

Echoes of Silence

Abílio Oliveira

There is in silence such a profound wisdom that sometimes it becomes the most perfect answer.

Fernando Pessoa



Silent Vigilante.

In the beginning was the Silence and in his mantle, cradled in the breath of the Eternal, the Word was manifested.

These words could preface any Holy Scriptures. They are associated with Pessoa's reflection, where silence conveys a full, ancient wisdom, and not an absence. To listen to it, it is necessary to stop listening to worldly absurdities and learn to observe with closed eyes.

In a world of noise, reheated ideas, automatic speeches and forms of thought tainted and repeated to exhaustion (or submission), appreciating silence and reacting silently is a gesture of resistance, lucidity and even reverence — it is a retreat to rediscover the essential. Living in silence requires effort, as we are pressured to give our opinion and react... Without having a single idea of his own. To be silent is to give back to words and to listen to their value. Wisdom is dynamic. It results from what one meditates, concentrates and intuit, and not from what one knows, memorizes or repeats. It requires love, willingness to learn and receptivity to renew and evolve, continuously, in silence, in tune with plenitude (which is achieved internally). To share at the right time.

Silence is also a mirror: it reflects fears, truths or hesitations. There are those who fear it because it forces intimate confrontation with oneself and loneliness, but it is there that discernment is born. Silence requires total presence. It is the temple of listening, where 'the other' exists without interruption or separation. So, silence is humility in the face of mystery. Gratitude. I long to touch the Essence

and recognize oneself in it. It is the highest answer, because in the face of the Mystery any word is insufficient. True understanding is born of silence, in the midst of which the Soul scientifics and inspires.

Primal Silence – From Chaos to Order

It is said that before the Word, or the vibration that separated the heavens from the earth, there was silence. Not as an inert void, but rather as a matrix of possibilities – a cosmic womb where chaos effervesces before order is built in it. Physics describes it as a “quantum vacuum,” an undifferentiated plenitude where all matter and energy existed in potency. Certain spiritualist traditions focused on this principle millennia before Jesus Christ: the *Rig Veda* sings of a state of absolute rest, or “a breath without wind”; Genesis speaks of the Spirit of God who hovered silently over the primordial waters, to which the philosopher Max Picard alludes (in the book “World of Silence”): Silence is the beginning of all things. Before the word, there is silence and after the word, there is silence again.

The metaphor of clay in the hands of the potter – present in Plato (*khôra*, in the dialogue of the *Timaeus*), in Rumi's Sufism (reed flute) or in Jung's psychology (*Unus Mundus*) – advocates silence in order to capture ideas and conceive all forms, as a requirement of creation. It is from the primordial silence that chaos emerges – not as a negative disorder, but as the starting point (with the raw material) for the birth of order, from which it generates everything. Chaos theory in modern physics confirms that seemingly random systems cover up subtle orders. Chaos is fertile. Without it, order would be only repetition, boredom and death. Take DNA (deoxyribonucleic acid) – the spiral staircase, or double helix, formed by sequences of four chemical bases (Adenina_A, Timina_T, Citosina_C and Guanina_G) – an organic compound whose molecules contain the genetic instructions that coordinate the development and functioning of all living beings, in a unique structure in each being. Silently, from an apparent chaos, an infinite diversity of code is generated – organized – that allows each being to have unique attributes.

In human life, crises, confusions and ruptures are like dense silences that precede new inner orders. Just as it is in the darkness that the light is most noticeable. Sometimes, the encounter with anguish precedes genuine creativity. The artist faces the score, the blank sheet or canvas – a silence that frightens – and then, through the chaos of sounds, traces or scribbles, gives it an organized form and arrives at the work. Absolute silence would be mortal, but living silence oscillates and breathes, like the musical interval that is not the absence of sound, but its intimate breathing. Taoism (described in Lao Tzu's “Tao Te Ching”) designates this movement as *wu-wei* –a non-action or effortless action, which involves acting in harmony with the natural flow of the universe, avoiding coercive force, stress, and unnecessary resistance.

Thus silence is the house of all beginnings, the condition of all emergency. He teaches not to fear chaos (for it is silence in motion) and not to idealize static order (for true order is the harmony of opposing tensions).

Types of Silence

To classify silence is daring. “Silence is not said, it is silenced” – wrote the poet Alberto de Lacerda. It is not an absence of words, it is an active space of contemplation, where attention is focused on the core of life. Even knowing that the types of silence can be mixed, complete or superimposed, remembering Bernard Dauenhauer, Bernard Picard and Erling Kagge – thinkers who wrote about the nature and relevance of silence, comparing it with mundane noises – we notice some types of silence:

Sensory—in the absence of measurable sound stimuli (e.g., in anechoic chambers (or without echo), deep caves, or snow-capped mountains). It is culturally variable: in Finland it may be comfortable, but in a Mediterranean country it will be hostile.

Psychological – cessation of the mental flow, by meditation or deep concentration; it can be lucid (meditative) or opaque (depressive). It is associated with states of inner peace and alertness.

Relational – between people, with a communicational meaning, revealing dependence, intimacy or tension – is associated with complicity, tension, respect, seduction, power or therapy.

Spiritual – encounter with the divine or the ineffable, refers to inner transformation, in various traditions, e.g., such as *hesychia* (Greek term for inner peace, adopted in Christianity), *satori* (term associated with enlightenment in Zen–Buddhism), or *wu-wei* (in Taoism).

Creative – tension that precedes, assists, or culminates in the creative act. Silence for inspiration to germinate – noise or agitated mind – hardly accesses the deepest levels of creativity.

Pathological – arising from fear, trauma, violence or censorship, by suffering and not by choice, like an invisible shackle – linked e.g. to selective muteness, domestic abuse or totalitarian regime.

Ecological – the silence of healthy nature, threatened by noise pollution. Bernie Krause, musician and ecologist, found that half of the natural sounds of the 60s are no longer heard. Sustaining the ecosystem and biodiversity is preserving human and planetary health.

Therefore, there are many ways to perceive silence. A cave can be sensory for some, spiritual for others, or pathological for those with claustrophobia. We have to understand the importance it has for each one of us, what opportunity and role we attribute to it, how we seek it, use it or neglect it. Without silence, without listening to each other, will we be able to hear anything?

Solitude, Immensity, Peace – Proface of Silence?

Solitude, immensity and peace are closely associated in the demand for silence. Chosen solitude opens the portal of immensity in search of a peace that is not found in a crowd. It takes courage, determination and emotional intelligence to start this search, without fear or hesitation.

Loneliness can be torment or privilege. Abandonment, contempt, indifference, forced isolation or social exclusion generates pain, sadness or anguish, not always easy to integrate and overcome, with a severe impact on health. It translates a silence that oppresses or suffocates. Chosen solitude, however, is a natural necessity or discipline. Some mystics, monks or hermits seek it to find God and not out of misanthropy. Already in the Middle Ages, solitude was associated with “feeling complete” and *solitude* translated the experience of being one with God. The loneliness that is essential on the evolutionary path. Ester Bucholz (in “The Call of Solitude”), emphasizes how it helps us to understand ourselves and not to remain isolated, even from ourselves. An ancestral parable also alludes to this: the human being was born to live in a group, however, the meaning of living in a community can only be discovered in the company of solitude. And Jean Genet associates it with liberation: “Solitude is not granted to me, I am led to it by an interest in beauty, I want to define myself in it, to outline its contours, to emerge from the confusion. In short, to put myself in order.” I'm better off with 'the other' if he's well 'with me', in silence, and that's a premise for knowing how to love.

Immensity is when silence pierces the vastness, suggesting a cosmic sensation – the shiver when looking at the starry sky, the stunning landscape or the endless ocean. The philosopher Gaston Bachelard reminded us that the contemplation of the vast acts as an expander of the soul. We feel small, but in a liberating way, because something broader than the ego blossoms and expands. The immensity induces an awe, a deep admiration, humility and respect, with some awe and a sense of smallness before the vast and grandiose – like an ocean of silence.

Peace is not the absence of conflict, it is a calm that does not depend on circumstances. Unlike boredom (a negative emptiness) or boredom, peace is quiet plenitude. We speak of physiological peace (relaxed body), psychological peace (mind without rumination) and spiritual peace (feeling of unity, that everything is or will be fine). Peace is a dynamic balance with chaos, in an infinite spiral – if

we are at peace with ourselves, we will more easily have peace at home, in the organization, in the community, in the country, in the world... Peace is a path to universal harmony.

Solitude, immensity and peace symbolize an inner ecology that projects us into the infinite cosmos – solitude is the soil, immensity the horizon and peace the environment, in and through which the inner voice emerges. In short, solitude connects us to ourselves and reveals to us the importance of 'the other', immensity reveals 'our place', without self-centeredness, peace is the breathable atmosphere that makes contemplation and life itself possible. In the realm of silence emerges the voice of the soul, the fifth empire spoken of by poets and mystics, the breath that allows us to create, transcend and love.

[Tip ☺: Try moments of solitude (20 to 40 minutes without screens, e.g., relaxed, running or walking), immensity (with open horizons, contemplating the sky) and peace (with diaphragmatic breathing, acceptance, shared silence).]

The Inspiring Silence – The Voice of the Soul

The aforementioned expression, “voice of the soul”, is millennial. Plato spoke of the *daimon*, a silent voice that listened, or an intermediate spiritual entity between gods and men. In Hinduism, the *ātman* is the deep self that is listened to with the senses silenced. St. Augustine designated the voice of God as a *speaking silence*. Jung called it the *self*, the archetypal center that is perceived in silence. So the poet R. M. Rilke suggested: dive into yourself and probe the depths where your life springs.

Something that neuroscience proves: deep creativity occurs when the brain is in default *mode network* (DMN), the resting network that is activated when we wander silently. This can result in *insights*—unexpected connections between distant memories that project themselves into 'visionary' ideas. Even in the shower or in a race we have seen how pure ideas emerge when the brain roams free. The voice of the soul is also revealed in these 'intuitions', fragile and profound, which require silence to listen and great lucidity to perceive. Several historical examples confirm this: Newton isolated himself in silence during the plague and discovered gravitation; Beethoven, deaf, composed symphonies adorned with pauses and empty spaces; John Cage composed 4'33" of absolute silence; C. D. Friedrich created meditative and contemplative landscapes with an intense existential and spiritual silence; and Einstein found himself traveling in a silent ray of light.

The voice of the soul—speaks quietly, once and is silent—differs from the noisy ego, which speaks loudly and is repetitive. Silence allows us to observe thoughts like clouds – some pass, say nothing to us, others stay, make us reflect – and between them, the clear sky,

where the *anima* breathes. But, after listening (or *immersing*), it is necessary *to emerge*, to translate silence into word, image, invention, gesture or work. Silence that does not generate action can become sterile or fade away. Perhaps this is why some people spend time in creative silence (in various areas of activity) – the musician Arvo Pärt spent years without producing and one day emerged with the *tintinnabuli* style (from the Latin “bells” or “bells”), a minimalist music made of long pauses and solitary notes.

The inner voice is the most precious experience that silence offers. One listens alone, to hold back the noise and pay attention without knowing what one will hear. Anyone who listens to it, even for a mere instant, knows that it is worth it. Because that voice, as Thoreau said, is the very tone of the universe.

Immerse and Emerge – From Dive to Action

In a civilization of noise (physical and symbolic), forgetting tiredness, facing emptiness (between fears, insecurities and doubts), ignoring the opinion of others, facing boredom and immersing oneself in silence, is – more than a refuge – once again, a courageous act.

Some practices of meditation, concentration and visualization – which would require much more than this text to be properly addressed – allow us to immerse ourselves in silence and gather in it the fruits that, only in its bosom, can be found: at the physiological level (by reducing cortisol, or improving sleep), psychological (reducing anxiety, increasing creativity), spiritual (connection to something greater – remembering that religion comes from *religare*, which presupposes the effort to re-establish the connection with the sacred or the divine, uniting the material and spiritual world) and relational (with improved listening, greater tolerance to ambiguity). Silence is a plunge that regenerates—to inhabit the world more fully and inspired, whether to create, heal, give, and evolve, or to contribute to a greater good, a joint project, humanity as a whole.

Introverted or traumatized personalities can immerse themselves without emerging—they see silence as a cesspool rather than a spring (like the hermit who won't come back, the patient who can't speak for years, or the artist who stares hopelessly at the canvas without painting). Silence is an immersive experience: we dive to catch shells, but if we stay at the bottom, we die. It is necessary to go up and share them. This means translating stillness into visible language. This can happen through speech (e.g., when the word, not reactive, is born from listening and can save a relationship), action (in non-impulsive gestures, e.g., when a leader is silent before deciding, or a therapist is silent while the patient cries), creation (in the work that is born of calm, be it a poem, melody, painting, play, algorithm

or invention) or love (loving without possessiveness, with small but touching silent gestures: making coffee, listening without interrupting, holding hands, or simply being present).

We know, from our own experience, how essential it is to have silence in some situations – e.g., when we want to concentrate, we have something important to do or decide, in a family discussion, we feel excited, before an exam, a test, a competition or a work. The action to be taken can involve many people or a global destiny, which increases the responsibility to decide lucidly. Gandhi was an example that it is possible to have regular days of silence, and to emerge with speeches of immense moral force.

There are practices that we can try to follow in everyday life, e.g., pause 3 seconds before responding to someone; maintain 1 or 2 minutes of silence before an important conversation; write or draw right after meditating; do a good deed, in silence; quiet moments in support groups; and many others. Immersion and emergence are like the diastole and systole of spiritual presence. The sensible person cultivates this cycle and knows that silence is a means or way of affirmation.

From Emptiness to Wholeness – The Spiral of Life

Is it possible to conceive of nothingness? No. Can anyone imagine the void? No. There is always something. A tension. A presence. A while. A space. A vibration. An echo. Since emptiness is philosophically inconceivable, unknown, why does it often cause terrible fear? Perhaps this is also why we have so much hesitation, reluctance or difficulty in getting to know ourselves, in understanding who we really are, where we come from or what we have to accomplish.

“Know thyself” (*gnōthi seauton*) is an ancient maxim, divulged by Socrates – engraved on the portico of the Temple of Apollo, in Delphi, Greece, it was the first advice given to pilgrims, warriors, everyone: before consulting the oracle about the future, the human being must scrutinize, in silence, his own nature, limitations and qualities. António Alçada Baptista, one of 'our' illustrious writers, alluded to this in a simple, brilliant and enigmatic way, in the *Preface* to ‘my’ book “Olhar Interior”: “Lembro-me muitas vezes de Simão, o Mago, um gnóstico, que criou uma heresia que não me deixa indiferente. Ele dizia que nem todos temos alma, que nascemos com uma pequena chama que podemos ou não alimentar e desenvolver. Quando não fazemos isso, ela apaga-se e retorna ao nada” (<https://abiliooliveira.weebly.com/livros.html>).

Emptiness is not absence, it is something that remains or is, that pulsates, invisible (to our gaze), that develops, expands and transforms. Silently. Strictly speaking, it is pure potentiality, where all forms, all faculties, and all things can be generated, from the tiniest being to the infinity of the most magnificent universe—in the splendor of manifested plenitude.

Nāgārjuna (Buddhist philosopher and monk) taught that all things are void of independent existence, as they always exist in interdependence. Thus, emptiness is the condition of plenitude: a thing is only complete because it is empty of a fixed essence. Meister Eckhart adapted this idea to the Western Christian tradition, stating that “in order for God to enter the soul, the soul must become empty of all creatures.” The mutation of emptiness into plenitude is not made in a straight line, nor in a circle, but in a spiral – the emptiness that seemed to be a lack reveals itself, in silence, a source.

The spiral is an ancient symbol of evolution, continuous growth, and expansion of consciousness – the mathematical Fibonacci spiral (linked to the golden ratio, approximately 1,618) represents perfect harmony in the evolution of shapes, present from galaxies to the most diverse forms that we find in Nature, such as simple sea shells. Due to our natural inclination for harmonious forms, we have also represented this magical spiral sequence in different achievements, namely in art, architecture, design and even in the psychology of behavior.



Note that the circle repeats indefinitely, while the spiral passes through the same planes at progressively higher levels – one advances a little, after which one retreats, but in the next advance one arrives a little higher, deeper or farther than at the point reached by the previous advance (a bit like the rising tide – there is a larger wave and a series of shorter waves follows, until at the beginning of a new series comes a wave even bigger than the one that occurred in the previous cycle, and so on, until the tide reaches its maximum and fills the beach – in a given cycle, of tides, in an infinite spiral).

Biologist Ilia Prigogine has shown that open systems, such as living organisms, evolve through fluctuations (or pauses) and chaos that gradually lead them to more complex levels of organization—by dissipating energy and entropy into the environment—mathematically justifying biological self-organization and the universal tendency toward order. Silence works like those pauses that allow progress or evolutionary leap. Each descent into deep silence increases our ability to be in the void without fear, to listen to the soul without haste.

Darkness – as an existential crisis, a difficult loss or grief, a painful breakup or failure, or a lack of meaning in life – is often experienced as hostile silence. But when crossing the dark night (as St. John of the Cross wrote), without fleeing into the noise or confusion, one

realizes that it invites us to dismantle false certainties, insipidities, illusions and dissolve the ego. The light does not return from the outside, it emerges from the bosom of emptiness, passes through the darkness and bursts forth crystalline and regenerating. As Rumi sang, “The wound is the place through which the light enters you.”

Even “music, as an art of sound, owes as much to silence as to notes. However, the pause is not a void between sounds – it is a living organ of the composition, because without silence, the music would be continuous noise, where nothing would stand out. It is silence that gives rhythm, contour, breathing, and emotion. Silence is not the opposite of music, it is its habitat. For C. Debussy, “music is the silence that is found between the notes”. Each note emerges from the silence, vibrates for an instant, and submerges itself again into silence. Their beauty lies in their relationship with what surrounds them – before and after, it is silence – giving meaning to the emerging melody. Aldous Huxley would have thought about this when he said: “After silence, music is the closest thing to expressing the inexpressible”.

Plenitude is not having everything, it is being present, or, ontologically, it is being everything. Silence, more than a means, is fullness itself in power and action. When we are deeply silent, nothing is missing. The breath and the moment are enough. David Steindl-Rast said, “Gratitude is the key to wholeness,” to happiness and transforms our perception. It is important to value the present moment as a gift, through the daily practice of stopping, observing and acting with kindness and gratitude. And gratitude only resonates in silence. For António Ramos Rosa, the poem is born from silence and gives him a voice: “Silence has no end, it is an island without a beach where what matters most is never to arrive”. Silence is a pure space from which word and life emerge. Immortal silence is not destiny, it is the journey seen from within.

Friendly Silence – Silent Watcher

Is silence the beginning of listening and not the end of sound? Is it the fullness of attention and not the emptiness of the mind? Is it the intimate presence of two and not the absence of connection? Is it a call for freedom? “No Silêncio – só no Silêncio – no vazio que é repleto – só no vazio que é repleto – no nada que é tudo – só no nada que é tudo – há Liberdade” (Morya, no livro “Sementes e Pérolas”, CLUC, 1989, p. 9).

“The continuous breathing of the world is what we hear and call silence,” wrote Clarice Lispector. Here we are. From emptiness to eternal plenitude, on the celestial path, here, but with the mind on High, in this spiral of life, on a spiritual path, inspired by the echoes

of the immortal silence that encourages and pacifies us, in a beautiful endless story, respecting the divine, with gratitude for what is given to us, with faith and commitment for a better world! For God willed it so! Well, we want it that way!

Do you really want to know what silence is? Sit with me for about fifteen minutes, without talking, without cell phone, just breathing in and out, feeling the air enter the lungs and exit after internal filtration, quietly and deeply). We can look at each other, quietly, or remain with our eyes closed. Then you may find an answer.

For me, silence is the Whole that whispers when nothing roars anymore, the bond that connects us to the sacred essence, the voice that awakens to the beauty of life. And life is all that remains when nothing else remains.

Confucius summed it up this way: “Silence is a friend that never betrays.” Fernando Pessoa is absolutely right, there is in silence a profound science, the unique and ancestral *Ageless Wisdom*, which in us, by us or through us, can become the most perfect answer – if we allow it, are vigilant and are prepared to think, feel and act.

Planet Earth, July 12, 2026

Abílio Oliveira