

# Friends of Silence

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“Is there enough Silence for the Word to be heard?”

Dear friends~ It is early summer, and nearly nine o'clock until dusk finally pulls down the shades on the warm, humid day. It's well past bedtime for a Benedictine monk who will rise at two in the morning, then gather to pray at three-thirty. Yet he stands in the doorway to his dwelling, gently calling for the nameless stray cat he befriended as a kitten five years before. He hears her soft mewing nearby and finally notices where she's perched on a low wall not far off. "It's time for bed," he whispers into the dark.



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The small striped cat acknowledges him with her large eyes but doesn't budge. Instead, she turns her head toward the other side of the wall, like a finger pointing at whatever it is she wants to show him. The monk rubs his white stubbled chin, already braced for the inevitable two o'clock wake-up call not many hours away. With a flash of impatience, he considers scooping up the creature and hauling her off to their room. But she is resolute, he can see that. Her tail flicks periodically, and in the end curiosity compels the monk outside.

"What do you see?" he asks as he pats her head and settles onto the wall alongside her. All is still for a few moments, aside from the sleepy river trickling over occasional boulders and logs at the western edge of the property. When a small rustling shifts the brush below the wall, the cat leaps lithely to the ground to greet the visitor she awaited so eagerly—a young skunk who circles her with calm familiarity. The two exchange soft animal noises in acknowledgement. Less than a minute later, both are satisfied. Each one turns—the cat toward the monastery, and the skunk toward the cornfields and river.

The monk understands that he has been offered a gift: an invitation to wait, to receive, to be surprised. He smiles and follows his feline companion back to the room where they will rest for a few quiet hours. ~ Joy



**Lord, not you,  
it is I who am absent...**

**I stop  
to think about you, and my mind  
at once  
like a minnow darts away,  
darts  
into the shadows, into gleams that fret  
unceasing over  
the river's purling and passing.**

**Not for one second  
will my self hold still, but wanders  
anywhere,  
everywhere it can turn. Not you,  
it is I who am absent.**

**You are the stream, the fish, the light,  
the pulsing shadow,  
you the unchanging presence, in whom all  
moves and changes.**

**How can I focus my flickering, perceive  
at the fountain's heart  
the sapphire I know is there?**

~ Denise Levertov from "Flickering Mind" in  
*THE STREAM AND THE SAPPHIRE*

*... and how could anyone believe  
that anything in this world  
is only what it appears to be—*

~ Mary Oliver from "What Is It?" in *HOUSE OF LIGHT*

receptive mind and a more attuned ear, we become better listeners not only to nature but to each other. Silence can be carried like embers from a fire. Silence can be found, and silence can find you. Silence can be lost and also recovered. But silence cannot be imagined, although most people think so. To experience the soul-swelling wonder of silence, you must hear it.

~ Gordon Hempton in *ONE SQUARE INCH OF SILENCE*

I personally believe the noise pollution, both physically noise pollution, as well as our inner noise pollution, is probably one of the single biggest threats to our humanity. And to be able to quiet ourselves enough in whatever practice, and then in the fields of discovery of where we work or where we live, find quietude, so that the signal and antenna can even meet is, to me, the front line of the work. Because if we can't quiet ourselves, getting the instructions, knowing how to meet each other is actually impossible.

~ Azita Walton from "On Nature's Wisdom for Humanity" podcast interview with Krista Tippett

In the stillness of quiet, if we listen, we can hear the whisper of the heart giving strength to  
weakness, courage to fear, hope to despair.

~ Howard Thurman

For some time now it has seemed to me that two questions we should ask of any strong landscape are these: firstly, what do I know when I'm in this place that I can know nowhere else? And then, vainly, what does this place know of me that I cannot know of myself?

~ Robert Macfarlane in *THE OLD WAYS*



**As we are made by what moves us,  
willows pull the water up into their  
farthest reach which curves again  
down divining where their life begins.  
So, under travels up, and down and up again,  
and the wind makes music of what water was.**

~ Marie Howe from "The Willows"  
in *NEW AND SELECTED POEMS*

and bring it to fulfillment. Just as a drop of water, poured into a river, becomes one with the flowing waters, so may all I do become part of all that you do. So that those with whom I live and work may also be drawn to your love.

~ Gertrude of Helfta in *WOMANPRAYERS*

**...May what I do flow from me like a river,  
no forcing and no holding back,  
the way it is with children.**

**Then in these swelling and ebbing currents,  
these deepening tides moving out, returning,  
I will sing you as no one ever has,  
streaming through widening channels  
into the open sea.**

~ Rainer Maria Rilke from "Ich glaube an Alles noch nie Gesagte"  
in *RILKE'S BOOK OF HOURS: LOVE POEMS TO GOD*

Come, behold the works of the Beloved,  
how love does reign even in humanity's desolation.  
For the Beloved yearns for wars to cease, shining light into fearful hearts...  
"Be still and know that I am Love. Awaken! Befriend justice and mercy;  
Do you not know you bear my Love? Who among you will respond?"  
O Blessed One, You know all hearts, You are ever with us;  
may Love ever guide our lives!

~ Nan Merrill from her interpretation of "Psalm 46" in *PSALMS FOR PRAYING*

**Have you also learned that secret from the river; that there is  
no such thing as time? That the river is everywhere at the same  
time, at the source and at the mouth, at the waterfall, at the  
ferry, at the current, in the ocean and in the mountains,  
everywhere and that the present only exists for it, not the  
shadow of the past nor the shadow of the future.**

~ Hermann Hesse in *SIDDHARTHA*

There is a mystery about rivers that draws us to them, for they rise from hidden places and travel by routes that are not always tomorrow where they might be today. Unlike a lake or sea, a river has a destination and there is something about the certainty with which it travels that makes it very soothing, particularly for those who've lost faith with where they're headed.

~ Olivia Laing in *TO THE RIVER*

Lord, in the presence of your love, I ask that you unite my work with your great work,

**Let rain be rain.  
Let wind be wind.  
Let the small stone  
be the small stone.  
May the bird  
rest on its branch,  
the beetle in its burrow.  
May the pine tree  
lay down its needles.  
The rockrose, its petals.  
It's early. Or it's late.  
The answers  
to our questions  
lie hidden  
in acorn, oyster, the seagull's  
speckled egg.  
We've come this far, already.  
Why not let breath  
be breath. Salt be salt.  
How faithful the tide  
that has carried us—  
that carries us now—  
out to sea  
and back.**

~ Danusha Laméris, "Let Rain Be Rain"  
from *THE WONDER OF  
SMALL THINGS*

