

## **The Power of Silence**

Life can be observed in two aspects: one aspect is the life which is silent and unknown; the other is the aspect of life which is active and known. What man knows and sees and calls "life" is that part of life which is active – it is that part which is known, but the other part of life is unknown to the generality. Man is conscious of the drops – and about the ocean he knows little, and this may be considered the reason of disbelief of the unbelievers and of the blind belief of the believers. If there is anything existing which can be called God, it is the perfect and absolute life which is unknown to most people. The part which is known to man is much smaller in comparison to the part which is unknown. The word "great" of "small" man has used in relation to the life he knows; to convey the life unknown, however, there is no word but "God".

When one reads in the scriptures about the Almighty Power of God, one doubts whether and where such a power can exist. But some idea of that power may be understood by the silent life which is in nature. Think of the force of running water, and of the power of the air; and if there is such power in these, which form only a part of life, how great must be the life behind it! The silent magnetism and attraction that one feels in forests and in the wilderness, brings one nearer to nature. Hills and mountains standing for thousands of years in the same place, without moving, have a charm for us, bringing us nearer to the life of nature. We can, if we open ourselves to receive it, obtain from the trees in the forests, which are standing quietly as if in silent resignation to the will of God, an unlimited amount of magnetism, excelling all that the pleasures of the world can give.

What keeps us away from the Truth is the artificiality of the life we live, for we keep ourselves far from nature. If there is anything next to life unknown, it is the life which is silent and which will make us feel that power behind the external.

The life of man is full of activities from morning till evening and he is kept against his will from that great happiness and bliss which is within himself. The silent part of life manifests in rocks, trees, etc. that peace and happiness which comes from the life hidden beneath them; and in the heart of man the same life exists and it can express itself even with greater power there, if man were able to experience it. But it wants the learning of the art of life, called in the East the Inner Cult. Concentration, meditation, contemplation are different processes to obtain the peace already existit within the human soul. To think that man should exist without realizing that peace, which is the very nature of the human soul, is the greatest tragedy in life.

Considering our everyday life, we find that every activity in life takes away from us the opportunity of having a little silence. The responsibilities of life are great and become greater every day; there are worries which continue to occupy our minds in sleep; and as we are lacking in the study and knowledge of harmony in life, it becomes every day more and more difficult to live in reality. Life is an intoxication and this keeps us absorbed; but in the moments of soberness we feel as if we want to leave the world and enjoy the peace of the wilderness.

All depression and discouragement comes from loss of life-forces. The first essential knowledge required is the knowledge of saving and preserving the life-forces of oneself. People think that their present unhappiness in life is due to lack of money, comfort or other worries. This may be true to a certain extent, but if the life-force is preserved in man, he is king of his kingdom and this kingdom is himself. The difficulties of the condition around him can then hurt him but little. There is some treasure, greater than all the treasures of the world, always within reach and on the way. Every activity if life robs a part of that life-force, and this is especially true of speech, because the main battery which keeps the mind and body going, is the breath and the breath-force is spent more in speech than in anything else. You will not have to go very far to see examples of weakness, caused by excess of speech.

There are people who get into the habit of talking; talking is to them a relief – on the other hand it is also a waste of energy and time. And it may become an indulgence. People who enjoy talking, want somebody to talk to, and when they do not find others willing to listen to them, they finally talk to themselves, because they cannot help it. Some develop a tendency for argument and this may go so far that nothing will contempt them. No doubt we can learn by argument, but it is still better to try and understand things by ourselves. Then there are those who make it their life's occupation to please others by talking, they develop the habit of exaggeration to make their talk more interesting and they are often led to telling lies in the end. Some make it a point to speak the truth, but by that excuse go so far as to hurt everybody; they will proudly say, they don't mind, so long as they speak the truth. But if the truth can strike a discord and bring about a disharmony, it would be better to avoid that truth – if it can break peace and harmony, it is worse than a lie.

Now it is very difficult to give a definition of what Truth really is – it is too fine to be explained in words – it is that which the soul can comprehend and which is inexplicable. It is not the words that count, it is the sincerity that counts. One may use a thousand words to express his love or admiration, or just cast a glance to explain – when his lips are closed, the heart begins to speak, and the voice of the heart is louder than speech.

There are some who will trust everybody with their secret and feel a relief in doing so, not considering who can really be trusted. Afterwards, seeing they have given their own life into other people's hands, they wish they had not spoken, but then it is too late. This tendency shows weakness of will. When the will cannot control man's speech, he says things in a rage or in moments of annoyance that he would not otherwise have said, and this brings repentance afterwards.

It also happens that people with a limited understanding of the science of life do not know what can be said, and whatnot, at a certain time. The same word can have an effect at a certain moment and be useless at another. Besides the way in which we put it, can make it either offending or pleasing.

An amusing story in the East tells us of a woman who went to a healer asking him if he could give her advice so as to avoid disagreement at home. He gave her sweet lozenges

and told her to put them in her mouth every evening when her husband came home and promised her that she would have no more trouble. After some time the woman went to thank the healer, because the remedy had worked well, and she asked for more lozenges. But the healer explained that it was a lesson: that when the husband came home, tired and upset from his work, she was to let him talk to himself for a while and calm his mind before she addressed him.

We ought to learn what, when and how we must speak, what we must say or not say. For not a small thing in the secret of happiness is the secret of silence. Silence does not only help to bring harmony in domestic and social life, but also to harmonize ourselves. All the restlessness in life and the disturbed state of mind one so often experiences, is caused by man not allowing himself to be silent for some moments every day. Muhammed gave his followers five prayers every day, whatever their work would be. They had to sit five times in silence and harmonize with themselves. When the disciples asked why these five prayers were given, He said: a hundred would be necessary but I gave you only five, because your life is so occupied. Western people are used to saying that life in the west is too busy and does not allow time for silence, but the answer is: for this very reason silence is more necessary even in the West. And it is surely not too much to spare a short time during the 24 hours of night and day for that which is our highest destination.

Religious prayer, concentration or Yoga are all taught to bring about the state of harmony and peace. According to the mystical point of view the power of silence is symbolized by the two wings allowing man to fly, besides the two arms given him to work. The person who has never tasted sugar, cannot know what sweetness is, so one who has never touched the depth of life, cannot know the sweetness which silence can give.

The Sufi teaches his pupils above all quietude – this is not a matter of discussions, arguments or studies – study comes as a side thing. The teacher really does not teach anything, but the pupil is shown the way how he can learn from himself, the teacher shows how he can learn from life external and life within, and never forces his own experiences on his pupil. The greatest mystic knows the most profound silence. He then experiences Nirwana, Mukti, the ideal goal which the soul has to reach.

When through silence man has learned the secret of life, to him all the religions are one, he sees the underlying truth in all religions, they are one and the same. The Sufi therefore, instead of wanting others to join his religion, joins the religion of others.

Hazrat Inayat Khan gave this lecture in Paris, Musée Guimet, June 5<sup>th</sup> 1921.