

Extracts

Principle 1: Silence and Solitude

I commit to finding moments each day for silence and solitude, to make space for another voice to be heard, and to resist a culture of noise and constant stimulation.

Silence is never merely the cessation of words . . . Rather it is the pause that holds together indeed, it makes sense of all the words, both spoken and unspoken. Silence is the glue that connects our attitudes and our actions. Silence is the fullness, not emptiness; it is not absence, but the awareness of a presence.

-John Chryssavgis, *In the Heart of the Desert: The Spirituality of the Desert Fathers and Mothers*

The voice we are listening for is the voice of our own deepest selves and the voice of Spirit whispering in our hearts. This can get drowned out by the clatter and cacophony of daily life.

If you signed up for this online retreat, the title kindled a longing or a curiosity inside of you. How does one live as a monk in the world? Don't monks live cloistered away in monasteries? Perhaps you have a sense that this way of being can transform your heart and the world around you.....

One of the central hallmarks of the monk as an archetype is a commitment to contemplative ways of being in a frenetic world. Instead of being carried away by the daily demands of modern living, the monk makes space for holy pauses and the silence which John Chryssavgis describes above as holding everything together. Contemplative moments are an act of resistance to a world that judges our value by our productivity and achievements rather than who we are.....

In *Meditations of the Heart*, prophet and mystic Howard Thurman writes, “As we listen, floating up through all the jangling echoes of our turbulence, there is a sound of another kind – A deeper note which only the stillness of the heart makes clear. It moves directly to the core of our being. Our questions are answered, our spirits refreshed . . . The moment of pause, the point of rest, has its own magic.” Thurman was a powerful proponent of the magic of rest and the ways it puts us in touch with the “deeper note” or as he wrote elsewhere, “the sound of the genuine” within our hearts. It is only through these sacred pauses that we can listen carefully enough to know if we are Spirit-directed, rather than being pulled by the agendas of others. Through the holy pause we can return to deeper alignment with who we are called to be.

Thomas Merton described the different levels of silence we might experience from tongue to imagination to mind: “When your tongue is silent, you can rest in the silence of the forest. When your imagination is silent, the forest speaks to you, tells you of its unreality and of the Reality of God. But when your mind is silent, then the forest becomes magnificently real and blazes transparently with the Reality of God.” (from *A Year with Thomas Merton*) It takes practice and regular commitment to cultivate this kind of profound inner silence where we can see Reality with new eyes and hear it with new ears.

Just for today claim a window of time - even ten minutes is enough to begin - and rest into an experience of stillness. Connect gently with your breath, breathing in the life- sustaining breath of the spirit, breathing out and releasing whatever distracts us from this moment. As thoughts or anxieties arise, gently release them, and return to this moment. The invitation is toward both an outer and inner silence. Notice the way silence nourishes you and consider ways to give yourself this gift each day.

