is available to us when we enter the depth and purity of silence and stillness.

One's pursuit of silence does not end in an in-depth living that benefits oneself alone. While it transforms the inner self and fills it with peace and compassion, it also makes it overflow into the external world. This compassion takes many forms, especially in addressing apathy and indifference, injustice and inequality. It expresses itself in creative ways to show solidarity and empathy with those in need. Thus seeking silence does not make one passive; instead, it brings new energy to act with greater clarity and kindness. This new energy to search and re-search for silence is limitless. We hear it in the words of the prophet and mystic Khalil Gibran:

Say not, "I have found the truth,"

but rather, "I have found a truth."

Say not, "I have found the path of the soul."

Say rather, "I have met the soul walking upon my path."

For the soul walks upon all paths.