Silence is Golden

If one cannot say something useful, one should keep “noble silence”.
(Buddha)

One of the lessons of history is that nothing is often a good thing to do and always a clever thing to say.
(Will Durant, 1885-1981, American historian)
In futile discussion is much poison; 
in much talk is great mischief. 
Keep your mouth shut; suffer all in silence; 
and remember the Name Unfathomable. 
(Kabir)

The sage does not talk, the talented ones talk, and the stupid ones argue.  
(King Tingan)

The wise man does not argue; he remains silent and goes quietly on his path.  
(White Eagle)

Silence is an answer to a wise man.  
(Euripides)

Bear kindly when others chatter. Be not irritable: 
Calm men do not answer back.  
(Buddha)
Let a fool hold his tongue and he will pass for a sage. 
I have often regretted my speech, never my silence. 
(Publius Syrus)

Better to remain silent and be thought a fool than to speak out and remove all doubt. 
(Abraham Lincoln also attributed to Mark Twain)

Wise men speak because they have something to say; 
fools because they have to say something.  
(Plato)

Happy is the hearing man; unhappy the speaking man. 
(Ralph Waldo Emerson)

Silence is not always a sign of wisdom, 
but babbling is ever a mark of folly. 
(Benjamin Franklin)

To speak and to speak well are two things. 
A fool may talk, but a wise man speaks. 
(Ben Jonson)

Fine clothes may disguise, but silly words will disclose a fool. 
(Aesop)
Take your choice: talk about others and be a gossip
or talk about yourself and be a bore.
(Laurence J. Peter)

Most people have a furious itch to talk about themselves and are restrained only
by the disinclination of others to listen. Reserve is an artificial quality that is
developed in most of us but as the result of innumerable rebuffs.
(W. Somerset Maugham)

An egotist will always speak of himself, either in praise or censure,
but a modest man ever shuns making himself the subject of his conversation.
(Jean La Bruyere)

We would rather speak ill of ourselves than not talk about ourselves at all.
(Francois La Rochefoucauld)

We say little, when vanity does not make us speak.
(Francois La Rochefoucauld)

Let not the disciplined one boast nor speak for personal motives nor from pride,
nor use provocative words.
(Buddha)
Choose silence of all virtues, for by it you hear other men's imperfections, and conceal your own.
(George Bernard Shaw)

Silence is the most perfect expression of scorn.
(George Bernard Shaw)

It is always assumed by the empty-headed, who chatter about themselves for want of something better, that people who do not discuss their affairs openly must have something to hide.
(Honore de Balzac)

“I have learned silence from the talkative, tolerance from the intolerant, and kindness from the unkind; yet strangely, I am ungrateful to these teachers”

Kahlil Gibran

It was mortifying to find how strong the habit of idle speech may become in one’s self. One need not always be saying something in this noisy world.
(Sarah Orne Jewett)

Quiet and silence is a form of power. Thoughtful and wise people are not talkative people.
(Dr T.P.Chia)
I have found out in the course of a long public life that the things I did not say never hurt me.  
(Calvin Coolidge)

Calvin Coolidge was a man of few words. Upon the sudden death of President Warren G. Harding in 1923, Coolidge became the 30th President of the United States and earned the nickname “Silent Cal.”

Often called the “most negative” and “remote” of U.S. Presidents, Coolidge has also been called the “most accessible” of U.S. Presidents. When asked by successful businessman Bernard Baruch why he did not talk much during interviews, Coolidge explained, “Well, Baruch, many times I say only ‘yes’ or ‘no’ to people. Even that is too much. It winds them up for twenty minutes more.”

In a story recounted by First Lady Grace Coolidge, a young woman once sat next to the President at a dinner party. She told him that she made a bet she could get him to have a conversation of three words or more. According to the First Lady, Coolidge, without even looking at the young woman, quietly responded, “You lose.”

Put a bridle on thy tongue; Set a guard before thy lips, lest the words of thine own mouth destroy thy peace. On much speaking cometh repentance, but in silence is safety.  
(William Drummond)

Always have something to say. The man who has something to say and who is known never to speak unless he has, is sure to be listened to.  
(Dale Carnegie)

Men of few words are the best men.  
(William Shakespeare)

Never miss a good chance to shut up.  
(Will Rogers)
In one’s early years one learns to speak, and in old age one learns to keep quiet, and such is a person’s great fault: that he learns to speak before knowing how to keep quiet. (Rabbi Nachman)

Gray hairs are signs of wisdom if you hold your tongue, speak and they are but hairs, as in the young. (Rabindranath Tagore)

- A vow of silence is a religious vow, usually taken in a monastic context, to maintain silence. Known as Mauna in Hinduism, Jainism, and Buddhism, the practice is integral to Christian and Islamic traditions as well. Apart from that it is also followed as a spiritual practice.

It was said of Abbot Agatho that for three years he carried a stone in his mouth until he learned to be silent. (Thomas Merton)

The man who finds God loses his speech. (Mohammed)

One of the things that keep us at a distance from perfection is, without doubt, our tongue. (Saint Francis de Sales)
Keep silence for the most part, and speak only when you must, and then briefly. (Epictetus)

You cannot practice too rigid a fast from the charms of worldly talk. (Fenelon)

Make A Vow Of Silence

Slaying quiet for even short periods of time builds willpower and self-control because you exert force on your will by not giving in to the impulse to talk. To improve your personal discipline in this aspect, keep a vow of silence for one hour a day over the next seven days. Within a matter of days, you will feel a sense of mastery and strength growing within you.

The best way to cut your problems in half is to learn how to keep your mouth closed. (Anonymous)

The four principal verbal non-virtues are lying, divisive talk, harsh speech, and senseless chatter. (Dalai Lama)

It requires more good judgment to know when to talk, than what to say. (Josh Billings)
There is nothing in the world better for the perfection of the soul than the curbing of speech.
(Samuel Agnon)

Once I knew a man whose ears were exceedingly keen, but he was dumb. He had lost his tongue in a battle. I know now what battle that man fought before the great silence came.
(Kahlil Gibran)

With all progress this happens, that speech becomes less, and finally ceases in a nobler silence.
(Ralph Waldo Emerson)

True eloquence consists in saying all that need be said and no more.
(Francois La Rochefoucauld)

We seldom regret talking too little, but very often talking too much. This is a well-known maxim which everybody knows and nobody practices.
(Jean de la Bruyere)

I am very little inclined on any occasion to say anything unless I hope to produce some good by it.
(Abraham Lincoln)

If you can control the two sense-organs, namely, one between the two lips and the other between the two thighs, I shall stand for you in the Lord’s Court.
(Mohammed)
Keep the golden mean between saying too much and too little.
  (Publilius Syrus)

Wise men, when in doubt whether to speak or to keep quiet, give themselves the benefit of the doubt, and remain silent.
  (Napoleon Hill)

Give every man thy ear, but few thy voice.
  (William Shakespeare)

Tranquil sage indeed is he who can control his speech.
  (Buddha)

He who knows the Tao does not care to speak of it; And he who is ever willing to speak of it does not know it.
  (Lao-Tzu)

It is a great misfortune neither to have enough wit to talk well nor enough judgment to be silent.
  (Jean de la Bruyere)

Be silent or let thy words be worth more than silence.
  (Pythagoras)

Let silence take you to the core of life.
  (Rumi)
Learn to be silent.
Let your quiet mind listen and absorb.
(Pythagoras)

It is better wither to be silent, or to say things of more value than silence.
Sooner throw a pearl at hazard than an idle or useless word;
And do not say a little in many words, but a great deal in a few.
(Pythagoras)

Let thy speech be better than silence, or be silent.
(Dinoysius the Elder)

Silence is the universal refuge, the sequel to all dull discourses and all foolish acts,
a balm to our every chagrin, as welcome after satiety as after disappointment…
(Henry David Thoreau)

Courage is what it takes to stand up and speak;
Courage is also what it takes to sit down and listen.
(Winston Churchill)

I will begin to speak when I have that to say
which had not better be unsaid.
(Cato the Younger)

If everybody thought before they spoke,
the silence would be deafening.
(George Barzan)
Every kind of beast and bird, and of serpents and the rest, is tamed and has been tamed by mankind; but the tongue no man can tame - a restless evil, full of deadly poison. With it we bless God the Father; and with it we curse men, who have been made after the likeness of God. Out of the same mouth proceed blessing and cursing. These things, my brethren, ought not to be so. (Saint James)

Nature has given us two ears, two eyes, and but one tongue, to the end that we should hear and see more than we speak. (Epictetus)

"When a man knows the solitude of Silence, and feels the joy of quietness, he is then free from fear and he feels the joy of the Dharma."  
~ Buddha

Talkative people listen to no one, for they are ever speaking. And the first evil surrounding those who do not know the meaning of silence is that they hear nothing. (Epictetus)

Blessed is the man who, having nothing to say, abstains from giving evidence of the fact. (George Eliot)
In each man’s mouth at birth is born an axe, wherewith the fool who speaks ill cuts himself.  
(Buddha)

Guard your tongue, for it is highly dangerous; Unguarded words can cause terrible distress. 
A single bad word can destroy a vast quantity of good.  
A wound caused by fire will eventually heal; But a wound caused by the tongue leaves a scar that never heals.  
(Valluvar)

Abstaining from lying, from tale bearing, from harsh language and from vain talk – this is called common-sense speech. It yields worldly fruits, it brings good results.  
(Buddha)

Speak when you are angry and you will make the best speech you will ever regret.  
(Ambrose Bierce)

Remember not only to say the right thing in the right place, but far more difficult still, to leave unsaid the wrong thing at the tempting moment.  
(Benjamin Franklin)

The kindest word in all the world is the unkind word, unsaid.
The bell never rings of itself;  
Unless someone handles or moves it,  
it is silent.  
(Plautus)

One should speak what is true; one should speak what is sweet;  
One should not speak what is true if it is not sweet or what is sweet if it is false;  
this is the ancient law.  
(Manu)

Keep your mouth closed. Guard your senses.  
Temper your sharpness. Simplify your problems.  
Mask your brightness. Be at one with the dust of the earth.  
This is primal union.  
(Lao-Tzu)

I do not act, people change by themselves.  
I like to remain quiet.  
(Lao-Tzu)
An enormous amount of energy is wasted by excessive talking. The energy that is spent talking should be carefully and vigilantly conserved and utilized for spiritual practices and in divine contemplation. The organ of speech distracts the mind considerably. A talkative man cannot dream of having peace even for a short time. (Swami Sivananda)

Whereas speaking distracts, silence and work collect thoughts and strengthen the spirit. (Saint John of the Cross)

“SPEAK, only if it improves upon the SILENCE”

If you want to feel God's guidance in your life, don't waste time talking idly with others. Silence is the altar of the Spirit. (Yogananda)

Calm silence, sincerity, and courteous words, whether one is agreeing or disagreeing with others, mark the person who knows how to behave. (Yogananda)
Sant Kirpal Singh

Talking is easy. Doing is difficult.
Nothing is gained by talking,
but by doing one may progress on the Path.

Think twice before you speak. "Will this word I am uttering carry an effect?"
If there is any controversy, quietly follow what the other one is saying.
If you are angry, mind that, never say anything.
Keep quiet.

Think twice before you speak. What should you think?
One: Is it necessary to say anything? Two: How will it affect others?
Is it in their interest or will it hurt them? Is it good? If not, keep quiet.
Mind your own business.

Never wish to think or to appear clever; have no desire to speak.
It is well to speak little; better still to say nothing,
unless you are quite sure that what you wish to say
is quite true, kind, and helpful.

Too much talking dissipates spiritual energy.
You should try to control your speech by resorting to Simran of the Names silently.

Those who speak much and waste their precious energy in idle and loose talk
cannot listen to this Heavenly Melody.

Be very much on guard, you see:
Guard your eyes, guard your ears, guard your tongue.
The remedy for these things is usually: kind words imbued with humility.
That doesn’t cost anything.

Silence is golden. Speak as little as possible.
When you speak, speak in the most kind and gentle manner.
Don’t lose your temper over anything. Always keep your tongue under control.
This is one thing. The wound given by a sword will be healed in a month or so,
but the wound given by the tongue is not healed. All through life,
whenever you remember again, it becomes fresh.
It is from the abundance of heart that the tongue speaks. If you studiously cultivate purity of heart, your tongue will automatically become honeyed sweet. A tongue-cut is always deeper than a sword cut, and remains ever green and gangrenous. We should avoid all idle talk, for every idle word that men shall speak, they shall give account thereof in the day of judgment.

If you were to listen to someone silently, you will find that he talks of his passionate desires, petty jealousies, factions, enmities, recriminations, etc. he will over-rate some and under-rate others. These vices must be dispensed with.

The worst of all bad habits is to criticize others.

Sant Darshan Singh

Ravi Das, in speaking of the true devotee, put his finger on a universal weakness. He says that unlike the true devotee, we engage in endless criticism and debate with everyone and everything around us. If we only stop to analyze our behavior, our own experience, our own thoughts, we will realize that the overwhelming part of our energies is wasted in talking about others…

If we honestly take stock of our lives we will discover that we spend the greater part of our time in finding fault with others. It is the same sad story from day to day. If we are at home, we criticize our relatives, or we speak ill of this or that person. If we are at work, we are always finding fault with our boss or co-workers. It is the same all over the world. Most of our time is taken up with such things. The result is that from morning to night we are complaining about or finding fault with others. But with all our criticism, we never stop to see the failings that are within ourselves. If we were only to look at our own lapses and shortcomings, then those of others would pale into insignificance.

If we would truly look at ourselves, we would notice that we are oblivious of our own limitations and failings. We find fault with all those around us, but we hardly know our own failures. In reality it is we who are diseased by having a fault-finding eye; it is not others who are at fault. What we see in others is but a reflection of our own mind. The disease is not in others but in ourselves…

Instead of introspecting and seeing our own faults, we spend our lives noting the faults of others and speaking ill of others. And the law of nature is: as you think so you become. If we always think of others people’s faults, then what qualities will we ourselves acquire?

Until we learn to give up criticizing others and speaking ill of others, until we give up our negative way of thinking, we cannot tread on the spiritual path.

(Sant Darshan Singh)
Speaking evil of others is the greatest sin, and they who do it are fools. The man who indulges in it is on his way to hell and gets nothing in return.

All the good deeds of one who talks ill of another are credited to the account of the slandered one. The slanderer washes away our sins without charging anything.

Indulgence in unnecessary talk and debate results in the exhaustion of mental powers.
Proverbs

A man’s defeat lies in his tongue.  
(Persian proverb)

God gave us teeth to hold back our tongue.  
(Greek)

It is easier to talk than to hold one’s tongue.  
(Greek)

The tongue is more to be feared than the sword.  
(Japanese)

Silence is a fence for wisdom, but it is not wisdom.  
(Jewish)

Don't speak unless you can improve on the silence.  
(Spanish)

To talk without thinking is to shoot without aiming.  
(English)

We are ruined by foolish speech and saved by silence.  
(Hindu)

There should be a reason for speech but not for silence.  
(French)

From listening comes wisdom, and from speaking repentance.  
(Italian)

Speak to everyone in accordance with his level of understanding.  
(Sufi)

Speech is silver, silence is golden; Speech is human, silence is divine.  
(German)

Some folks speak from experience; others, from experience, don’t speak.  
(American)
The Old Testament

Be in no hurry to speak.

I will take heed of my ways,
that I sin not with my tongue.

Those who guard their lips preserve their lives,
But those who speak rashly will come to ruin.

He that keepeth his mouth keepeth his soul:
But he that has no guard on his speech shall meet with evils.

A fool’s talk lands him in a dispute, and his mouth calls out for a beating.
A fool’s mouth is his ruin, and his lips are the snare which traps him.

A stroke of the whip raises a welt, but a stroke of the tongue breaks bones.
Many have fallen by the edge of the sword, but many more have fallen by the tongue.

A learned man is restrained in speech, and the judicious man keeps a cool head.
Even a simpleton who remains silent may be thought wise, and his closed lips be taken as a mark of intelligence.

A gentle answer turns aside anger, but a cutting retort makes a man angrier still.
The tongue of wise men commends knowledge, but the mouths of fools spout folly.

The lips of gossips repeat the words of others, the words of wise men are carefully weighed. The heart of fools is exposed in their words; the words of wise men reveal their heart.
The Buddha

The Buddha, it is said, rarely spoke unless spoken to. Central to Buddhist teaching is the Eightfold Path, the third step being Right Speech:

Right speech means abstention
1. from telling lies,
2. from backbiting and slander and talk that may bring about hatred, enmity, disunity and disharmony among individuals or groups of people,
3. from harsh, rude, impolite, malicious and abusive language,
4. from idle, useless and foolish babble and gossip.

When one abstains from these forms of wrong and harmful speech one naturally has to speak the truth, has to use words that are friendly and benevolent, pleasant and gentle, meaningful and useful. One should not speak carelessly: speech should be at the right time and place. If one cannot say something useful, one should keep ‘noble silence’. (What the Buddha Taught, Walpola Rahula)

William Law
English Mystic, 1686 – 1761

The spiritual life is nothing else but the working of the Spirit of God within us, and therefore our own silence must be a great part of our preparation for it, and much speaking or delight in it will be often no small hindrance of that good which we can only have from hearing what the Spirit and voice of God speaketh within us.

Rhetoric and fine language about the things of the spirit is a vainer babble than in other matters; and he that thinks to grow in true goodness by hearing or speaking flaming words or striking expressions, as is now much the way of the world, may have a great deal of talk, but will have little of his conversation in heaven.

Saint John of the Cross

It was not from want of will that I have refrained from writing to you, for truly do I wish you all good; but because it seemed to me that enough has been said already to effect all that is needful, and that what is wanting (if indeed anything be wanting) is not writing or speaking – whereof ordinarily there is more than enough – but silence and work. For whereas speaking distracts, silence and work collect the thoughts and strengthen the spirit. As soon therefore as a person understands what has been said to him for his good, there is no further need to hear or to discuss; but to set himself in earnest to practice what he has learnt with silence and attention, in humility, charity and contempt of self.

Wisdom enters through love, silence, and mortification.
It is great wisdom to know how to be silent and to look at neither the remarks, nor the deeds, nor the lives of others.
Unrestrained and indiscriminate talk is morally evil and spiritually dangerous. Jesus said “But I say unto you, that every idle word that men shall speak, they shall give account thereof in the Day of Judgment.”

This may seem a very hard saying. And yet if we pass in review the words we have given vent to in the course of the average day, we shall find that the greater number of them may be classified under three main heads:

1. words inspired by malice and uncharitableness towards our neighbors;
2. by greed, sensuality and self-love;
3. words inspired by pure imbecility and uttered without rhyme or reason, but merely for the sake of making a distracting noise.

All these idle words, the silly no less than the self-regarding and the uncharitable, are impediments in the way of the unitive knowledge of the Divine Ground, a dance of dust and flies obscuring the inward and the outward light.

The guard of the tongue (which is also, of course, a guard of the mind) is not only one of the most difficult and searching of all mortifications: it is also the most fruitful.

Thomas a’ Kempis

Avoid public gatherings as much as possible, for the discussion of worldly affairs becomes a great hindrance, even though it be with the best of intentions, for we are quickly corrupted and ensnared by vanity.

Often I wish I had remained silent, and had not been among men.

But why is it that we are so ready to chatter and gossip with each other, when we so seldom return to silence without some injury to our conscience? We must watch and pray that our time may not be spent fruitlessly.

When it is right and proper to speak, speak to edify. Evil habits and neglect of spiritual progress are the main causes of our failure to guard the tongue.
The Tongue Devises Mischief
Excerpts from Kabir: The Great Mystic

Ceaseless talking is often considered today to be a sign of culture, intellectual attainment and sociability. Inability in this field is apt to be condemned as dullness or lack of manners. As a result the tongue has no bridle, no restraint, and what occurs at the moment must be poured out at once. This runs entirely counter to the teachings of Kabir and all other Saints. They advocate a strict control of the tongue.

What is our endless talk about? We indulge in petty slander, trivial social scandals, or at the best, indulging in criticizing men and affairs, politicians and statesmen, writers and scientists, without the slightest authority on the subject on which we talk. This may mean hurting people around us or, more generally, those who are absent, but what does it matter as long as we can make an exhibition of our cleverness, wit or humor?

Saints explain that by all slander or unnecessary criticism, we get ourselves attached to the very defect we criticize; the process is understandable. We attract to ourselves those qualities that we think about and wash away the evils of those whom we condemn.

Many quarrels and fights, even national and international, have their origin in the wrong use of the tongue. We condemn entire communities, entire nations, races and continents in a most thoughtless manner. Prejudices are thus fostered, prejudices that have no foundation in facts.

The plain and simple fact is that we are God’s creatures, that everyone has his merits and demerits and that we, as children of the same Heavenly Father, have no right to throw stones at others. As one Saint says, when we find fault with the creation, we actually find fault with the One who created it.

The control of the tongue is one of the first steps towards spiritual progress.

This is the reason why mystics keep to themselves as much as possible and avoid idle chatter. When they do talk it is about the Lord, or the Master or fellow mystics.

Perfect Masters set an example in this. Of course, they cannot, especially when they have large followings, keep to themselves. But all their talk is in the service of the Lord. When they give discourses they are spiritual discourses, when they discuss matters with their disciples they are spiritual discussions. Even when they give a hearing to their disciples’ worldly problems, it is only done to help forward their spiritual progress.

Perfect Masters live in the thick of worldly affairs and are yet aloof from them. They are in tune with the Lord all the time, they have no time for idle discussions…

The way of the world is vigorous activity and ceaseless talk, activity for getting honor, position; talk to the same end. The mystic wants none of these and knows where they lead.
Saint Teresa of Avila
From *Mysticism* by Evelyn Underhill

During the years of inward stress, of penance and growing knowledge of the Infinite, which she spent in the Convent of the Incarnation, and which accompanied this slow remaking of character, Teresa’s only self-indulgence – as it seems, a sufficiently innocent one – was talking to the friends who came down from Avila to the convent-parlor and spoke to her through the grille.

Teresa felt more and more the distracting influence of these glimpses of the outer world. They were a drain upon the energy which ought to be wholly given to that new, deep, more real life which she felt stirring within her…

Teresa knew that so long as she retained these personal satisfactions, her life had more than one focus; she was not whole-hearted in her surrender to the Absolute. But though her inward voices, her deepest instincts, urged her to give them up, for years she felt herself incapable of such a sacrifice. It was round the question of their retention or surrender that the decisive battle of her life was fought.

Her biographer stated, “For though she was resolved to belong entirely to God, she knew not how to shake herself free from the world: and at times she persuaded herself that she could enjoy both, which ended mostly, as she says, in complete enjoyment of neither.”

During eight and twenty years of prayer, I spent more than eighteen in that strife and contention which arose out of my attempt to reconcile God and the world.
(Saint Teresa of Avila)

Much talk prevents us from being preoccupied with the remembrance of God.
(Sharafuddin Maneri)

The devotee’s aim is the restraint of his organs of sense and mind; Silence is his talk, and he has not time to think of any other thing aside from meditation on his Guru’s instructions.
(Dnyaneshwar)
Meher Baba
Forty-Four Years of Self-Imposed Silence

From July 10, 1925 until his death on January 31, 1969 Meher Baba maintained a self-imposed silence. He communicated first by using an alphabet board and later by unique hand gestures which were interpreted and spoken out by one of his disciples.

For many years, Baba asked his followers to undertake austerities on July 10th, the anniversary of the day his silence began, such as keeping silence, fasting and praying. In his final Silence Day request to his followers in 1968, he asked only that they keep silent. Many of Baba’s followers continue to celebrate Silence Day by keeping silence in his honor. (https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Meher_Baba)

Will people not be thrown face down into Hell only on account of the harvest of their tongue?
(Prophet Muhammad)

But I say unto you,
that every idle word that men shall speak,
they shall give account thereof in the day of judgment.
(Jesus Christ)
And then a scholar said, Speak of Talking.

And he answered, saying:

You talk when you cease to be at peace with your thoughts;

And when you can no longer dwell in the solitude of your heart you live in your lips, and sound is a diversion and a pastime.

And in much of your talking, thinking is half murdered.

For thought is a bird of space, that in a cage of words may indeed unfold its wings but cannot fly.

There are those among you who seek the talkative through fear of being alone.

The silence of aloneness reveals to their eyes their naked selves and they would escape.

And there are those who talk, and without knowledge or forethought reveal a truth which they themselves do not understand.

And there are those who have the truth within them, but they tell it not in words.

In the bosom of such as these the spirit dwells in rhythmic silence.

When you meet your friend on the roadside or in the market place, let the spirit in you move your lips and direct your tongue.

Let the voice within your voice speak to the ear of his ear;

For his soul will keep the truth of your heart as the taste of the wine is remembered when the color is forgotten and the vessel is no more.
Silence
Catholic Encyclopedia

All writers on the spiritual life uniformly recommend, nay, command under penalty of total failure, the practice of silence. And yet, despite this there is perhaps no rule for spiritual advancement more inveighed against, by those who have not even mastered its rudiments, than that of silence. Holy Scripture warns us of the perils of the tongue, as "Death and life are in the power of the tongue" (Proverbs 18:21). Nor is this advice less insisted on in the New Testament; witness: "If any man offend not in word, the same is a perfect man" (St. James 3:2 sq.). The same doctrine is inculcated in innumerable other places of the inspired writings. The pagans themselves understood the dangers arising from unguarded speech. Pythagoras imposed a strict rule of silence on his disciples; the vestal virgins also were bound to severe silence for long years. Many similar examples could be quoted. Silence may be viewed from a threefold standpoint:

- **As an aid to the practice of good**, for we keep silence with man, in order the better to speak with God, because an unguarded tongue dissipates the soul, rendering the mind almost, if not quite, incapable of prayer. The mere abstaining from speech, without this purpose, would be that "idle silence" which St. Ambrose so strongly condemns.

- **As a preventative of evil.** Seneca, quoted by Thomas à Kempis complains that "As often as I have been amongst men, I have returned less a man" (Imitation, Book I, c. 20).

- **The practice of silence involves much self-denial and restraint, and is therefore a wholesome penance**, and as such is needed by all.

From the foregoing it will be readily understood why all founders of religious orders and congregations, even those devoted to the service of the poor, the infirm, the ignorant, and other external works, have insisted on this, more or less severely according to the nature of their occupations, as one of the essential rules of their institutes.

It was St. Benedict who first laid down the clearest and most strict laws regarding the observance of silence. In all monasteries, of every order, there are special places, called the "Regular Places" (church, refectory, dormitory etc.) and particular times, especially the night hours, termed the "Great Silence", wherein speaking is more strictly prohibited.

Outside these places and times there are usually accorded "recreations" during which conversation is permitted, governed by rules of charity and moderation, though useless and idle words are universally forbidden in all times and places.

Of course in active orders the members speak according to the needs of their various duties. It was perhaps the Cistercian Order alone that admitted no relaxation from the strict rule of silence, which severity is still maintained amongst the Reformed Cistercians (Trappists) though all other contemplative Orders (Carthusians, Carmelites, Camaldolese, etc.) are much more strict on this point than those engaged in active works. In order to avoid the necessity of speaking, many orders (Cistercians, Dominicans, Discalced Carmelites etc.) have a certain number of signs, by means of which the religious may have a limited communication with each other for the necessities that are unavoidable.
Mohandas Gandhi spent one day of each week in silence. He believed that abstaining from speaking brought him inner peace and made him a better listener. This influence was drawn from the Hindu principles of mauna (silence) and shanti (peace). On such days he communicated with others by writing on paper. For three and a half years, from the age of 37, Gandhi refused to read newspapers, claiming that the tumultuous state of world affairs caused him more confusion than his own inner unrest.

For a while now I've felt the need for more silence in my life. When you are forced to be silent, you are forced to listen. Most of us don't know how to listen anymore, there is always something going on in the back of our minds, some kind of judgment or a need to give ones opinion or relate it back to ourselves. We can never just fully listen and take in what another person is trying to tell us.

When you take time for silence, you open your mind to a whole new world. You learn that everything is not always about you and you don't need to relate everything back to you or compete with anyone. There is a lot of information floating around that we miss because our minds have become so filtered to only hear what we relate to. You not only miss a lot of opportunities to help others by actually listening, but you miss opportunities to help yourself, to change your view, to see the world through a different perspective, to become a deeper, better person.

I find it hard to listen anymore with a clear mind and I can feel the effect it has on my overall well-being. If you can't fully listen, you cannot grow or expand your mind which is what I strive for so I am going to devote every Monday (like Gandhi) to a day of silence. My hope is to develop the ability to listen fully every day without the intention of turning it into something about me. I want to become more aware of the world around me and more able to relate to others fully, and not with a preconceived notion.
The Splendid Spiritual Practice of Silence

A former monk shares insights from a year of solitary prayer and contemplation:

A few weeks after I graduated from high school, I left home and went away to a monastery. For the next eight years I lived the life of a monk—a solitary life of prayer, work, contemplation, fasting, and silence.

Within the walls of the monastery my life was not much different from the life of a monk of the Middle Ages. I was part of a community of about 60 monks, ranging in age from 18, like me, to 80. The monastery was self-sufficient. We grew our own food in the fields around the monastery, which was in a remote farming area in the American Midwest. Our life was the simplest imaginable. We wore plain clothing, ate humble meals, and, at night, retired to small individual rooms that were furnished only with bed, sink, desk, and chair.

Apart from the ‘World’

The first year of my life as a monk was a time of training and instruction, preparing me to live outside the monastery and teach in the Brothers’ schools. Called the novitiate or canonical year—from canon, or Catholic Church law—it was a period of intense concentration on how to live as a monk. We studied the Rule of Saint Benedict, formulated more than a millennium ago as a blueprint for the monastic life. And we practiced silence.

When I tell people that I spent an entire year in silence, their expressions usually stop cold, waiting for their minds to catch up with the novel information. Their eyes seem to ask: How can anyone live in silence for a year? Even if it were possible to live in silence, why would anyone want to do it?

Being silent was not difficult for me. Perhaps the biggest surprise was that once I went into the silence, I was not interested, most of the time, in speaking. Also, when no one is speaking, it is much easier to be quiet than if some people are speaking and others are not. In our monastery, everyone lived under the rule of silence.

As for why we wanted to be silent, that relates to the nature of monastic life itself, which is to be apart from the world and to have an opportunity for reflection and meditation, activities that are “inner” and require quiet. It would be absurd to try to follow a contemplative path and also to allow noise into one’s realm. The two do not go together.

The silence we lived in the monastery had both an interior and an exterior character. Silence from the inside meant not talking, in the first place, but also something deeper: it had to do with quieting the mind, not being busy inside. Inner silence also carried the idea of refraining from judgment and staying away from thinking about the past and the future. Being silent within was really being at once absent from the world of busyness and at the same time present in the moment.
Silence on the outside had to do with keeping away anything that did not foster inner silence. So, no radio or television or newspapers or magazines found their way behind the walls of the monastery. There were no computers in those days—and therefore no Internet, no email, no Facebook, no Twitter; if there had been computers, they would not have been part of our monastery. Natural sounds (birds, animals, the wind in the trees) were considered part of the silence, actually fostering contemplation in the spirit of silence. We were discouraged from making loud noises ourselves—even while working—because that would have disturbed that same spirit of silence, even if we were not speaking.

What happens when one is silent for a long period? The outer noise goes first, and then the inner noise starts to evaporate. Soon, quiet reigns everywhere, it seems. Time slows to a crawl. Sound becomes a curiosity—natural sounds, especially, like the flow of water or the rustle and sway of tall grass, become occasions for deeper listening and lead to a most profound inner calm.

The Letter and the Spirit of Silence

During the time I spent living in monastic silence, I learned to distinguish between the letter and the spirit of silence.

The letter of silence is just that: not speaking and not disturbing the silence around you in any way. Practicing the letter of silence, you tread as lightly as possible, do not utter a word or any other sound, do not use sign language or body language, and even avoid reading written communication, except perhaps, on occasion, inspirational articles or books.

The letter of silence has both an interior and an exterior character. On the outside, you are careful not only to remain silent but also to avoid intruding on the silence of others—or, for that matter, of the “silence” of nature. On the inside, you stay away from “noisy” or useless thoughts. Useless thinking is the running of interior mental tapes that are set in the past or in the future.

The spirit of silence poses a slightly different way of regarding being silent. When you practice the spirit of silence, you will actually find yourself speaking when it is necessary. For instance, you have decided to be in silence for an afternoon. You have turned off the television and the radio, you have switched off the telephone ringer and the computer, and you have closed down all the other noise-generating appliances in the house. You sit down with an inspirational book. Then the doorbell rings unexpectedly—the mailman is delivering a package. Practicing the spirit of silence, you go to the door, accept the package gracefully, and say, “Thank you.” You have not broken your silence. In fact, you have enhanced it with a simple expression of gratitude.

In the monastery, the spirit of silence was an important concept to learn. When I took the vow of silence for a year, it meant that I would strive to dwell in the interior world of the spirit as much as possible. But it did not mean that I would not speak at all. All the monks spoke during open prayer, for example. We also spoke in public during classes we took on living the monastic life, and in private to our spiritual counselor. If we needed to explain something about a particular task, we spoke briefly and quietly; if we had questions about how to perform a certain duty, we spoke. Once during my year of silence I needed to see a dentist. I spoke to him about my toothache—and did not break the spirit of silence. Living in the spirit of silence allowed me to dwell constantly in a silent place, even if words needed to be exchanged.
Your Inner Cloister

The peace that silence brought to me then—and continues to bring to me now, when I practice it—is hard to describe. Being in silence is feeling the bliss of balance and completion on an exceedingly high level. Silence grounds me and gives me serenity and mental clarity.

I take part of each day now to dwell in silence. You can do this, too. You can create your own quiet inner monastery cloister. If you have the opportunity to practice an hour of silence sometime during the day, you may want to try it and see how it makes a difference for you. Like the monks of the Middle Ages who lived the vow of silence, you may find that spiritual treasures you had not imagined will be revealed to you—not only in your silent time, but all through the day. (http://spiritualityhealth.com/articles/splendid-spiritual-practice-silence)

The tongue is a small member, but it does big things. A religious who does not keep silence will never attain holiness; that is, she will never become a saint. Let her not delude herself unless it is the Spirit of God who is speaking through her, for then she must not keep silent. But, in order to hear the voice of God, one has to have silence in one's soul and to keep silence; not a gloomy silence but an interior silence; that is to say, recollection in God. (Saint Faustina)

A talkative soul lacks both the essential virtues and intimacy with God. A deeper interior life, one of gentle peace and of that silence where the Lord dwells, is quite out of the question. A soul that has never tasted the sweetness of inner silence is a restless spirit which disturbs the silence of others. (Saint Faustina)

A judicious silence is always better than truth spoken without charity. (Saint Francis de Sales)

Silence is God’s language, and it’s a very difficult language to learn. (Thomas Keating)
Silence is a friend who will never betray you.
(Confucius)

A white flower grows in the quiet.
Let your tongue become that flower.
(Rumi)

Kirpalct@yahoo.com

For more booklets go to: kirpalsingh.org
Spiritual Quotations for Lovers of God