

## Silence

In most spiritual traditions, silence is seen as a fundamental practice. This silence takes many forms: withdrawing from the world, silent contemplation, sitting in silence. But what do we mean by silence? And what kind of silence is important for those on a spiritual path?

When we hear statements such as ‘the mind cannot know consciousness – you need to go beyond the mind’, it is natural to assume that we need to find a way of getting rid of thoughts, feelings and perceptions, and making the mind quiet. But efforts in this direction usually lead to a blank state and a blank state is still an object. Pure consciousness is objectless. As Jean Klein said, we need to come to ‘the absence of the absence’.

Here is Francis’s description of three kinds of silence:

*Q: Is silence an object?*

FL: It depends what you call silence. Silence could be the absence of sound – that’s the silence of someone who is deaf. It could be the absence of thoughts or perceptions, but in this case this absence could still be a perception. Or it could be really the background of all perceptions. So in other words, you have physical silence, you have this the silence of the mind, and then you have the silence of awareness or the silence of the spirit. So there are these three types of silence. The first and the second type of silence are still objects, they are still perceptions.

The example my teacher used is that you go to visit this friend and there is a painting on the wall. One day you visit the friend and the painting is no longer there. And you say to the friend ‘Oh you sold the painting?’ meaning that what you saw was not the wall. Really you saw the absence of the painting, which is still the painting in negative. You saw a non-painting, but you didn't see the wall. In the same way there is what could be called a blank state in the mind, which is an absence of thought, but which is still a thought. It is a kind of superimposition upon the wall, upon the background of awareness. In some Sufi traditions, *fana* means the absence of the extinction, and they talk about the extinction of the extinction, which is even the absence of the absence. And then that's a revelation of the support.

The difference is that the first and second type of silence elapse in time. There is a time element to them. Whereas spiritual silence is not in time. So when we reach it in the absence of objects, no time elapses there. But it is present also in the presence of objects, because it is a background of perceptions, what we call consciousness.

[Francis Lucille, 2/10/2021: *Spiritual Silence is Not in Time*]

It is common for those who practise meditation to reach a blank state and mistake this for pure consciousness. But once we have had a taste of pure consciousness, it is easy to tell the difference. A blank state may be peaceful but it has no life, no perfume. It quickly becomes boring. It requires a subtle effort which is maintained through an almost imperceptible tension.

For many of us, it is thoughts rather than perceptions that seem to block the deep silence of ourself. At the start of his guided meditations, Francis usually instructs us to ‘allow all thoughts, bodily sensations and perceptions to be exactly as they are’. We let them do their own thing and stop giving them our attention. But these guided meditations are experiments that usually require non-activity. So what is the best approach to thoughts that arise during our normal, active life and which seem to disturb the innate peace of our true nature? Here is Francis’s suggestion for exploring and understanding the source of the various types of thought:

*Q: I've been looking today at this pattern of self-narrative thoughts. Generally speaking, they can just run in the background almost like a podcast in the back of the head. It's pretty innocuous but I feel like they almost inevitably lead to some kind of suffering, some kind of internal conflict. I was just wondering if you had any sort of insights into that?*

FL: When you see that process, what you can try as an experiment is to drop the thought. Then first ask yourself a question – because there are three types of thoughts – in this case, ‘does it come from a sense of “me” as a separate entity?’. In other words, is it a thought of fear and desire?

The second type of thought is just some kind of a jamming thought – a thought that is there because I need some noise. People do that all the time: it creates a constant sensation.

*Q: Like a pop song in the back of the head?*

FL: Yes like muzak in the elevator. I mean, why not have silence in the elevator? Why this stupid muzak – Vivaldi ‘Four Seasons’?

Because the behaviour is different. If it is related to me as a person then take advantage of that to start the investigation and ask ‘what's the foundation of this thought?’. If it is just a jammer, then stop it, and you will see the tension that arises in you which is this propensity to think, this rejection of silence. And you see that this is in the body. So you stop the jamming thought. It seems to require an effort. If you look at this effort, it's located in the body. And then you offer all this network of bodily sensations to the space. You don't try to manage it, but you have love for it. So now you have moved from the thought to the body. You have moved upstream towards the source of the agitation.

And finally, the third type of thought doesn't need to be interrupted because it's a thought that comes from a genuine interest, and that's fine. If it is fun, if you enjoy it, there is nothing to change. You don't want to try to manipulate this thought. It comes from interest. It is not necessarily interest for the truth. It can be interest for something else – someone has told you something, or you think of a person, or you think this person has this problem, or she's nice ... That happens. There is nothing wrong with this type of thought. It's innocent. It's life.

*Q: I forget which type of thought you were talking about, when the thought drops and then you are looking into the body and seeing the tension ...*

FL: It's not that the thought drops – you drop it. When you see it's a thought that doesn't seem to involve me as a person, on a rational level. It's not a thought that comes from interest. It is kind of mechanical. It's almost like when you have a tune that runs in your head and it seems that you cannot stop it. That would be a bad tune – if the tune is enjoyable that's fine. But if it's some kind of repetitious thing, running in circles, then you stop it, and you then you see the resistance that prevents you from stopping it. You *want* to think. You see the rejection of silence. So it's not as you said ‘when it stops’. When you notice it, you stop it. You conduct the experiment, and you see the impulse that was prior to the thought.

*Q: That's referring to the sort of radio thought, right? And the one that refers to the ‘me’?*

FL: That's fear and desire. That's projection into the future, into the past. There is a ‘me’ in it. And of course, you have to be clear, because for instance if you think about your contract and your new job etc., that's fine. It's ‘me’, but you are the manager of your body and of your life

and your professional activities. These are normal things to think about.

[Francis Lucille, 16/2/2018: [The Rejection of Silence](#)]

Since awareness is present throughout all activities and cannot be disturbed by anything that is going on in mind, body or world, is there any point in sitting in silence? Is it a valid form of meditation for those who are following the Direct Path? This is Francis's answer:

*Q: What is the value of silent sitting?*

FL: We have to define silence. Sitting is clear! There are three kinds of silence. There is physical silence, the absence of sound, in other words, you are not talking. There is another form of silence that would be for instance, the absence of thoughts. And finally, there is another form of silence which is a real silence which is simply the absence of the belief or the feeling to be a separate entity.

So the first two types of silence don't define meditation for me. It is only the third type that defines meditation. And in fact it is a sufficient condition for meditation. Sitting is not a necessary condition for meditation. So the absence of the belief or of the feeling to be a separate entity is a necessary and sufficient condition for meditation. There are different definitions of meditation but that's the one which is the most important one in my view. ...

So going back to sitting in silence, sitting in silence could be part of the true meditation – sitting in silence without the belief or the feeling to be a separate entity. Now this feeling or belief to be a separate entity can be momentarily absent or it can be annihilated – in other words, definitely absent. If it is definitely absent, meditation is natural, it's our natural state. If it is momentarily absent, this type of meditation is one way to lead to the annihilation of this sense of separation. The best way, the best prescription for this type of meditation would be the welcoming of the flow of thoughts, bodily sensations and external sense perceptions, without trying to interfere with them, beholding them with indifference. In other words, letting them appear, letting them unfold, letting them vanish. Usually that is done during sitting meditation. Why? Because it's easier to achieve that while preventing any physical activity of the body, just as on the thought level, this approach to meditation prevents any interference with the flow of thoughts. In other words, it's not suited for daily life that may require physical activity and mental activity.

You see, if you are working you need some continuity in the line of thought. So it is a somewhat artificial exercise, but one which almost immediately leads to meditation in the sense that it momentarily suspends the belief and the feeling to be a separate entity. Because the feeling, when it is simply observed, reveals itself for what it truly is, which is bodily sensations. The feeling to be separate and the thought to be separate when they are simply contemplated with detachment, they are simply concepts. They cease to be beliefs.

[Francis Lucille, 9/2/2019 [True Meditation is Asana Agnostic](#)]

After we have had a liberating glimpse and no longer believe ourselves to be a separate entity, is there still a need to sit in silence? Here is Francis's advice:

FL: It has to be natural. So my suggestion is this. When you feel like sitting, sit, and in various periods of your life, you may find yourself sitting for long periods, or not sitting at all, or just having moments of silence. But what I would recommend is this. When you sit, and when the desire to get up and stop it, if even if it is after three minutes that it arises, make sure it comes from eagerness and enthusiasm for something, and not from something negative. So be aware, because then you have the time of reflection – OK I want to stop meditating, whatever I call

meditation, and then just give yourself a few seconds to see what is the origin of this decision. Is it because I'm eager to do something else: I want to do something else, I want to read a book, I want to think about something, I want to take a walk? Or is it because I'm avoiding something and I'm trying to compensate?

So that's what I would suggest so you can discover that in fact you are perfectly happy with one-minute small meditations, or you can discover that when you realize this desire to get up after five minutes, you see that it came from a sense of lack that was not paid attention to. And then you go back, you see it, and you discover other things about yourself.

The idea is never to be mechanical and to always follow your heart's desire given the constraints. People think when I say that, that I am a proponent of hedonism. No. Because the question is, what is the true desire of your heart? Then the idea is that through this path the desire will purify itself, especially because it remains unhindered, so it can express itself. And because it is unhindered and unimpeded, it has a freedom to evolve, and in this evolution, it purifies itself. Very soon you see that all desires go back to meditation, to the truth. They will go back either to the fulfilment of a need or they will go back to the truth, to the experience of the truth, or they will go back to a celebratory type of activity – something you enjoy doing out of love for life, let's put it this way.

[Francis Lucille, 14/2/2022, February 2022 Retreat, week 2 day 4]

## Contemplation

*You are not taken to the silence – you are the silence. How could the silence be taken to the silence? It would have to be different from the silence. You're always at the same place. You don't move. You're not taken anywhere. You don't meditate. You are meditation.*

[Francis Lucille, 27/11/2021: Turiya & the Tantric Tradition]

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*It is like being in the desert. At first you listen to the absence of sounds and call it silence. Then suddenly you may be taken by the presence of stillness where you are one with listening itself.*

[Jean Klein, *Who Am I: The Sacred Quest*]

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