

nutritious fruits may come from thorny trees. So it is that silence may not look appealing at first. It is often associated with boredom, sleep, and loneliness. But after experiencing it, we will not be able to hold ourselves back from getting more and more of it. For example, we may decide to observe a silent fast. That is, we will fast from talking for a day or two or even a week, during which we may meet with so much resistance or even hostility that we will be shocked at how so few people can stand silence. People will keep asking us, are you OK, is everything all right, are you sure you're not sick, and so on and so forth. Some may even feel offended by our silence and may even press us to make us speak.

Silence is the great gateway to the self; through it one may be able to reach depths of intuition. And for such a great reward no one should abide any interruption in the process. Take silence seriously. A right to silence has been incorporated into the basic laws of almost all the countries in the world in order to protect us against a charge of perjury (lying under oath). But again this raises a question: Does being silent make you not a liar? Of course not, because when the truth is replaced by silence, then that silence is a lie. As Robert Louis Stevenson put it in *Virginibus Puerisque*, "The cruelest lies are often told in silence." When a wrong is committed, it is wrong not to speak it out against it. In the "Golden Stairs" we are advised to make "a valiant defense of those who are unjustly attacked."

Silence is a healer. It should be a hushed, peaceful silence. Let any depressing thoughts come to the surface and, after a thorough examination of the thoughts, let them go, knowing that through Mother Nature all will be well and that nothing is impossible.

Listening is also a kind of silence that will relieve the suffering of another person, also known as compassionate listening. You listen with only one purpose: to let the other person pour out his or her heart. Even if they say things that are full of wrong perceptions or bitterness, you are still capable of continuing to listen with compassion. Such listening gives the other person a chance to suffer less. If you want to help the other person to correct their perception, you wait for another time. At that moment, you don't interrupt. You don't argue. If you do, the other person loses their chance. You just listen with compassion and help the other to suffer less. Time spent like this results in transformation and healing.