

DEAFENING SILENCE

There is nothing like a stroke to plunge one into virtual silence and pronto! Otherwise, holding still or allowing ourselves to be exposed to silence and stillness may be a door we would never willingly choose to go through, but, nevertheless, it can happen and suddenly. I know this from my two stroke experiences.

Certainly, as I have found out, silence is not silent. Just as the Tibetan Book of the Dead states that in the bardo state after death, while transitioning from this life to rebirth, the brilliance of the light of the inner mind can be so sudden and intimidating that it drives beings into the shadows, which is said to result in a less than optimal rebirth or entrance into what is called a Buddha Realm. Basically, it's a fear of the true nature of our own mind. And it's with us right now.

IMO, the total absence of sound is equally terrifying, let's call it the deafening sound of nature living that we call silence. It's like trying to fathom that this Earth we live on is circling the Sun at 67,000 miles-per-hour. Or that our Milky Way Galaxy is moving through space at 1.3 million miles an hour. It's not like we are standing still.

I am still learning to cope with my recent stroke, which I can only liken it to having a freight train pass between my ears or a nuclear bomb flatten the surrounding terrain as far as I can see. I have often written about how our Self can be shattered by an untoward event (like a death of a loved one), leaving us teetering on the edge of the void and peering into it.

Well, while that shattering I just mentioned is uncomfortable and may take our Self some time to reanimate, a stroke cleans our clock more than we will ever know unless we experience one. As a phenomenologist, it is my nature to examine and experience whatever happens to me, health events included. And so I am.

And after the shock, there is the aftershock, as the waves of reality begin to roll in. The immediacy of the stroke event blows everything it can right out of the mind, certainly our Self composure and whatever fixations we were honing at the time it struck. Gone, without notice!

And in its place, at first there appears what to me seemed like some bleak moonscape or barren planet-scape that remained. And after that this was followed by total silence from the hum and drum of the constant chatter and internal comments I was so used to. Nada. Familiarity be-gone. It was then I thought of the Robert A. Heinlein book "Stranger in a Strange Land." I felt that way.

Is it a relief? Well, not at first crack; that's for sure. It was scary, my being empty of sound and thoughts. I was so used to being filled to overflowing with minutiae, with the non-essential -- my cozy little cocoon. Realized yogis speak of non-elaboration. The Self is pure elaboration.

And suddenly, there just aren't any thoughts other than the immediate "do this" or "do that," "take this test" and "take that medical test" -- the silent blast of the present. If you want the truth, it was like the deep foghorn of an immense ocean liner resounding in the night, only it was silent. It was the silence itself that was calling and I had no choice but to hear it.

There was no history to fall back on. My chatty old Self was eliminated by the initial blast in one fell swoop. It was just vacated. Where did it go and what was it made up of? Apparently: nothing memorable. In its place: eternal silence, if only for the time being. But for me, that time is still being... now many weeks later.

Here i was, standing on the verge of eternity, looking out as far as I can see at nothing, with my ears overflowing with silence. There is only the immediate present. No past and no future.

"As Bodhicitta is so precious,
May those without it now create it,
May those who have it not destroy it,
And may it ever grow and flourish"

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