



There is a channel between voice and presence, a way where information flows. In disciplined silence the channel opens. With wandering talk it closes.

Rumi's writings are not only a work of poetry; they also speak of practical ways and practices that lead to inner transformation of our 'being'. The more subtle meanings in his words won't be recognised by our ordinary mind; they are aimed at different faculties of understanding that are attuned to a language of stillness.

The majority of Rumi's poems are embedded within this stillness, whose main objective is to make us pause and listen, as well as shifting us out of our ordinary state of consciousness into a more contemplative and refined state. In a state of contemplation we are obviously more receptive and open to information that can reach us through channels we would not recognise in our average state of mind in everyday life. Not for nothing does one of his famous sayings state that '*In silence there is eloquence*', though silence is now rarely used or acknowledged as a means of direct communication in our society.

To become eloquent in the language of stillness, we need to adopt a specific kind of practice that is almost as old as humankind. By achieving a depth of silence, we become receptive enough to tune in to this universal language of stillness, from which all other languages, both spoken and unspoken, have grown.

This timeless practice is known to us today as a process of stilling and meditation, and Rumi's poetry provides us with a significant amount of material to unlock and understand how to apply this practice in our daily lives.

'Stop weaving ...' he says, pointing towards the importance of pausing, and the urgent need to create an internal memory of stillness within our mind and body. He continues, *'... and watch how the pattern improves'*, emphasising the process of stillness by means of action through non-reaction. Without this, we will never be able to observe the countless patterns we create in our life, so that they can be improved, properly integrated into our being or ultimately transcended.

'Between voice and presence' is one of Rumi's ingenious short sayings that, in itself, gives us insight into the actual process and application of meditation and stilling practice of such depth that it can only be assimilated in small pieces of contemplative practice. Meditation is like stripping off wallpaper in a very old house. Each time we revisit the job, the next layer or level underneath is revealed. Once all the layers and coverings are removed, the house will shine with its original glory.

Our whole body–mind unit can be considered as an old house with

different rooms, spaces, levels and windows. The events of life enter this great house via a continuous stream of incoming impressions and stimulus, forming and accumulating layer upon layer of new and repeating patterns on tapestries, ceilings and wall spaces, enveloping what we are in essence, and gradually creating what we have become physically, emotionally and intellectually up to the present day. This includes all our amazing capacities and talents, as well as our defects and shortcomings as an evolving human being.

Meditation could also be seen as the hammer and chisel that, with the utmost care and patience, gradually chip away all the layers, grooves and patterns that prevent the light of consciousness from illuminating the truth of what we are in essence. In philosophical terms, this whole process of experiencing and acknowledging both the conscious and non-conscious sides in us is called self-consciousness or self-realisation. The aim is to reach a level of consciousness in 'being' that possesses the whole objective truth of ourselves, as well as to experience what is not subject to change, somewhere hidden within the vastness of our internal psychological makeup.

A hint of how to ignite this process is contained in Rumi's words ...

'... *voice and presence* ...', which speaks about the ongoing struggle of stilling the body and mind during the initial stages of meditation. In addition, it is clearly pointing out which of our different mental faculties are involved in the process of meditation. Voice and presence represent attention and awareness respectively, interdependent inner qualities that

usually oppose each other. Together they create a state in which the active part – attention – takes its seat in the foreground to be always ready to act, whilst the passive and receptive part – awareness – rests in the background just to perceive, whilst attention continues on.

In meditation, as well as in everyday life, we continuously bounce back and forth between attention and awareness. Whilst meditating, our attention is constantly attracted by the powerful pull of our thoughts, which are evoked by incoming impressions of light, sound and smell entering our allegorical seven-storey house by using the five ‘open windows’ of our physical senses. Just imagine for a moment how these impressions enter our mind and how they are perceived. Within a glimpse of a moment, our attention springs into action. It then starts zooming in and, once focused, it identifies with whatever thought, object or event possesses the strongest attraction. Here, our struggle lies in bringing our attention back into the house with the help of our awareness, which simply perceives and is able to be aware of the stream of incoming impressions from a non-responsive, motionless, silent and far greater perspective. Unfortunately, due to its intrinsic passiveness, as well as its inability to perceive itself and act, awareness alone is entirely helpless to take on this apparently simple undertaking.

However, Rumi is handing us the tool that takes us out of this increasing friction between awareness and attention by the word ...

‘... *between* ...’, which means neither this nor that, or the fulcrum in the middle that gives us the possibility of settling right there in the still-point

between these two opposing forces, so that both are simply allowed to be. Settling there manifests a natural frictionless equilibrium between attention and awareness. Attention finds stillness and becomes pure and clear like a crystal, so that awareness finds itself reflected back by attention. Here, attention has learned how to close the shutters of all five windows, finding freedom from the continuous flow of external impressions and internal thoughts. This powerful reflective state between attention and awareness, which in time will lead to more prolonged intervals of peace of mind, is experienced as a state of ‘divided attention’, in which attention finally becomes attentive to awareness in the background. This linear and two-dimensional state of divided attention gives rise to ...

‘There is a channel ...’, which manifests as a balancing and neutralising force in the form of concentration. But before we can elaborate on this crucial point that we will all meet and cross during the process of stilling and meditation, we have to discuss the meaning of Rumi’s mystical knowledge concealed in his words *‘a way where information flows. In disciplined silence the channel opens, with wandering talk it closes’*.

‘... a way where information flows’ is a very significant statement in this poem, capturing the attention of the reader, and giving rise to different questions meant to ignite our curiosity and to open us up to possibilities we haven’t come across or even considered before. Only a true mystic of Rumi’s calibre – who undoubtedly walked the talk during his physical presence on earth eight centuries ago – in his compassionate wisdom has the capacity and authority to do that, and wake us up to a greater truth. In

these simple words he offers an encouraging proposition, a promise of great significance, which provides fuel in the form of unimpeachable meaning and gravitas that gradually will take us towards the realisation of our objective – that is our awakening.

In other words, ‘... *a way where information flows*’ points towards a way of possibilities, an approach, new modality or technique by which all that has formed, crystallised, is held or has stagnated within us can be dispersed, become spacious and possibly change in the flow. We now know that there is a way that leads to a place, level or state of existence that lies above the grasp of our mind and thought. In addition, we know that this way takes us to a channel that gives us access to information we can’t access in our ordinary state of mind. Rumi reveals the way to come into contact with this channel in the words ...

‘disciplined silence ...’, which hold the teachings of the process of stilling and meditation, clearly indicating by the word ‘disciplined’ that meditation is a process in which we will meet resistance and will experience phases of struggle and friction, and that we can’t expect instant results. Rumi refers to a particular kind of effort that forms part of achieving disciplined silence, which is known in the universal teachings as ‘conscious effort’. The term ‘silence’ in this context tells us that Rumi is not talking about a rigid discipline. The non-invasive nature of silence evokes a gradual and deepening process of stilling on all levels, in which the subtle energy of our conscious effort is directed towards remembering to remember to be aware, and being attentive to this inner stillness whilst sitting in meditation. This process will undo all doings, including all

intentions, as well as gradually transcending all ideas of being the one that meditates until ‘... *the channel opens*’.

‘... *with wandering talk it closes*’ informs us about all the different obstacles we will face in meditation that will disrupt our conscious effort and interfere with our new studies of the language of stillness. The phrase describes the scattered nature of our mind–body– thought unit. The word ‘wandering’ tells us about our different sleep-evoking states – all states that have become mechanical and habitual in us, mainly in the form of memory, and have created formations such as daydreaming, internal considering and imagining, as well as mechanical talking and identifying. These non-conscious states, which form a large part of our psychological being, don’t require any kind of effort and are a strong counterforce to the conscious effort we put into our stilling practice. As is the case with awareness and attention, the active force of conscious effort bounces back against the passive force of non- conscious effort.

At this point we can go back and start elaborating on the meaning of ‘*There is a channel ...*’ and ‘... *the channel opens ...*’. Allegorically, the channel stands for the ‘vertical scale’ or the ‘scale of eternity’, which according to the universal teachings comprises the scale of consciousness and our own individual scale of being. At this stage in meditation, attention (voice) and awareness (presence) come into perfect balance through the continuous application of stilling and meditation, merging through the power of concentration. This frictionless triad gives rise to a deep and whole state of meditation, in which our relative state of consciousness expands, all that is ‘in formation’ transcends, and higher

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knowledge of transformation will be unveiled and communicated by the omnipresent language of stillness.

And on this philosophical note, nothing more needs to be said than this: what you are left with is worth contemplating deeply within yourself in stillness and silence.

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