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SURRENDERING TO SILENCE: A HEART-CENTRED PRACTICE

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## GRATITUDES

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## INTRODUCTION

This study explores the efficacy of surrendering to Silence as a heart-centred practice within an urban setting. Designed as a two-stage process, it began with a weekend workshop, followed by three weeks of home-practice. The weekend workshop was designed to outline the challenges of Silence practice, and to assist in the navigation of its practice; the intention of the three-week practice was to articulate the participants' personal experience with both. To achieve this not-so-modest task, eight participants gathered for a retreat weekend at Vancouver School of Theology in early June 2010. Five interrelated themes, called the "Silence Practice Kit," were introduced throughout the weekend in the following order: Physical Response, Resistance and Suffering, Internal Observer, Surrender as Alignment, and Yearning and Devotion. The five themes were presented using dyad-exercises, journal writing, drawing, group discussion, visualization exercises, communing with nature, labyrinth walking, and chanting/singing psalms – all interspersed with periods of Silence. These activities were designed to reinforce Silence practice within the distractions of urban living in order to assist participants with their three-week practice: group discussions and exercises were intended to deepen their personal interpretations and/or understandings of the "Silence Practice Kit" themes.

Following the theme-building workshop, participants were expected to have a daily morning meditation practice and an end-of-day reflection, with each activity followed by

journal writing.<sup>1</sup> In both cases, the “Silence Practice Kit” themes were intended to provide a reflective framework to focus their journal writing. In effect, the “Silence Practice Kit” themes serve as the backbone for the entire project: the context and theological rationale of chapter one; the weekend exercises and discussions (Workshop Outline of Appendix 4); the quantitative and qualitative research design (chapter two); and a reference source for the participants’ meditation and day-end journal writing (Appendix 8).

An urban practice of Silence is challenging because it is counter-cultural and counter-intuitive. If we want Silence, most of us “escape” to nature or a retreat centre because we do not think that it is possible to create space for Silence in the routines of our everyday life. Since the Industrial Revolution of the 18th-19th centuries, our cultural and personal identities have been increasingly shaped by market-driven economies. In our first world consumer culture, human existence has become increasingly centred around “filling ourselves up” – with entertainment, purchases, socializing, information, exercise, sexual liaisons, and so on. Our relationships, including ways of relating to the natural world, have been colonized by increasing consumer-driven demands. Eventually and unconsciously we internalize these needs to the point where they become a core belief-system through which we live our life. Over time, the constant seduction of externalized needs creates inappropriate social and spiritual values that reinforce a false understanding of who we are. This false self-understanding, in turn, lessens our availability for the open simplicity of sacred Silence.

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<sup>1</sup> Participant’s Journal entries can be seen in Appendix 7.

This research project proposes that regular Silence practice, in an urban environment, can offer a possible antidote to these culturally-reinforced habits of self-identification. Thomas Keating refers to this culturally-reinforced false understanding of who we are simply as the “false self.” He describes why the false self develops *and* how it is culturally maintained:<sup>2</sup>

[The false self is] the self developed in our own likeness rather than in the likeness of God; the self-image developed to cope with the emotional trauma of early childhood. It seeks happiness in satisfying the instinctual needs of survival/security, affection/esteem, and power/control, and bases its self-worth on cultural or group identification.<sup>3</sup>

Given the impact of this cultural context on our lives, the “Silence Practice Kit” is designed to loosen the compulsive habits of the false self. While awareness of these false-self habits is a personal practice, it would be incomplete to view them *only* as a personal problem, that is, as separate from cultural influences. After all, as Keating states, we seek validation of the false self, and its instinctual needs, within the dynamics of the surrounding culture. So where does one begin?

The short answer is that we begin with ourselves – or rather – our false self (most commonly). However, as Keating reminds us, the dropping of false-self identities is only the first half of the journey. The second half raises the question: if I’m not just my body and my emotions, then who am I?<sup>4</sup> This research project suggests that some answers to this question lie within the theistic practice of Silence which understands Silence as a

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<sup>2</sup> Eckhart Tolle describes these (unconscious) habit patterns, based on early emotions, as the “pain body.” *A New Earth: Awakening to Your Life’s Purpose* (New York: Penguin Group, 2006), chapter 5.

<sup>3</sup> Thomas Keating, *The Human Condition: Contemplation and Transformation* (New York: Paulist Press, 1999), 163.

<sup>4</sup> Keating, 42.



relational dynamic that can be grounded and expressed in and through our daily lives.

The workshop and three weeks of practice were designed to increase conscious awareness of this frequently-feared, misunderstood, and largely-forgotten dimension of twenty-first century life. Attending to Silence was explored as an interior journey, and as with many journeys, it begins at the beginning. In other words, it can only begin from where we are and what we are experiencing: our psychology, our theology, our fears, our hopes, our bodies, our emotions, our busyness, and so on.

The most challenging obstacle we meet on the silent journey is our false-self habit of resistance to the spaciousness of Silence. However, with the other four themes of the “Silence Practice Kit,” particularly the Internal Observer practice, we begin to make space for changing our relationship to our resistance (and the suffering it causes). As Eckhart Tolle says, by observing or “watching the mechanics of the mind, you [can] step out of its resistance patterns.”<sup>5</sup>

Although the themes are discussed independently in chapter one, they dovetail with each other constantly within the actual practice and experience of Silence. This will be discussed more fully in the results review of chapter three, with direct “sample quotes” from participants’ journals (Appendix 7). These entries reflect participants’ experience of the “Silence Practice Kit” themes during meditation and at the end of the day. The day-end journal writing gives participants an opportunity to reflect on how, or if, they were aware of the “Silence Practice Kit” themes that day. It also allows for the “spontaneous

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<sup>5</sup> Eckhart Tolle, *The Power of Now: A Guide to Spiritual Enlightenment* (Vancouver: Namaste, 2000), 29.

surprises” of Silence practice, most evident in the Surrender theme in chapter three’s Journal Results.

A spontaneous arising of Silence however, is not intended to downplay the importance of a committed meditation practice. Even within the protected walls of monastic Silence, Thomas Merton encouraged daily contemplative practice, independent of what one’s personal feeling towards it might be. He stipulates that praising God is independent of how we may *feel* about it.<sup>6</sup> Like many mystics, Merton demonstrated a particular resonance for expressions of God-yearning. Addressing Trappist monks, Merton claims that Christ is in them whether they think about it or not; and therefore, their particular feeling towards their contemplative practice becomes easier to deal with precisely *because* they are not just doing it for themselves.<sup>7</sup>

Whereas an expression of yearning as devotion *is* likely the most powerful conduit for the practice of surrendering to Silence, it is highly unlikely that urban Silence practitioners could wrap their minds around the concept of a self-less practice at the outset. For this reason, Yearning appears as the last theme in the “Silence Practice Kit” and the final practice introduced in the workshop. Without the foundational practice and experience of the other four themes – particularly the Internal Observer practice (as we shall see) – there is little chance of connecting with the Yearning practices as outlined in the Research Design of chapter two.

The diversity of themes allows for individual differences, as well as the personal complexity of our Western psychology. For example, on one given day we may be

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<sup>6</sup> Thomas Merton, *Surrender to God*, audiotapes of lectures by Thomas Merton presented at the Abbey of Gethsemani in the mid-1960’s, (Kansas City: Credence Communications, 2004 [c2001?]).

<sup>7</sup> Merton, *Surrender to God*, audiotapes.

completely unable to relate to the practice of surrender, but we may be adept at observing our resistance to it without judgment. On another day, our body may feel relaxed – our breath full and deep – as we experience a place of internal surrender. The Journal entries of Appendix 7 show how the five themes work in surprisingly supportive and interrelated ways.

The presuppositions I bring to the practice of surrendering to Silence are three-fold: firstly, that the practice of Silence is heart-centred (as is supported by the Yearning results); secondly, that God lives in and through our heart (and life) within the spaciousness of Silence practice; and thirdly, that the challenge of Silence is multi-dimensional because we are multi-dimensional people – connected to our bodies, minds, hearts, and spirits – living in a highly stressed culture. Robert Sardello suggests that the heart is the region of the body where “the currents of Silence” enter, before spreading to the whole of our body: likewise, he says, the qualities of this silent current are much harder to feel when we are focused on the head region.<sup>8</sup> Cynthia Bourgeault states that the profound effects of *lectio divina* come from the awakening of the “eye of the heart,” when the “unitive seeing” of the divine heart becomes manifest.<sup>9</sup> The heart region of the body is also where I have experienced my most profound moments of Silence – once in paralyzing resistance, fear, and heart-chakra contraction; and once in the glory of a mystical-heart opening. These experiences, and others, have irrevocably altered my life view, and are responsible for my presuppositions.

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<sup>8</sup> Robert Sardello. *Silence* (Vermont: Heaven and Earth Publishing, 2006), 37.

<sup>9</sup> Cynthia Bourgeault, *Centering Prayer and Inner Awakening*. (Cambridge: Cowley Publications, 2004), 72-73.

As Sardello says, a conscious Silence practice is different from a “gift” of Silence, and can involve confronting anxiety and a “certain degree of terror.”<sup>10</sup> Perhaps this is because a challenging conundrum guards the gates of the silent journey and its spiritual practice: it only begins where we end – or rather, where our false self ends. Can such a humble practice be learned in an urban setting that does not value humility, or internal practices in general, let alone Silence?

The following research questions guided my research, and are answered in the chapters below. Would a workshop and three weeks of practice provide enough information and time to navigate the challenges of Silence practice? Would group discussions and the use of the “Silence Practice Kit” be sufficient to sustain that three-week practice? Would the habitual distractions of everyday life take over once participants were home? If there are benefits to their Silence practice, would participants’ journal-writing adequately reflect that benefit? Finally, would I be able adequately and fairly to interpret the challenges and the victories in their three-week exploration of Silence?

The “Silence Practice Kit” themes coalesced over months of research into the nature of Silence practice. Most of the authors make distinct references to at least three of the “Silence Practice Kit” themes. These are supported by theme-related quotes in the theological context below. The authors that reflect *all five themes* most consistently are Bourgeault and Keating. Their heart-centred Christianity, depth psychology, cultural understanding, and awareness of false self “energies” coincide well with the theme

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<sup>10</sup> Sardello. *Silence*, 20.

orientations.<sup>11</sup> Bourgeault describes a Welcoming (Centering Prayer) practice as follows (although I did not *extract* the themes from this practice, it is remarkably resonant with all five “Silence Practice Kit” themes).<sup>12</sup>

Welcoming is intrinsically an energetic practice [Physical Responses], geared to work at the level of sensation (not attitude) [Physical Responses and Internal Observer], in order to actively imprint kenotic surrender [Surrender as Alignment] as the innate first response to all life situations. Through its deliberate training in inner softening and opening [Physical Response and Surrender as Alignment], the practice begins to lay down new neural pathways in support of that deeper compassionate flow ... [of] Divine Mercy [Physical Responses and Yearning] ... Kenosis is experienced in (and through) the act of bringing oneself into a state of unconditional presence [Internal Observer and Surrender as Alignment]. In this more spacious spiritual state [Silence], the energy of being which might otherwise have been squandered in useless identified emotional reaction [Resistance and Suffering] is recaptured and placed directly in the service of spiritual transformation [Surrender as Alignment and Yearning].<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> False self “energies” refers to the physically felt “emotional energy” that surfaces from the unconscious material of the false self, as we practice sitting still (in Silence or Centering Prayer). Thomas Keating, *Intimacy with God: An Introduction to Centering Prayer* (New York: Crossroad Publishing, 2006), 79.

<sup>12</sup> I have underlined the key words or phrases that relate to the “Silence Practice Kit” themes.

<sup>13</sup> Cynthia Bourgeault, *The Wisdom Jesus: Transforming Heart and Mind – A New Perspective on Christ and His Message* (Boston: Shambala, 2008), 177.

## CHAPTER ONE

### CONTEXT AND THEOLOGICAL RATIONALE

The Christian wisdom-tradition recognizes the ancient and sacred connection of Silence to God: Merton states that we cannot be silent without listening to God;<sup>1</sup> Keating describes silence as “God’s first language;”<sup>2</sup> and Vennard explains that the purpose of silent retreat is simply “attending to God.”<sup>3</sup> The following theological context attempts to demonstrate that attending to the interior Silence of our heart is infinitely more real, challenging, and beneficial than the seduction of theological abstractions and curiosities. It will attempt to subvert the enduring (often unconscious) ideologies of manipulating ideas of God to serve our personal preferences and situations, rather than engaging in the vulnerable spaciousness of relating to God in attentive and surrendered Silence. As Richard Rohr says, we have to “break through the images to find out who God really is” (although he recognizes the anxiety and insecurity in letting go of both God-images and self-images).<sup>4</sup>

Cultural and religious paradigms alike have contributed to our distrust and ignorance of the internal world of spirituality. Bourgeault states that from “blessed are the

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<sup>1</sup> Merton, *Surrender to God*, audiotapes.

<sup>2</sup> Keating, *Intimacy with God*, 55.

<sup>3</sup> Jane E. Vennard, *Be Still: Designing and Leading Contemplative Retreats* (Library of Congress: The Alban Institute, 2000), 29.

<sup>4</sup> Richard Rohr, Trans., Peter Heinneg, *Simplicity: The Freedom of Letting Go* (New York: Crossroad Publishing, 2003), 25.

pure in heart, for they shall see God,” the Christian West has become stranded in “I think, therefore I am.”<sup>5</sup> Merton says that the trouble we have with Silence is that we don’t know what we are doing.<sup>6</sup> Perhaps we have tried to “do” Silence – and “do” God – from theological concepts alone, forsaking the vitality of a lived relationship or practice. Concepts can isolate us from experiencing who we are in Silence – and therefore, in God – if we engage God only through our thinking mind. Rohr says that while good theology is important, spirituality is more important.<sup>7</sup> Known for his cheeky manner, he suggests that religion is one of the surest ways to avoid both faith and God.<sup>8</sup> The Church, he says, was built on “outer authority,” and what we need now is the experience of “inner authority.”<sup>9</sup> Accordingly, the question becomes not just how to place Silence theologically, but how to experience it as the heart-centred Christian practice that it is. Or, as Bourgeault says, “the unitive level [of] Christianity is ‘all heart’.”<sup>10</sup>

A painful chasm exists between our fears and misunderstandings of Silence, and Merton’s joyful declaration that “the silence of the spheres is the music of a wedding feast.”<sup>11</sup> The following theological context is designed to support the “Silence Practice Kit” themes through a sound grounding in theology and practice; both are needed if we are to navigate the cultural and personal landscapes of Silence practice. This chapter

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<sup>5</sup> Bourgeault, *Centering Prayer*, 73.

<sup>6</sup> Merton, *Surrender to God*, audiotapes.

<sup>7</sup> Rohr, *Simplicity*, 33.

<sup>8</sup> Rohr, 33.

<sup>9</sup> Richard Rohr, *The Contemplative Stance in an Active Life*, audiotapes of lectures by Richard Rohr presented at Christ Church Cathedral, Chalmers Institute Summer School Public lecture series July 2001 (Vancouver, B.C.: Vancouver School of Theology, 2001).

<sup>10</sup> Bourgeault, *Centering Prayer*, 73.

<sup>11</sup> Thomas Merton, *New Seeds of Contemplation* (New York: New Directions, 2007), 297.

begins with a personal theological context and metaphoric story, followed by a discussion of relevant Christian theologies and spiritualities that support the “Silence Practice Kit” themes.

### **Personal Context**

While studying at Vancouver School of Theology, I have discovered my love and natural affinity for the Christian Wisdom Tradition. Guilty of having “thrown the baby out with the bath water,” I am slowly returning to Christianity as a scholar and Silence practitioner. Previous grounding in other wisdom traditions has helped me to recognize and appreciate my Christian wisdom roots. There is a proverb that “one teaches best what one most wishes, or needs, to learn.” In this sense, my thesis topic, “Surrendering to Silence: A Heart-Centred Practice,” is actually a humble attempt to serve my heart’s deepest yearning: learning to serve God with simple authenticity in my daily life.

The deep yearning behind this research project evolved gradually over a lifetime. A thirty-year career in Psychiatric Nursing, and further psychotherapeutic training, grounded me in an ability to be present with diverse forms of suffering. An undergraduate degree in Communications from S.F.U. (1992) deepened my understanding of the media’s impact on the Western psyche and culture.<sup>12</sup> Lastly, eleven years of exposure to a Bhakti (devotional) spiritual tradition has clarified suffering as a legitimate, and even necessary, part of an evolutionary spiritual practice such as Silence.<sup>13</sup> Understood as an

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<sup>12</sup> How the media’s emphasis on an external life-focus contributes to suffering, is discussed below in the Theological Rationale.

<sup>13</sup> The Western Baul tradition, founder Lee Lozowick (with origins in Bengal, India).



essential aspect of spiritual practice – rather than something to “fix” – suffering begets the surrendered heart of yearning.

Navigating the challenges of Silence myself has made it possible for me to assist others in this process. The research results indicate that the practice of Silence clarifies a spiritual need that people have had difficulty naming. It is difficult to say, “I need more of God in my life,” but in fact I think that is what I am “hearing” in the Journals and observing in the Yearning-theme Bar Graph Results.

The heart-centred practice of Silence has much to teach us about who we are *and* who we are not – usually beginning with the painful awareness of the latter. Knowing our resistance is the internal equivalent of “know thine enemy.” The Bengal Tiger Story (Appendix 9) offers a valuable metaphor for the “Silence Practice Kit” themes.<sup>14</sup> As Vennard says, “Stories are the words that give voice to the Silence, which information is unable to do.”<sup>15</sup>

### **Theological Context**

The theological rationale for the “Silence Practice Kit” draws mainly upon the Christian writings of Thomas Merton (and Merton scholar William Shannon), Thomas Keating, Richard Rohr, Cynthia Bourgeault, and my thesis advisor, Jane Vennard. Each of these authors practice and teach (or taught) the benefits and challenges of Silence within the spirituality of Christian wisdom. References also include secular authors who, while

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<sup>14</sup> I have studied with the Western Baul Lineage since 1998. Originating 500 years ago in Bengal India, they combine Hindu, Buddhist, and Sufi teachings through stories, song, and dance. The metaphor’s drawn from the story are entirely my own.

<sup>15</sup> Jane E. Vennard, telephone interview with author, Vancouver, B.C. Oct. 7, 2010. Quoted with permission.

they refer to New Testament scripture at times, do not identify themselves as Christian. These include local spiritual teacher Eckhart Tolle; spiritual psychologist and Silence Practitioner, Robert Sardello; and journalist and Silence practitioner, Anne LeClaire. All of these secular practitioners came to Silence in unique and fortuitous ways. Their writing style and choice of language is diverse, but their reverence for the universal sacredness of Silence is palpable and inspiring. These authors demonstrate that Silence practice is available to everyone who chooses to embark on the discipline of its practice, a discipline that continually beckons us away from a life of fear and pain, towards a life of open-hearted yearning for God.

Christian mystic St. John of the Cross stated, “The Father spoke for all eternity – just one word – and he spoke it in an eternal silence, and it is in silence that we hear him.”<sup>16</sup> There are many enticing mystical expressions relating to Silence. However, Silence practice begins where we are. As Tolle says, “[seeing] one’s predicament clearly is a first step toward going beyond it.”<sup>17</sup> Like the Bengal tiger, this often begins with the discomfiting knowledge of our own suffering and its ally, the false self. Keating demonstrates the pervasive tenacity of the false self, by comparing the worldly example of “drinking your friends under the table” with the monastic example of “*fasting* your friends under the table.”<sup>18</sup>

The theological context most helpful for the practice of Silence starts with the humbling recognition of how deeply (and unconsciously) we are trapped by the false self

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<sup>16</sup> Thomas Keating, *Contemplative Prayer: Traditional Christian Meditations for Opening to Divine Union*, audiotapes of lectures by Father Thomas Keating, (Boulder, CO: Sounds True Recording, 1995).

<sup>17</sup> Tolle, *A New Earth*, 131.

<sup>18</sup> Keating, *The Human Condition*, 17.

and its various manifestations of our human condition. To use an old-fashioned Christian term, we begin learning Silence as we begin to observe our “sinful” habits, or the places where we are not aligned with God or our own authenticity. Ann LeClaire says that on her Silence days, she was challenged to “release illusions about [herself] and ... observe [herself] as she truly was,” by looking more deeply at her “intentions, reactions, and responses.”<sup>19</sup> The Internal Observer theme is essential to Silence practice, as it allows us to recognize our authentic location in relationship to Silence. Although the following “Silence Practice Kit” themes are discussed individually, they are fluid and interconnected within the experiential *practice* of Silence.<sup>20</sup>

### 1. Physical Responses

The spaciousness of Silence easily gives rise to a palpable softening of the physical body. As Sardello says, when the “touch of Silence announces itself,” there is a closeness and a familiarity with our own bodily form.<sup>21</sup> He describes our multi-leveled relationship with Silence as follows.

Silence keeps us intimately bound with the truth of our being, constantly conveying to us *in a bodily way* that our individual and unique presence as soul, spirit, and body intermingles with the world and, at the same time, lives a free and independent existence ... Illusion and ego-fantasy begin with forgetting this intimacy (*italics mine*).<sup>22</sup>

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<sup>19</sup> Anne D. LeClaire, *Listening Below the Noise: The Transformative Power of Silence* (New York:Harper Collins Publishers, 2009), 102.

<sup>20</sup> For a more practice-oriented description of these themes, see Appendix 2, “Interpretive Themes,” a hand-out for participants.

<sup>21</sup> Sardello, *Silence*, 32.

<sup>22</sup> Sardello, 32.

Likewise, in the inner work of Centring Prayer, Bourgeault recommends avoiding the mental work of self-analysis and “staying with the sensations.” Self-analysis, she says, lands us right back in ego, whereas following the sensation (i.e, if fear is present, what is the *sensation* of fear?), will align us with our “inner observer.”<sup>23</sup> In this way, the practice of Physical Responses and Internal Observer support each other.

Unlike stress-reducing techniques that focus on finding relief through physical relaxation techniques, relaxation is a by-product of Silence practice, beginning with the simple practice of observing “what is,” without judgment or conclusion. As Shannon reminds us, we don’t have to “get anywhere” when we practice Silence “because we are already there” (in God): we simply have to become aware that we are there.<sup>24</sup> Far from just a conceptual understanding, the awareness of being in God through Silence can be felt physically, as a fluid relaxation in the body. Sardello says that physical relaxation is pivotal for Silence practice, because muscles are connected to personal effort or the “desire body,” which is incapable of receiving Silence.<sup>25</sup>

## 2. Resistance and Suffering

William Shannon, a Roman Catholic priest, identifies two main reasons why it is so difficult for us to have the true awareness necessary for Silence practice: (1) certain things that are a part of our culture and, (2) certain things that are a part of our personality structure.<sup>26</sup> Shannon cites three obstacles to developing cultural awareness: our busyness,

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<sup>23</sup> Bourgeault, *Centering Prayer*, 143.

<sup>24</sup> William H. Shannon, *Silence on Fire: The Prayer of Awareness* (New York: Crossroad, 1991), 167.

<sup>25</sup> Sardello, *Silence*, 34.

<sup>26</sup> Shannon, 75.

the addiction of our culture to (external) productivity and efficiency, and the noise that so pervasively saturates our lives. He refers to our personality structure as the “brooding, disturbing thoughts [that] represent what is really a false, illusory self in us, ... untrue to the image of God that we are.”<sup>27</sup> Here, Shannon is addressing the connection between the illusory false self and the “brooding, disturbing thoughts” that inhabit our personality structure.

Rohr speaks to *types* of thought – one spiritually problematic and the other not – by differentiating between the calculative mind and the contemplative mind.<sup>28</sup> He labels the calculative mind as ego-centric (i.e., “what’s in it for me, how will this make me appear, and what advancement will this give me?”), calculating, controlling, judging and therefore essentially blind.<sup>29</sup> Rohr says that, as a Western people, we are largely involved in hoarding, accumulating, performing, attaining, and achieving – “*exactly* opposite to the direction of contemplation.”<sup>30</sup> In her book, *Mary Magdalene*, Bourgeault cites that “... the real problem with any constrictive motion (taking, defending, hoarding, clinging) is that it makes us spiritually blind, unable to see the divine generosity that is always flowing toward us.”<sup>31</sup> Through self-observation and a conceptual understanding of suffering’s cultural-psychological dynamics, we begin to break patterns of resistance that contribute to both our suffering and spiritual blindness.

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<sup>27</sup> Shannon, 80.

<sup>28</sup> Rohr, *The Contemplative Stance*, audiotapes.

<sup>29</sup> Rohr, audiotapes.

<sup>30</sup> Rohr, audiotapes.

<sup>31</sup> Cynthia Bourgeault, “Theology and the Practice of Prayer,” Class Handout of chapter 8, “The Great Identity Theft,” *The Meaning of Mary Magdalene: Discovering the Woman at the Heart of Christianity* (Shambala Publications, 2010), SP220: The Theology and Practice of Prayer, V.S.T., Fall 2008.

### 3. The Internal Observer

The Internal Observer navigates the inner world that lies behind the false self.

Bourgeault recommends an “inner observer practice” to facilitate moments of “unconditional presence.”<sup>32</sup> She argues that this allows for *the convergence of surrender and awareness* – something she claims that the mystics have always known.<sup>33</sup> Acknowledgment of our suffering through an awareness of it (rather than unconsciously resisting it), opens us to a more spacious way of knowing our pain.

The Internal Observer practice encourages a different way of perceiving, both on and off the cushion. Either way, suffering and discomfort can metamorphose into an opportunity to know ourselves and the world around us less habitually. Tolle challenges us to “take the thinking out of perceiving” by simply “looking,” without the voice in our head commenting, drawing conclusions, comparing, and trying to figure things out.<sup>34</sup> The Internal Observer practice allows self-knowledge to grow because we begin to experience ourselves beyond the confines of personal suffering and resistance. Suffering is an unavoidable aspect of our human condition, but through increased self-awareness, it can also serve as a fiery portal into Silence practice.

Keating warns that if our suffering remains unconscious, it may cause us to pray from an unconscious and therefore insincere place.<sup>35</sup> Without self-observation practices, we remain victims of our own suffering, casting blame outside of ourselves. The Internal Observer practice is designed to illuminate the structure of our ego. If we never explore

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<sup>32</sup> Bourgeault, *Centering Prayer*, 145.

<sup>33</sup> Bourgeault, 145.

<sup>34</sup> Tolle, *A New Earth*, 240.

<sup>35</sup> Keating, *Contemplative Prayer*, audiotapes.

why certain people or situations make us nervous or angry, for example, we never get to know the defenses of the false self. Rohr says that we have to de-stabilize the “imperial ego,” and “do something ... to undercut the success game that we’re all playing.”<sup>36</sup>

Tolle discusses two phenomena: one he refers to as “the pain body,” and the second as the “transformational tool” of being present – as the watcher – to that pain, or whatever is happening inside you.<sup>37</sup> Similar to Bourgeault’s “unconditional presence,” Tolle suggests that we become “present with the pain” rather than feeding it with our “compulsion to talk or think about it.”<sup>38</sup> Being present with emotional/psychological pain and letting go of the story we have built around it, resonates with the kenotic action of Centering Prayer, where one returns – again and again from thoughts and feelings – to the “sacred word.”<sup>39</sup>

#### 4. Surrender as Alignment

What mechanism could possibly teach us the kenotic action of self-surrender? What could be strong enough to propel us towards surrender? Within the materialistic individualism of our culture, surrender is a feared and misunderstood spiritual practice. Rohr questions where we will learn the surrendered action of letting go when capitalism teaches us nothing about it.<sup>40</sup> He suggests that there is only one thing strong enough to teach surrender:

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<sup>36</sup> Rohr, *The Contemplative Stance*, audiotapes.

<sup>37</sup> Tolle, *The Power of Now*, 34.

<sup>38</sup> Tolle, 34.

<sup>39</sup> Keating, *Contemplative Prayer*, audiotapes.

<sup>40</sup> Rohr, *The Contemplative Stance*, audiotapes.

Normally the only thing strong enough to destabilize [the] separate self, [the] imperial ego, [the] private “I,” [the] autonomous self that Western individualists think they are – the only thing strong enough is some form of suffering.<sup>41</sup>

Rohr reminds us that suffering and surrender are inseparable, and that all great spirituality is about “letting go.”<sup>42</sup> Shannon reminds us that the “letting go” action of surrender is not just a momentary experience, but a way of life; he cautions us against making childhood wounds and bruises identity badges that we “enjoy nursing.”<sup>43</sup> It is not wealth or material possessiveness that are the opposites of true poverty, he says, but the clinging to less definable realities, like our prejudices and biases.<sup>44</sup> Bourgeault reframes surrender as “open alignment,” as in the New Testament story of Peter walking miraculously across the water, until he becomes “self-conscious” and falls out of alignment.<sup>45</sup>

## 5. Yearning

In a theistic tradition, yearning is often expressed as prayer. Vennard states that many people claim that they need to figure out who God is before they pray, but she recommends the other way around.<sup>46</sup> Vennard maintains that prayer *is* her theology and that old images of God – good and bad – are abstractions.<sup>47</sup> She questions the possibility

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<sup>41</sup> Rohr, *The Contemplative Stance*, audiotapes.

<sup>42</sup> Rohr, *The Contemplative Stance*, audiotapes.

<sup>43</sup> Shannon, 85.

<sup>44</sup> Shannon, 85.

<sup>45</sup> Adaptation by Cynthia Bourgeault, *Spirituality and Practice E-course*, InterSpiritual Wisdom, March 3, 2010. (This story, among others, was given to participants as a Reflection Handout, see Appendix 5.)

<sup>46</sup> Jane E. Vennard, *A Theology of Prayer: Discovering Intimacy with God*, audiotapes of lectures by Jane E. Vennard presented at Vancouver School of Theology, Chalmers Institute Summer School Public lecture series, July 2000 (Vancouver, B.C.: Vancouver School of Theology, 2000).

<sup>47</sup> Vennard, *A Theology of Prayer*, audiotapes.



for intimacy with an abstraction: “while they help us to think about God, they don’t help us think about God and relate to God in our own hearts.”<sup>48</sup>

Western cultural and religious paradigms distrust the internal world, making them prone to mental abstractions – whether atheistic or theistic. Keating says that a scripturally-based spirituality (now rediscovered by Christian scholars) represents a 180-degree turn from the Western Model because “Scripture teaches that interior motivation is more important than external acts.”<sup>49</sup> As such, we immediately come up against our social and cultural conditioning: not just conditioning us about who we are as individuals, but conditioning us about who God is as well.

Historically, much of our theology has been a process of God-objectification, which does not lend itself to knowing the heart’s yearning. In order to help us transition from externalized God-concepts, Bourgeault simply refers to “God as flow” rather than “object.”<sup>50</sup> Bourgeault and Vennard both recommend the use of Psalms to praise God, as well as to transform intense emotions such as anger or fear. Bourgeault asserts that psalmody helps us to stay grounded, connected, and “is always guiding the heart.”<sup>51</sup> Vennard says: “if I can really pray where my heart is, then my heart and my prayers are transformed.”<sup>52</sup> Merton asserts that contemplation “sees without seeing [and] knows

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<sup>48</sup> Vennard, *A Theology of Prayer*, audiotapes.

<sup>49</sup> Keating, *Intimacy with God*, 25.

<sup>50</sup> Bourgeault, “Theology and the Practice of Prayer,” Class Notes, Fall 2008.

<sup>51</sup> Cynthia Bourgeault, *Chanting the Psalms: A Practical Guide with Instructional CD* (Boston: New Seeds, 2006), 47.

<sup>52</sup> Vennard, *A Theology of Prayer*, audiotapes.

without knowing,” and is a greater depth of faith and knowledge than can ever be grasped in words, images, or even in clear concepts.<sup>53</sup>

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<sup>53</sup> Merton, *New Seeds of Contemplation*, 1.

## CHAPTER TWO

### RESEARCH DESIGN

The research design used for this thesis has produced results that demonstrate that attending to the interior Silence of our heart is infinitely more real, challenging, and beneficial than the seduction of theological abstractions and “curiosities.” It subverts the enduring (often unconscious) paradigm of manipulating ideas of God to serve our personal preferences and situations, rather than engaging in the vulnerable spaciousness of relating to God in attentive and surrendered silence.

Qualitative and quantitative research methods were used. The qualitative research method contained three weeks of twice-daily journaling, once following the meditation (internal reflection) and once at the end of the day (external reflection). The latter reinforces the idea that the practice of Silence extends beyond the meditation time. The quantitative method consists of thirty-five rated questions about participants’ experiences of Silence (see Appendix 6). These were e-mailed to participants prior to the weekend workshop and were measured as follows: (1) bar-graphed in contrast with the answers to the same set of e-mailed questions following three-weeks of silent practice (Appendix 8), and (2) contrasted with the emerging themes from the journal writing of the qualitative data (Appendix 7).

A Western psychological perspective is applied to the “Silence Practice Kit” because its practice begins with the extensive psychological entanglements of the false self. Bourgeault states that, before our deep quest for God-union can be fully realized, “there is a huge amount of healing [from] ... our psychological woundedness and self-justification that needs to take place.”<sup>1</sup> Combining contemporary psychology with classic Christian teaching, Keating refers to the false self as the modern day equivalent of the Christian concept of original sin.<sup>2</sup>

Modifying Silence from “academic topic” to Silence as “practice,” carries with it a particular set of challenges. The Christian tradition – as expressed by Thomas Merton in particular – recognizes Silence as a monastic practice. The question then becomes: how *does* one establish a Silence practice within an urban setting, without the visible walls and monastic routines of the community? In order to approach Silence practice from a Western-psychological perspective, the five themes of the “Silence Practice Kit” combine a theistic model with an embodied psychology. As Keating says, it is helpful to recognize emotions as energy because they “can only be dissipated by acknowledging or articulating them.”<sup>3</sup> While the *actual* relationship with Silence contains no such categories or divisions, the “Silence Practice Kit” themes serve as navigational training wheels (or monastic walls) that provide guidance around cultural and personal (psychological) obstacles to Silence. Most significantly perhaps, the workshop design and three-week practice simply gave participants permission to take time for Silence.

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<sup>1</sup> Bourgeault, *Centering Prayer*, 95.

<sup>2</sup> Bourgeault, 94.

<sup>3</sup> Keating, *Intimacy with God*, 79.

## Monastic Motif: Urban Practice Guidelines

Many questions lay behind my desire to support and learn from people as they faced the challenges of engaging in an urban Silence practice. As Westerners, we are estranged from Silence, in part, because we have learned to live with the false self (or ego) at centre stage: “wild, strong and free,” like the Bengal tiger. Our personal and cultural orientations may be incongruent with Silence practice, and yet our deepest heart-yearning draws us towards its spacious language. Bourgeault says that monastic practices are not about “leaving the world,” but more about “cultivating worlds within the inner geography” where subtle meanings of essential interconnectedness begin to find “expression in the outer world.”<sup>4</sup>

As with the Bengal tiger, the heart-centred practice of Silence begins with the willingness to learn a new language, to allow for deeper connections with ourselves and the world around us. According to Bourgeault, “Benedictine monasticism refined the training of the unitive imagination to a high art,” and as long as yearning continues to reverberate within us, that same potential is within each of us.<sup>5</sup>

The five “Silence Practice Kit” themes were presented in the Workshop Outline of Appendix 4 as a variety of individual and group exercises, followed by dyads and theological discussion. Many workshop exercises were followed by periods of silence, journal writing, and drawing. The focus was to allow participants to explore their own resistances, observations, and questions in a safe and supportive environment.

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<sup>4</sup> Bourgeault *Chanting the Psalms*, 58.

<sup>5</sup> Bourgeault, 58.

## Workshop Design

For the workshop weekend, we were fortunate to have two rooms on the fourth floor of the Vancouver School of Theology. This allowed for some flexibility in silent breaks and those wishing to dialogue further about their experiences. In either case, whether in Silence or talking, the Internal Observer focus was constantly encouraged. Breaks in the workshop were divided between “silent breaks” and “talking breaks.” According to Vennard, this gives participants a lot to observe regarding their own responses to talking and Silence.<sup>6</sup>

Friday night began with circle introductions, in which participants gave their reasons for attending, followed by any fears they might have had about Silence practice.<sup>7</sup> They were then given a questionnaire in which they were asked to write or comment on their personal experiences of Silence in the past.<sup>8</sup> The Workshop Design details and exercise descriptions are found in the Workshop Outline of Appendix 4. The Participant Workshop Outline, which is a skeletal version of the Workshop Outline, is found in Appendix 5, along with theme-related handouts mentioned below. Following the guided meditations, participants were frequently encouraged to draw or write.<sup>9</sup> Vennard states that this “helps people remain with their imaginations rather than immediately engaging their analytic minds in discussion.”<sup>10</sup> (As Rohr points out, we need to be able to

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<sup>6</sup> Vennard’s Outline Feedback from Thesis Proposal, March 2010.

<sup>7</sup> Vennard encourages circle exercises where we would put a word or phrase into the circle as a way of sharing (Vennard’s Outline Feedback, March 2010).

<sup>8</sup> See Appendix 6, Workshop Outline for details.

<sup>9</sup> Crayons and paper were distributed on the tables around the room.

<sup>10</sup> Vennard writes that she is often asked why the participants are not led *through* the obstacle. She says that she believes God to be in the meadow, on the journey, *and* in the obstacle. The spiritual life, she proposes, is about being where you are, e.g., “if the couch-potato part of myself interrupts prayer, then it needs loving attention,” Vennard, *Be Still*, 67-68.

distinguish between the calculative mind and the contemplative mind. The practice of Silence simply cannot be undertaken with the calculative mind.)

Friday and Saturday evenings a “home practice” was assigned, and then discussed the following morning. Lunch consisted of a one-hour silent break, during which the participants were asked to have eye contact for the first half hour, and no eye contact for the second half hour. Labyrinth walking was also available. At lunch break, they were encouraged to exercise their Internal Observer: i.e., if resistance surfaced they were to just watch it; rather than *practicing* compassion they were to just allow the spaciousness of “neutral” observation, and watch what happens.<sup>11</sup> They also discussed how their body (and/or breath) responded when resistance (i.e, judgments) entered their consciousness.<sup>12</sup>

Sunday morning began with a silent entry and meditation. The Yearning exercise began with a brief orientation to Christian psalmody and its history. It was contrasted with other traditional forms of chanting, in particular its “purgative” emphasis, designed to awaken the heart’s capacity for spiritual realities.<sup>13</sup> The Chants and Psalms of Sunday’s Yearning practices were done as a group exercise and individually, where we listened to the different nuanced interpretations of the text.

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<sup>11</sup> We love to make the “heady” conclusion that we are compassionate beings before we give ourselves space to *discover* who we are. Practicing silence is about discovering (Vennard’s Outline Feedback, March 2010).

<sup>12</sup> These guided reflections and discussions were intended to clarify participant awareness of how the themes related to each other. The questions they were asked would hopefully their focus in journal writing as well.

<sup>13</sup> Bourgeault *Chanting the Psalms*, 163-164.

## Workshop Handouts: Theme-Practice Guidelines

“Retreat Reflection Handouts” (Appendix 5), were distributed to participants as we covered each “Silence Practice Kit” theme during the weekend. These Workshop Reflection Handouts were based on the work of the authors referred to in chapter one, and were intended to support an understanding of the theology behind some of the workshop exercises. They consisted of the following: Internal Observer, Surrender, Yearning, Scriptural Orientation to Silence, and Prayers and Chants. (Physical Responses and Resistance did not have handouts, as these themes do not apply to theological reflection.) At the end of the workshop, participants were given a practice-oriented description of the five themes (Interpretive Themes of Appendix 6) as a guideline for their Silence practice and their journal writing. This reinforces the rationale behind the themes, as well as tips on how to practice them.

## Data Collection

The data collection included the qualitative analysis of participants twice-daily journal writing, thirty-five quantitative before-and-after questions, comments from the follow-up meeting, as well as three “Outlier Themes” that emerged independent of the weekend workshop design (i.e., courage, intention, and simplicity). Appendix 2, Interpretive Themes of the “Silence Practice Kit,” was given to participants at the end of the workshop in order to guide them in their practice and their journal reflections. While these themes are discussed theologically in chapter one, the interpretive theme descriptions emphasize a practice-based context.



## Journal Writing

The main method of inquiry is a qualitative analysis of the participants' twice-daily journal writing. The themes of the "Silence Practice Kit" are reflected in the Meditation Journals as well as the Day-end Journals because the practice of Silence extends beyond the meditation time. For example, a sense of increased spaciousness, well-being and/or calmness, may not always be apparent or observable while meditating; but we may find ourselves surprisingly gentle and open with our challenging teenager, or aging parent during the day.

Our relationship to Silence is very personal and can be named and experienced differently. I was keenly aware of this fact as I searched for "Silence Practice Kit" references when reading through participants journals, placing them in theme categories.<sup>14</sup> The participants' journals are divided into Meditation Journals and Day-end Journals, with the latter divided into sub-themes. The journal themes are placed into categories in order to compare them with the quantitative data from the before-and-after questionnaire.

## Before-And-After Questionnaire

The second method of inquiry is quantitative and consists of thirty-five before-and-after questions (one to five scale-rating). These were e-mailed to participants prior to the weekend workshop, and again after their three-weeks of Silence practice.<sup>15</sup> The questions

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<sup>14</sup> Details on journal reflection guidelines, methods of collecting data, validation of findings, and ethics, please see Appendix 3.

<sup>15</sup> See Appendix 6 for Before-And-After Questionnaire.

were designed to reflect the five themes of Silence practice. These before and after theme-based results are shown on the bar-graphs of Appendix 8.

## CHAPTER THREE

### RESULTS REVIEW

In this chapter, significant entries from participant Journals will be discussed, along with the Bar Graph theme results, and the “Unexpected and Could-Have-Improved” Results. The Meditation Journals are discussed first, followed by Day-end Journals and Outlier themes that emerged from the workshop weekend. Both journals have been reviewed and categorized according to the five “Silence Practice Kit” themes in the Journal Data Entries of Appendix 7. While themes frequently overlap, with two or more themes emerging in one journal entry, I have attempted to place the journal entry under the heading of the *dominant theme* being expressed.<sup>1</sup> Classifying the results by theme category allows the results to be reviewed systematically. In reality, any one theme, when practiced with sincere intention, can morph into an inclusive all-theme experience of Silence.<sup>2</sup>

The configuration of the eight participants was as follows:

- one male, seven female
- three with English as their second language
- four with regular meditation practices prior to the workshop
- three ex-Catholics, one Buddhist (raised in Brunei Darusalaam – a small kingdom on the island of Borneo), one with Pentecostal roots, and the remaining three without strong religious roots
- two practice their spirituality within a church
- ages ranged from forty-five to sixty-five years

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<sup>1</sup> The challenges of personal interpretation biases are addressed in Appendix 3.

<sup>2</sup> An example of this is in F-Simplicity, entry #6, of the Outlier Themes (Appendix 7).

## Journal Results

Only six of the eight participants have journal entries quoted in the Journal Data Entries of Appendix 7: one participant lost her journal (see “Follow-up Results” below), and the other participant’s journal writing was so personal as to obscure the “Silence Practice Kit” themes. As discussed in the conclusion, the Internal Observation theme is essential to Silence practice. The fact that the Internal Observer is by far the largest section in the Day-end Journals also reinforces the vitality of its practice.

The journal entries of Appendix 7 comprise approximately forty percent of the six remaining journals. Occasionally spelling, punctuation, and wording have been slightly altered from the original journal to improve legibility. Occasional italics within parentheses indicate my comments when the theme focus shifts within the journal entry.

Some entries belonged in two theme categories, and were placed in both. In her peer-debriefing, Sharon Liebau felt that some of the Internal Observer entries belonged in Surrender categories, and vice versa.<sup>3</sup> (Some I did change, others seemed best left where they were.)<sup>4</sup> Internal Observer and Surrender themes are perhaps easily mistaken for each other, due to the implicit action of surrender within the willingness to self-observe. As Bourgeault suggests (above), mystics speak of a “surrendered awareness,” implying the simultaneous nature of Internal Observer and Surrender practices.

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<sup>3</sup> Ms. Sharon Liebau ([sharon@cdnl.com](mailto:sharon@cdnl.com) or 604-681-8075.) is a friend and former colleague of mine who is familiar with the organization of research-oriented statistics. She was also a workshop participant.

<sup>4</sup> Liebau also felt that #11 of the 35 Before-And-After Questions was an Internal Observer Theme, rather than a Surrender Theme.

## Meditation Journals

The themes in the Meditation Journals were approximately equal in number, with the over-all entries being less than half the number of Day-end entries. Unlike the themes in the Day-end Journals, the Meditation Journals did not warrant sub-categories.<sup>5</sup> Entries from Theme A-Physical Response practice were expressed as:

1. (A.1) kundalini (corporeal energy)<sup>6</sup>
2. (A.2) physical pain
3. (A.3) a connection to the body through breath
4. (A.4) a desire for creativity
5. (A.5) a flow of physical energy through chanting (sound vibration)
6. (A.5) a "sensing" of the mind's skittishness

Theme B-Resistance appears as the largest category in the Meditation Journals, whereas it was the smallest theme in the Day-end Journals. Perhaps the withdrawal from external activities during meditation allows for increased observation of resistive patterns. (As discussed in chapter one, resistance to Silence is also a learned cultural phenomenon.) Entries from Theme B-Resistance practice were expressed towards:

1. (B.1) fatigue and weariness
2. (B.2) scriptural verses (from Catholic upbringing).
3. (B.3) a busy life
4. (B.4) a devotional quote evoking fear (of "forsaking [the] ... ego-self")
5. (B.6) the discipline of practice
6. (B.7) psychological pain
7. (B.8) unsafe feelings

For the most part, Theme C-Internal Observer in the Meditation Journals seemed to reflect a generalized sense of "spaciousness," allowing for increased levels of

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<sup>5</sup> Perhaps because meditation is an internal experience, the themes are clearer and interpreted more easily.

<sup>6</sup> In Yoga, kundalini is a "corporeal energy," i.e., an unconscious, instinctive or libidinal force or Shakti (Hindu term for the female principle), which lies coiled at the base of the spine.

questioning, self-acceptance, and self-understanding. Entries from Theme C-Internal

Observer practices were expressed as:

1. (C.2) questioning the difference between surrender and purposelessness
2. (C.3) recognizing the need to “lighten-up” (not take responsibilities so seriously)
3. (C.4) releasing “fear,” and seeing the mind’s busyness and spirit’s “warm glow” simultaneously
4. (C.5) feeling anger move
5. (C.6) a recognition of the difference between the actual situation and the thought-filter that produces fear
6. (C.7) seeing the relational aspect of Silence
7. (C.8) observing the sharp sound of hand-clapping to “startle/stop the mind”

Theme D-Surrender (Alignment) is a relatively short category in the Meditation Journals. For the most part, participants surrender experiences came in brief glimpses that appeared to surprise them (at times). Theme D-Surrender entries included glimpses of:

1. (D.3 and 6) the power of trust, the need to say or do little in that space, and how one can receive others (and activities) from a different place of understanding
2. (D.4) a surrendered feeling through (Psalm) *Lectio Divina* practice
3. (D.5) surrendered feelings of “being at peace” through Intention practice<sup>7</sup>

The Meditation Journals of Theme E -Yearning (and Devotion) demonstrate the participants experimentation with the Sacred Word in Scriptural Quotes from the workshop weekend.<sup>8</sup> Half of the entries seem to express a move from resistance to yearning, while others express an open trust that resonates as a physical response. Theme E-Yearning entries were expressed through the following:

1. (E.1) using a Hindu Scripture where “Me” represents the Holy, the participant expresses surprise at how the “Me” can put the (personal) “I” in its rightful place

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<sup>7</sup> Intention was one of the workshop weekend’s Outlier Themes. See The Unexpected and Could-Have-Improved “Workshop Outlier Themes”; Journal Data Entries: “Silence Practice Kit” Themes and “Outlier” Themes of Appendix 7; and Outlier Theme Entries (below).

<sup>8</sup> See “Workshop Scriptural Quotes” in Handouts, Appendix 5.

2. (E.2) using (Outlier theme) Intention by calling for “Grace and humility”
3. (E.3) psalm 34:1-3 begins as the “most resisted” quote to a discovery of its sacredness and power to bring people together in worship
4. (E.4) enjoyment of the mind-calming quality of Scripture
5. (E.5) a Rumi quote, now memorized after ten days, fills participant’s consciousness with prayer and yearning
6. (E.6) Scripture resonates in the body and also feels like a call to wisdom
7. (E.7, 8) psalms and sacred texts as powerful words affecting visceral and spiritual experiences
8. (E.9) feeling oneness and support in the universe

Overall, the Meditation Journals emphasize the discipline, personal challenges, and rewards of the “Silence Practice Kit” themes. The Internal Observer practice allowed for deeper levels of observing resistance through awarenesses of anger, fear, constant mind chatter, and physical habits of resistance. During the three-week practice, reflective insights into Silence practice emerged, allowing for experiential glimpses into the surrendered spaciousness of (alignment with) divine yearning.<sup>9</sup> The Meditation Journals demonstrate the importance of authenticity in Silence practice; awareness of both our resistances and our yearning are essential to its practice.

### Day-end Journals

Possibly because there is more to observe during the day than on the cushion, the Day-end Journals were more than twice the length of the Meditation Journals. I have therefore summarized the results in broader strokes, with less specific references to individual entries. The only Day-end Journal theme that is not divided into sub-categories was Theme A-Physical Responses. These entries included:

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<sup>9</sup> “Silence Practice Kit” themes are deliberately chosen for their ability to affirm personal experience through aware observation, rather than through the critical habits of the false self (i.e., forgiveness and love are aspects of surrender, but are impractical themes due to the false self judgment and guilt they can elicit).

1. (A.3) a calming and settling of body and mind
2. (A.5) awareness of relationship with food
3. (A.6) awareness of body posture
4. (A.10) a sense of calm spaciousness in the body
5. (A.12) agitation and anger responses shifting to a sense of peace and calm

Theme B-Resistance entries were the smallest in number, comprising only 8 percent of the total entries (the opposite of the Meditation Theme B-Resistance Journals, which was the largest category, with 21 percent of the total entries). One half of the Theme B-Resistance entries metamorphosed into aspects of surrender. The entries are as follows:

1. (B.1) intense observation of personal “tight spot”
2. (B.2) reflecting on irritations through the day as types of resistance
3. (B.3) playing it safe and avoiding risk
4. (B.4) sudden personal irritation as resistance that obscures compassion
5. (B.5) resistance as fatigue moving to surrendering control need
6. (B.6) resisting spouses stress, then surrendering the need to “fix things for him”
7. (B.7) resistance as irritation to family upsets, surrendering into self-reflection
8. (B.8) resistance as lack of forgiveness, surrendering attachment to the story

Theme C-Internal Observer entries were the largest category of the Day-end Journals, and were divided into five different categories. The “reflective self-observer” category was the largest. It showed various styles of self-reflection during the three-week practice. For example, there was the scriptural reflection (C.8), the relationship reflection (C.6), and the reflection on the actual practice of Silence (C.14). Each of these three “reflective self-observer” entries demonstrates a deepening Internal Observer practice which allows an increased understanding of self in relationship to Silence practice. Theme C-Internal Observer entries were divided into the following categories:



1. (C.2-5) observing Outlier Theme of Intention (4 entries)
2. (C.6-18) reflective self-observer (13 entries)
3. (C.19-23) compassionate observer (3 entries)
4. (C.22-26) observing resistance (5 entries)
5. (C.27-29) observing allowing space-from-self (3 entries)

The Surrender entries show the various realities available to us through surrender: the importance of practice through the challenges and blessings of Silence (D.2), the experience of “freedom” from one’s opinions and preferences (D.4 and 5), allowing the “other” space through not taking their reactions personally (D.7), surrendering into the “source” (D.8), surrender as presence and mind-body stillness (D.11), surrendering into spacious glimpses of compassion (D.14), self-expression creating new alignment with mind and body (D.15), and recognizing the difference between “giving up” and surrendering (D.23). Due to the large number of entries, Theme D-Surrender entries were also divided into the following categories:

1. (D.4-8) non-resistance (5 entries)
2. (D.9-14) being in the present (6 entries)
3. (D.15-21) non-judgment/equanimity/calmness (7 entries)
4. (D.22-23) knowing our limitations and biases (2 entries)
5. (D.24-25) surrender as love (2 entries)

The final category of the Day-end Journals is Theme E-Yearning and Devotion. Most of the entries expressed Yearning as “gratitude” (8 entries), as well as Yearning as “feelings of separation” (2 entries). Journal entry (E.1) expresses Yearning as continuous joy following “group chanting and Psalm” singing. The rest of the Yearning entries express “gratitude” (with the exception of the last two entries) as follows:

1. (E.2) gratitude for the (unusual) experience of a positive day
2. (E.3) gratitude for the beauty in the world

3. (E.4) gratitude for the attributes of Silence
4. (E.5) learning with “ears of the heart”
5. (E.6) appreciation for love of spouse and home
6. (E.7) the gift of silent spaciousness
7. (E.8) the power of gratitude
8. (E.9) mind and body gratefully appreciating the view
9. (E.10 and 11) expressing the pain of being separated from the yearning heart

Overall, Day-end Journals drew most consistently from the C-Internal Observer theme. These entries were highly individual and creative, but did reflect certain trends (that were divided into categories). Theme B-Resistance entries were the smallest in number, perhaps indicating that external distractions and busyness of daily life make resistance-observation more challenging. Resistance was explored as a mixture of internal and external struggles (physical fatigue, listening to spouses’ stresses, generalized reactivity and agitation, and attachment to a story) that metamorphosed into aspects of surrender. Theme D-Surrender, like the Meditation Journals, was experienced as a type of revelation (i.e., a “surprise gift,” or “fruit of Silence practice,” rather than a “practice” in itself). Again, because of the large number of entries, Theme D-Surrender was divided into five categories of expression. Gratitude emerged as the largest category in Theme E-Yearning, expressed chiefly through gratitude for various internal and external experiences of spiritual connection.

### **Questionnaire and Bar Graph Theme-Results**

The Bar Graph results reflect the group average before and after results. Except for Theme E-Yearning, the Bar Graph Themes reflected such small differences between the

before-and-after questions that no statistical significance was reached. However, the overall differences in the scoring patterns of the five themes is worth noting, as is a brief synopsis of significant differences between the before-and-after questions themselves. (Bar Graph differences of (0.5) and less, are not considered significant enough to mention.)

Most Theme A-Physical Responses reflect “strongly agree” responses (i.e., 4.0 - 5.0) in both the before-and-after questions. Theme B-Resistance, reflects the opposite – a less than “neutral” score (i.e., less than 3.0) – in all of the before-and-after responses.<sup>10</sup> Theme C-Internal Observer, reflects all “neutral” or less, except question 31, which scores in the “strongly agree” range in both before and after. Similar to Theme A-Physical Responses, Theme D-Surrender reflects all high scores of “strongly agree” in seven of the before and after, with the exception of two questions. Theme D-Surrender also reflects the largest number of questions (nine), while Theme C-Internal Observer has the fewest (five). Theme E-Yearning is consistently a “strongly agree” response in both the before and after for three questions. The remaining three questions show a less than “neutral” response before, and a significant shift to “strongly agree” in the after responses.<sup>11</sup> These are the differences between the themes themselves, we now move to an analysis of the individual questions in each theme.

Only two of the seven questions in Theme A-Physical Responses show an increased “after” result: question 19 (“When I am in touch with Silence, my breathing is slower and

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<sup>10</sup> For improvement in scoring methods, see “Data Collection Improvements below.”

<sup>11</sup> A negatively worded question, #27 has been reversed in the “Changes” Graph to illustrate its positive result.

more regular”), and question 6 (“When I experience Silence, my heart chakra – chest centre – feels less constricted and/or more open”).

Theme B-Resistance shows inconsistent before and after responses to similar questions: the negative result of question 4 (“I am very uncomfortable when I’m not busy doing something”) and the positive result of question 32 (“I am restless and uncomfortable if I don’t have something planned for the day”).

Theme C-Internal Observer shows two positive result changes: question 13 (“if I am not busy I feel unimportant and disconnected”), and question 34 (“the only Silence I have is when I am completely alone and undisturbed”).<sup>12</sup>

Theme D-Surrender, shows four positive result changes: question 8 (“after I have meditated, I usually feel a calm stillness”); question 20 (“after relating to Silence, I seem to think more easily or clearly”); (negatively-worded) question 21 (“meaning is created through external engagements, not through Silence”); and question 33 (“relating to Silence allows me to slow down and connect with people and their situations in ways that I normally wouldn’t have done before”).

Theme E-Yearning reflects the three most dramatic positive result changes in the questionnaire. From smallest to largest, question 17 (“before I practice Silence, I find it helpful to read a Scriptural text”), (negatively-worded) question 27 (“my experiences of Silence seem to have no connection to God or a higher power”), and the most dramatic change of all, question 16 (“before I practice Silence, I find it helpful to chant”).

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<sup>12</sup> Again, both questions are negatively worded, but the responses reflect positive changes.

### Comparisons between Bar Graph and Journal Results

In spite of the overall lack of significant change in the Bar Graph results, there are some commonalities between the themes represented in the Bar Graph and the Journal entry results. The most striking example is in the Theme E-Yearning results; with questions 16 and 17 reflecting significant increases in the use of chanting and scriptural texts in Silence practice, and question 27 reflecting an increased awareness of the connection between Silence and God (or a higher power).

It is perhaps not surprising that the challenge of a disciplined “sitting practice” is reflected in the Meditation Journals, in the large percentage of Theme B-Resistance entries, as well as the quality of the entries themselves (e.g., B.3 and 6).<sup>13</sup> The challenge of observing resistance is also reflected in the consistently low scores of both the before-and-after questions in Theme B’s Bar Graph results.<sup>14</sup>

As mentioned, Theme B-Resistance entries (B.5-8) of the Day-end Journals, on the other hand, metamorphosed into aspects of surrender about half of the time. One could speculate that it is more challenging facing one’s internal resistances in the “sitting practice” of Meditation, than it is in the flow of everyday life. This may also explain why Theme D-Surrender Bar Graph responses are substantially higher than Theme B-Resistance Bar Graph responses.

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<sup>13</sup> This phenomenon is discussed more fully in “Resistance: The Challenge of Suffering” of the Summary and Conclusion.

<sup>14</sup> The challenges of the generally low scoring of resistance-related questions is discussed in the Data Collection Improvements below.

## **The Unexpected and Could-Have-Improved**

Two unexpected and two could-have-improved occurrences emerged out of the workshop weekend and the research design.<sup>15</sup> Firstly, the Outlier Themes were unexpected results that emerged alongside the “Silence Practice Kit” themes during the workshop weekend. Secondly, the follow-up evening had unexpected outcomes. Thirdly, in hindsight, I would have reformatted the Data Collection of the quantitative Before-And-After Questions to reflect only positive answers. Finally, the feedback from participants following the workshop weekend offers some constructive fine-tuning details.<sup>16</sup>

### **Workshop Outlier Themes**

Three Outlier Themes emerged from the workshop weekend. I did not anticipate these beforehand, but feel that they are worth noting because they articulate participants’ responses to the “Silence Practice Kit” themes. Theme F-Courage emerged during the Resistance and Suffering exercises; Theme G-Intention emerged while the group engaged in the Internal (and compassionate) Observer exercises; and Theme H-Simplicity emerged on the last morning of the workshop, with the practice of Yearning. The Outlier Themes appeared infrequently in the Journals, and are entered as separate categories in Appendix 7.

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<sup>15</sup> In reality, the qualitative measurements and experimental nature of this research project reflects a series of surprises – some conclusively helpful and others open-ended.

<sup>16</sup> See Appendix 10, Participant Feedback.

To look at Suffering takes courage, to observe rather than react takes intention (or discipline), and simplicity lends itself to the heart-centered practice of Yearning. Theme F-Courage (2 entries) expresses the courage to trust and explore. Theme G-Intention (6 entries) expresses the intention to have physical silence (no radio), to focus on the task at hand, to have gratitude, and to remember that Silence never goes away. Theme H-Simplicity (6 entries) expresses the simplicity of the creativity arising from Silence, a Scriptural passage, letting go and feeling humbled, and (like intention) staying with the task at hand. Entry H.6 is particularly worth noting. Beginning with simplicity, it metamorphoses into the only journal entry that describes an all-theme experience: initially *observing* her relationship to Silence and its present simplicity (compared with previous struggles [*resistance*] “for all those years”); she makes sure to “breathe” (*physical response*); she feels the attraction to (*yearning* for) the “quiet space” (of Silence); she then lets her “brain do what it needs to do without reacting,” where there is “no juggling or pondering,” a “thought just drops,” and “it comes as an offering” (four different *surrender* examples).

Follow-up Evening  
(After Three-weeks of Practice)

“Every class needs a class dunce and I am the class dunce,” announced one of the participants at our follow-up meeting after three weeks of practice. In tears, she explained how she had experienced a couple of “beautiful” meditations in the first week of practice, but that her practice and journal writing began to fall away in subsequent weeks. She also announced that she had lost what journal writing she had done. The “container of

intention” that the group practice itself provided may have contributed to how badly this participant felt about her lack of follow-through.<sup>17</sup>

On the follow-up evening, six of the eight participants returned books they had borrowed from the research bibliography, i.e., books by Thomas Merton, Cynthia Bourgeault, Thomas Keating, Robert Sardello, and Anne LeClaire. From their enthusiastic feedback at the follow-up evening, it seems that these books offered participants a variety of supportive concepts and ideas that assisted Silence practice during the three weeks.

### Data Collection Improvements

The Bar Graph results would likely have been clearer if the scoring for the Before-And-After Questions (Appendix 6) read “0” as neutral, rather than “3.” In that case, “-3” would have been “strongly disagree,” and “3” would have been “strongly agree.” Question #3 presented a conundrum because it is actually asking two questions, which some participants pointed out in their answers. Also, some of the Before-and-After Questions were worded in a negative fashion, causing the Bar Graph picture to reflect a negative result in the “changes” column when, in fact, the change was positive.<sup>18</sup> As well, it would be inaccurate to draw conclusions exclusively from the height discrepancies of the individual Bar Graph themes (i.e., strongly agree or strongly disagree responses). For

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<sup>17</sup> The group “container of intention” is also reflected in the participant feedback of Appendix 10, and the fact that 6 out of 8 participants appeared at the oral presentation at V.S.T. on Oct. 18th. (An interesting aside, is that this participant is one of the 7 participants planning to attend an on-going monthly silence practice evening.)

<sup>18</sup> The following questions in Appendix six remain the same, but their depiction on the Bar Graph has been altered to reflect their positive change: #'s 2, 3, 13, 18, 21, 27, 28, 32, 34, 35.



example, because of the oppositional nature of resistance, the B-theme questions are likely to reflect a more negative (“strongly disagree”) response than other themes.

Sorting through the Journals and placing them into the five themes of the “Silence Practice Kit” presents the challenge of subjective interpretation. Although peer-reviewing (Appendix 3) validated most of the category placement of the entries, it may have been useful for participants – and perhaps more accurate – if they had categorized their own journals. Either way it seems, there is an unavoidable contrivance to categorizing the journals.

A feedback questionnaire sent to participants four days after the workshop weekend was generally favorable.<sup>19</sup> However, there are some helpful suggestions listed in Appendix 10, “Afterword: Participant Feedback.” These include when and how to give out hand-outs, fine-tuning dyad work, re-focusing the more verbal participants, and a longer workshop. Appendix 10 also contains participants’ feedback four months later, where they convey their continued exploration of the “Silence Practice Kit” themes.

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<sup>19</sup> As per “Member-checking” (#2) of Finding Validation, Appendix 3 of the Research Design Details.

## SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

Collective and personal resistances to Silence practice are *almost* insurmountable. Be that as it may, Christian monastics have endorsed this practice for centuries, and eight people *did show up* for a three-week urban practice. If both mystics and theologians are correct in their proclamations of God equaling Silence, then the willingness to challenge our resistance to Silence is surely productive and worthwhile. Based on the Journal entries and Afterword comments, it most decidedly is – in spite of the immense practice (and research) challenges it presents.

Silence practice brings us face to face with all within us that does not want to attend to Silence. Initially, Silence practice collides uncomfortably with the noise and self-absorption of our consumer culture. Similarly, in our internal environment, habitual thoughts, emotions, and psychological patterns of the false self makes Silence practice uncomfortable. *Observing* this false self, rather than (unconsciously) *reacting to it*, is both counter-cultural and counter-intuitive. However, by not engaging in the awareness of an Internal Observer practice, as Keating says, we risk “looking for God in all the wrong places.”<sup>1</sup>

Journal entries and participant feedback seemed to reflect both the discomfort and the benefits of Silence practice. The research results give hopeful indications that intentional awareness of ourselves and our cultural adaptations can provide openings into

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<sup>1</sup> Keating, *Contemplative Prayer*, audiotapes.

the mystery of Silence. The “Silence Practice Kit” did appear to support a three-week urban Silence practice for seven out of eight participants.

On the whole, this research has planted seeds for a variety of future options (see Afterword below). Like Silence practice itself, the conclusion appears to be an “on-going discovery” rather than a decisive deduction. The Internal Observer and Surrender are discussed next as the two most influential “Silence Practice Kit” themes. However, the practice of Yearning always remains at the heart of Silence *experience*.

### **Internal Observer: The Essential Practice**

The Results Review of chapter three demonstrates that the Internal Observer practice is vitally important for Silence practice, both off and on the cushion (Day-end Journals and Meditation Journals). The “reflective self-observer” category was the largest of the Internal Observer themes in the Day-end Journals, indicating that participants reflected upon their behaviours and reactions of that day – not to judge, but to know themselves more deeply. Within the “Silence Practice Kit,” observing practice is not done for the sake of “knowing,” but for the sake of “deepening.” Tolle reminds us that knowing ourselves and knowing *about* ourselves are two different things.<sup>2</sup> In psychoanalysis, for example, we can learn more and more *about* ourselves in a quantitative or factual manner, whereas *knowing* ourselves involves a more qualitative or depth dimension.<sup>3</sup> This is congruent with the generally qualitative dimension of the

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<sup>2</sup> Tolle, *A New Earth*, 192.

<sup>3</sup> Tolle, 192-193.

research design. Discovering self within the mysterious depths of Silence practice does not lend itself easily to quantitative designs. (As I have found out!)

Deep self-knowledge begins with the practice of self-observation. The Internal Observer practice divulges the humbling details about where we are not surrendered to (aligned with) God. When learning contemplation, Keating reminds us that, at first, we “[go] from humiliation to humiliation, as we throw-up undigested material of a life-time.”<sup>4</sup> The Internal Observer theme-practice is essential for the practice themes of Physical Responses and Resistance and Suffering because it creates space for questions and spiritual discoveries we would otherwise be blind to. By not questioning our habitual reactions and resistances, we close to the open vulnerability necessary for Silence practice. Silence practice begins humbly, with an intimate understanding of “For I know my transgressions, and my sin is ever before me” (Ps 51: 3). Or as (Meditation entry) Theme E.1-Yearning observes, it is about “[putting] the I in it’s rightful place.”

#### Physical Responses: As Silence practice Tool

The high-scoring Bar Graph results of Theme A-Physical Responses reflected “strongly agree” responses in *both* the Before-And-After Questions. As discussed in the Results Review of chapter three, this could have to do with the Physical Responses theme being the easiest to observe. This could be a reflection of the positive nature of the questions themselves, as opposed to the negative nature of resistance-related questions. Resistance is reflected in muscle tension, which has no receptivity to Silence.<sup>5</sup> When

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<sup>4</sup> Keating, *Contemplative Prayer*, audiotapes.

<sup>5</sup> Sardello, *Silence*, 34.

resistance is observed without judgment however, the body can become a highly tuned “instrument of awareness.”

In both Journals, Theme A-Physical Responses also reflect how the body relaxes when the mind is present (i.e., when the mind is focused on the activity in which the body is engaged). Journal entries describing relaxed physical responses tended to be associated with decreased emotional and psychological stresses, as well as increased insight and depth in the participant’s Internal Observer practice.<sup>6</sup> In the Day-end Journals, Physical Responses were observed through relationship with food, sound, physical pain, the beauty of nature, the breath, and so on. In the Meditation Journals, Physical Responses were observed through corporeal subtle energies, physical pain, the breath, sound vibration, and “sensing” the skittishness of the mind. In both Journals the physical connection is made through observation, externally, during various daily activities, or internally, during meditation.

Externally or internally however, physical awareness only occurs when we slow down to observe what we *are* aware of. One of the most reliable compasses for knowing the difference between when we are (mostly) self-referencing and when we are more surrendered and spacious, is the way our body feels. The former tends to hold tension, and the latter is more easeful and relaxed (as Sardello points out). However, endless external distractions and internal fascinations can easily prevent a recognition of the body’s simple resonance with Silence.<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> This relaxed awareness is connected to Bourgeault’s “surrendered awareness” (above) where decreased levels of stress and/or resistance facilitate an ability to observe more clearly.

<sup>7</sup> Patricia Sun, a Californian spiritual teacher from the 1980’s made reference to the “Truth Tingle Test,” meaning the alive quality felt in both body and mind when we are living from the truth of who we are.

Body awareness in the Journal entries was perceived in a variety of ways, all of which connected participants more deeply with their experience. These ranged from physical pain or exhilaration, to the energy sensation of sound (when chanting), and sensing the skittishness of the mind (when meditating). On their own merit, observing these physical responses may not be significant, but within the context of a regular Silence practice they become an internal connection – a matrix – allowing for increased depths of awareness or a “sensed” presence. With intentional practice, the body gradually builds endurance for incorporating the actual physical experiences of Silence. At this point, the body becomes a reliable self-reflective device, or a Silence practice awareness “tool.” Respecting and observing the body’s messages corroborates both the interdependent and the inclusive nature of the “Silence Practice Kit” themes.

#### Resistance: The Challenge of Suffering

The practice of Silence challenges us to be still with ourselves. For many, this begins with a deep acknowledgment of suffering (including the cultural and personal resistance-habits against knowing suffering.)<sup>8</sup> Simply put, constantly running from suffering creates internal noise levels that obscure our ability to “Be Still and Know that I am God” (Ps 46:10).

Participants wrote three times as much about resistance in their Meditation Journals than they did in their Day-end Journals. Perhaps this is because sitting alone in meditation allows for a more astute observation of resistance, i.e., all that does not want

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<sup>8</sup> Perhaps this is why Buddhist dharma starts by acknowledging that “life is suffering.”

to sit still *or* be alone rises to the surface of our awareness.<sup>9</sup> Unobserved suffering easily takes root in our false self. Or, as Keating says, “[the] lack of connection with the source of painful thoughts or feelings is what identifies them as coming from our unconscious.”<sup>10</sup> Without an observation practice a vicious circle ensues, whereby the spiritual blindness of the false self perpetuates suffering, and vice versa. Employing a regular Internal Observer theme-practice offers different alternatives for our personal suffering. As Merton says, a great deal of our trouble – our “me suffering” – comes from not having the deep self-knowledge that our fidelity is to the service of God alone.<sup>11</sup>

By repeatedly choosing to observe pain, rather than resist it, suffering can transform into a profoundly kenotic experience indicative of spiritual yearning. In Meditation Journal entry B.7-Resistance, the participant writes: “I have lost the pure heart of me. Too much pain is the lie, the resistance.” The acknowledgement of pain as the “resistance,” speaks to two important issues: (1) the dangers of over-indulging our personal pain stories (Merton’s “me-suffering”), and (2) the keen self-observation it takes to see our personal pain *as* resistance (to Silence and to God).

The spiritual disciplines of the “Silence Practice Kit” are like the invisible monastic walls that create the space for observing our habitual resistances. This is an entirely counter-intuitive process, because our usual pain response is one of contraction and withdrawal. Entry B.4-Resistance of the Meditation Journals reflects how staying with the Resistance (identified by the writer as fear), also gives her glimpses of freedom *from*

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<sup>9</sup> Also, some participants were new to meditation, and therefore their resistances to its practice may have been more substantial (and therefore more keenly felt).

<sup>10</sup> Keating, *Intimacy with God*, 79.

<sup>11</sup> Merton, *Surrender to God*, audiotapes.

fear. As in the Bengal Tiger story, the paradoxical nature of Silence practice is that we are “released” when we “stay with.” Our Western cultural habits of pain-denial and distraction are costly; they separate us from the freedom of knowing who we are in Silence and in God.

### **Surrender: The Choice-less Choice**

It is significant that half of the B-Resistance entries in the Day-end Journals metamorphose into aspects of surrender. Initially however, these entries express clear observations of resistance, e.g., in B.5-Resistance entry, the participant first observes the connection between her physical fatigue and her resistance, then, observing more deeply, she connects her resistance with her need to control. With no effort on the part of the participant, surrender begins to emerge the moment she clearly observes her control-needs. B.6-8 entries have similar movements from observing resistance to surrendering attachment to a personal story or “me-suffering” (Merton).

The willingness to self-observe simply, truthfully and non-judgmentally, holds within it an implicit action of surrender: the choice-less choice that frees us from bondage to false self preferences and habits. Like the Bengal tiger, with deep self-knowledge we observe that we are trapped and suffering, and have no choice but to learn another language. The two options remaining are continued suffering or a kenotic leap into learning/surrendering to the mysterious language of Silence. There is no room for “me suffering” or victim stories in the organic transformation from clear Internal Observer practices to Surrender.



An additional aspect of surrender that the Day-end Resistance-theme Journals emphasize is that surrender occurs effortlessly, as we align ourselves with present time. It appears that the Internal Observer practice assists participants to come into present time *with the truth of their own experience*, regardless of whether the experience is pleasant or not. For example, in the Day-end Journals of Resistance B.5-8 entries (above), participants observe *their* body's tension, *their* resistance to their husband or children, and *their* lack of forgiveness, before evolving into feelings of surrender.

Likewise, in the Day-end Journals of Surrender D.9-14 entries, participants actually describe feeling surrender *as a present time experience*. Compared with the vitality felt within the present-time connection, the personal particulars of their observations appear less relevant or important. A radical simplicity (outlier theme) appears to be at work when we find our way to present time: we open the potential for surrendered alignment to Silence and God. I can only speculate that this is because they – Silence and God – only exist as experience within present time.

“Catching” Silence, or more to the point being “caught” by Silence (Vennard), often means that we are unable to live in the same (unobservant or unconscious) manner as we did before.<sup>12</sup> As our relationship with Silence grows, so does our awareness of how caught we are in the false self grip.<sup>13</sup> In the same way that the Bengal tiger struggled against the (perceived) trap, the “wild, proud and free” false self resists the kenotic invitation of Silence practice. During the Invocation at V.S.T.’s Convocation this year,

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<sup>12</sup> Vennard, *A Theology of Prayer*, audiotapes.

<sup>13</sup> One of the paradoxical elements of any in-depth search for knowledge is that “the more we know, the more we know that we don’t know.” (A good recipe for humility development!)

Rabbi Robert Daum asked: “Who am I invoking? God is already here, so who am I invoking”? A good question, because it places the onus right where it needs to be. As Rabbi Daum concluded, *it must be us*, then, that needs to change. It is rightfully *our* task to engage in the abundance of Silence, that is always so freely given.<sup>14</sup>

Within the context of Silence practice, conscious struggling is actually the *good* news. It means that we are slowing down and using our energy to observe suffering, and the false self identities colluding with it. Bourgeault reminds us that with a growing trust in God and a stable practice, we penetrate more deeply “down to the bedrock of pain, the origin of our personal false self.”<sup>15</sup> With courage, intention, and simplicity (outlier themes), deepening self-observations thaw us from the grip of the false self and allow for the spaciousness of surrender. Frequently this experience comes as a “surprise moment,” where we experience the intimate nature of Silence as more compassionate, spacious, and intimate, then anything we have previously experienced.<sup>16</sup>

From outside of the experiential nature of Silence practice, all of this can sound rather glib, or even ridiculous. Sardello reminds us that Silence practice is not an intellectual practice. Neither is it something we can will or force, because that forcefulness comes from the same false self paradigm that keeps us spiritually blind. As Keating says, we are already in a state of “pure grace,” but we have yet not learned to receive these gifts with an open (or surrendered) heart and mind.<sup>17</sup>

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<sup>14</sup> This is reminiscent of Bourgeault’s statement (above) that we are blind to “the divine generosity that is always flowing towards us.”

<sup>15</sup> Bourgeault, *Centering Prayer*, 97.

<sup>16</sup> My Western Baul teacher, Lalitha, refers to these times as “lucky moments.”

<sup>17</sup> Keating, *Contemplative Prayer*, audiotapes.

## Yearning: The Heart of Silence practice

The results indicate that the heart's yearning is ultimately stronger than the cultural influences that lay siege to our authentic spiritual identities. I am happy to concede that I may have overestimated the impact of our consumer-driven Western culture, and underestimated the heart's natural affinity and yearning for the Silence of God. This is good news indeed. It is also theologically sound evidence of God's enduring Grace, without which I would not have been inspired to undertake this research project.

In their Meditation Journals, participants describe a holistic sacredness or oneness that resonates in their bodies, hearts, and minds. The majority of Day-end Journal entries agree with the Yearning-theme Bar Graph. This reflects the Yearning theme-practice simply as "gratitude." The Yearning themes of gratitude, deep listening, chanting, psalmody, or *Lectio Divina* represent the only truly significant collaborative result between the qualitative Journal entries and the quantitative Bar Graph. Both results demonstrate that surrendering to Silence is most productive when the heart expresses its divine yearning. These results are made even more significant because, prior to the workshop weekend, chanting and (especially) psalmody, was an unfamiliar practice to many of the participants. This is likely why the Yearning theme reflected the largest changes in the Bar Graph results.

Happily, the heart-centred practice of Yearning is not a new discovery within the Christian tradition. However, as both the journal entries and feedback results indicate, it is a discovery that people yearn to make again and again in their daily lives. The "Silence Practice Kit" themes work both independently and collaboratively to increase

awarenesses of false self habits. With the grace of Silence, we can dispose of the rubble of spiritual blindness and suffering that surrounds our collective and personal identities.

The research results indicate that Silence practice *is* possible in an urban setting. The results also revealed that heart-centred Yearning-practices could be the transformational fire that ignites our surrender to it.

The language of Silence is the most powerfully inclusive, grace-filled, and humbling of languages. It is available immediately through our own surrendered yearning-hearts. It has always been a two-way call and response, which comes as the unspoken blessing to be “where we are” by experiencing the eternal Grace of “who we are” in God.

## AFTERWORD

“Surrendering to Silence: A Heart-Centred Practice” has become far more than an academic research project for a Master’s degree. It has become a way of expressing my heart’s deepest yearning in a more complete way than I ever imagined possible. Not only has this project helped my own understanding of our intimate and eternal connection to Silence – and to each other, through Silence – it appears that it has done the same for others.

### **Four Months Later**

Six of the eight participants attended the oral thesis presentation at V.S.T. on October 18th. At that time, they agreed to e-mail a response to questions (listed in Participant Feedback of Appendix 10). In general they reported the following: an increased use of the Internal Observer practice, an increased depth-understanding of the Yearning practice, less resistance in the body, finding spaciousness and compassion within the Scriptural quotes, et cetera. The Buddhist in the group, who grew up in Silence, explained at the oral presentation that she feels grateful to now have words to describe her native love of Silence practice. Likewise, I am grateful to have a theological framework in which to elucidate the “Silence Practice Kit” themes.

### **Where to from Here?**

Exploring the powerful and humbling dynamics of Silence has assisted my return to Christian scholarship *and* practice, theology *and* spirituality; not exclusively the one or the other. I am grateful for my previous experience of other wisdom traditions, particularly the Western Baul lineage. This tradition awakened my heart enough to recognize the cultural value of Silence offered within Christianity’s wisdom-roots. Perhaps this research is living proof that we do teach best what we most wish to learn. My thesis topic has served my heart’s deepest yearning, i.e., of serving God more clearly, unconditionally, and simply through the everyday practice, and teaching, of Silence.

The minister at my (newly-found) church has asked if I would be interested in giving a Sermon, because “people need to hear about experiences with Spirit.” He has

also suggested that I do a thirteen-week series on the Practice of Silence. There are people in the Shuswap area, as well as on Gambier Island, that are interested in a workshop weekend and practice. I will also be offering one day a month (from 10:00 A.M. to 4:00 P.M.) for Silence practice out of my home. (Several people have already expressed interest.) As of January 2011, all but one of the participants (plus two interested non-participants) will meet monthly with me for an evening of Silence practice and theme discussion.

The “Silence Practice Kit” themes are certainly not the only way to connect with Silence. However, without some form of relationship-practice to Silence, our human desires too easily become fodder for a culturally reinforced false self identity. This frequently results in spiritual forgetfulness, and feelings of confusion and isolation. Regular Silence practice gradually leads us inward and, through God’s grace, outwards and away from (culturally engrained) habits of self-centeredness. Perhaps like the Bengal tiger, we are recognizing and experiencing the “productive value” of Silence practice. A valuable “group container” was provided by the workshop weekend and three weeks of practicing the “Silence Practice Kit” themes. “Surrendering to Silence: A Heart-Centred Practice” began as a research thesis but, like the kenotic action of Silence practice itself, it appears to be evolving anew.

**Appendix #1:** Retreat Workshop E-mail Announcement

Dear friends,

On June 11-13, I am offering a free weekend seminar/retreat exploring Silence.

"Surrendering to Silence: A Heart-Centred Practice" is the thesis topic for my Masters of Arts in Theological Studies, which I am completing this year at Vancouver School of Theology (V.S.T.). The retreat workshop will serve as the experiential and practical component of my thesis.

The workshop will have a theistic focus, which appreciates the relational dynamic offered within Silence practice. It is designed to increase our conscious awareness of this frequently feared, misunderstood, and largely forgotten dimension of our twenty-first century lives. Exercises and discussion will explore connections between resistance and suffering, as well as authentic heart expression and grace. In general, attending to Silence will be explored as an interior journey towards a spiritual wholeness that, with practice, manifests itself within our daily experience.

The retreat will take place in Room 423 at V.S.T. Participants are requested to attend the W/E in June, as well as the half-day follow-up 3 weeks later (July 3rd). The retreat will involve a daily commitment to a Silent practice (10 to 50 minutes), two daily journal entries, and a brief before- and-after questionnaire. Participants are welcome to contact me by phone or e-mail during the three weeks. Journals will be submitted on Saturday, July 3rd, and will remain confidential and anonymous. Workshop contributions will also stay within the group.

Tea breaks are provided throughout the W/E. Please bring a bag lunch on Saturday. To facilitate discussion and comfort, the maximum number of participants is eight. You are welcome to forward this message to anyone you feel may be interested. Call or e-mail me if you have any questions or concerns.

Thank you,

Laura Madsen

Phone #: 604-222-4111 or [lauramadsen@shaw.ca](mailto:lauramadsen@shaw.ca)

**Bring:** A bag lunch on Saturday, a tea mug, journals and pens, comfortable clothing. (An outside area is available with labyrinth and picnic tables.)

**Where:** Room 423, 6000 Iona Drive, V.S.T., UBC Campus. (Note: Friday and Sunday there could be elevator access only to the 4th floor)

**When:** June 11-13th and July 3rd (Saturday, 1-5 P.M.)

**Hours:** Friday 7:00 to 9:30 P.M.

Saturday 9:30 to 5:00 P.M. (with one hour for a silent lunch)

Sunday 9:30 to 1:00 P.M.

**Appendix #2:** Information and Consent Forms (4 pages)

May, 2010

Dear Workshop Participant,

Thank-you for your interest in attending this retreat and exploring your relationship to Silence.

"Surrendering to Silence: A Heart-Centred Practice" is the thesis topic for my Masters of Arts in Theological Studies, which I am completing this year at the Vancouver School of Theology (V.S.T.). The retreat will serve as the experiential and practical component of my thesis research. Thirty years of psychotherapeutic-focused Psychiatric Nursing has grounded me in an in-depth understanding of human suffering, a Communications degree from S.F.U. (1992) fostered a cultural understanding, eleven years exposure to a Bhakti (devotional) Indian tradition helped to illuminate suffering within a spiritual context, and V.S.T. studies have helped me theologically to ground that context.

This retreat will have a theistic focus, which understands Silence as a relational dynamic that can be grounded and expressed in and through our daily lives. Exercises and discussion will focus on the relationship between resistance and suffering, and the spiritual dimensions of our heart's yearning as a guiding force in our journey towards Silence. The retreat is designed to increase our conscious awareness of this frequently feared, misunderstood, and largely forgotten dimension of our twenty-first century lives. In general, attending to Silence will be explored as an interior journey towards a spiritual wholeness that, with practice, manifests itself within our daily life experience.

The retreat will take place at V.S.T. and participants will be expected to attend the week-end in June, plus the follow-up 3 weeks later, on July 5th. The time commitment involves a daily practice of Silence (10 minute minimum), followed by a brief journal writing about that experience. A second brief journal writing at the end of the day will reflect both moments of resistance and Silence throughout the day.

You will be e-mailed the same short-answer confidential questionnaire during the week of the workshop and after the follow-up day. You may also be asked to read the research results to see if you agree with their accuracy.

Participants are welcome to contact me by phone or e-mail during the three weeks. Journals will be submitted on Monday, July 5th, and will remain confidential and anonymous when used in support of my thesis results. Participant contributions within the retreat will also be understood by all as strictly confidential. You have the right to



withdraw at any time, to ask questions, and obtain a copy of the results if you wish to see them.

Tea breaks are provided throughout. There will be a silent “bag lunch” on the Saturday of the workshop W/E. To facilitate discussion and comfort, the maximum number of participants is eight. Please wear comfortable clothing (rain gear and umbrellas if appropriate) as some of the activities may involve being outside.

**Bring:** A bag lunch on Saturday, a tea mug, journals and pens, comfortable, weather appropriate clothing. (An outside area is available with labyrinth and picnic tables.)

**Where:** Room 423, 6000 Iona Drive, V.S.T., UBC Campus. (Note: Friday and Sunday there could be elevator access only to the 4th floor, i.e., no stair access)

**When:** June 11-13th and July 5th (Monday, 6:30-9:30 P.M.)

**Hours:** Friday 7:00 to 9:30 P.M.

Saturday 9:30 to 5:00 P.M. (with one hour for a silent lunch)

Sunday 9:30 to 1:00 P.M.

REGISTRATION AND CONSENT  
TO PARTICIPATE IN THE SILENT RETREAT AND FOLLOW-UP

This is to certify that I have read the above description of the workshop entitled **"Surrendering to Silence: A Heart-Centred Practice"** and have agreed to participate under the direction of Laura Madsen, as described above.

I have had all questions answered to my satisfaction and understand the conditions of my participation, namely: attending the week-end workshop described above, a three week daily silent practice (ten minute minimum) with journal writing, attending the four hour group follow-up at the end of the three weeks of practice, and filling in a short questionnaire at the beginning of the week-end and at the end of the three weeks.

I prefer to be contacted at: (604) \_\_\_\_\_ or by e-mail at  
\_\_\_\_\_

Special needs of any kind: \_\_\_\_\_

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Signature:

\_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

**Please return this form by June 4th, 2010 to:**

Laura Madsen  
4795 West 6th Ave.,  
Vancouver, B.C.  
V6T 1C4  
Phone #: 604-222-4111  
Email: [lauramadsen@shaw.ca](mailto:lauramadsen@shaw.ca)

(Over)

## **RETREAT EXPERIENCE Questionnaire**

**June 11-13, 2010**

### **Information Sheet**

Name \_\_\_\_\_ email \_\_\_\_\_ phone \_\_\_\_\_

Do you need a ride? \_\_\_\_\_ Can you offer a ride \_\_\_\_\_

Emergency contact name and  
number \_\_\_\_\_

What, if any, is your religious affiliation?

Have you had any contemplative retreat experience? If yes, please describe:

Do you have a specific spiritual practice? If so, please describe:

What are your hopes for this retreat experience?

Is there anything else you would like me to know about you?

### **Appendix #3: Research Design Details (3 pages)**

#### **Collecting Data**

A coding process (unknown to participants) will be used for the before-and-after questions, and the journals will be used to analyze recurring “Silence Practice Kit” themes. Quantitative and qualitative data will be used in order to develop and measure participant’s experiences of conscious Silent practice in relationship to the workshop exercises and themes. In this way, participants will be cognizant of the strategy of theme-inquiry for their journal writing, but they will not be limited to that. The practice of surrendering to Silence is neither linear or predictable and its practice can be full of surprises.

#### **Journal Reflection Guidelines**

Participants are free to write what “comes up” for them in their journals, but will also be encouraged to keep in mind the themes of the work-shop and the “Silent Practice Kit” exercises. The object is that they write as accurately as possible about their experience of their Silent practice. If it consists only of agitated feelings, that is what they describe in their journal – how did it feel in their body, what thoughts were going on, can they describe the emotion? Did the feeling change when they began to observe it?

Workshop exercises and focuses are not limited to the meditation cushion. Working with the “Silent Practice Kit” increasingly becomes a lifestyle choice, an emerging shift in response to life that can be practiced anywhere and at any time. Towards the end of each day (sometime in the evening), participants are encouraged to journal about moments of awareness they may have had – resistances, surrender, yearning (heart opening) – during the day. Frequently, when participants experience some shifts “on the cushion,” silent moments during their day increase.

#### **Findings will be Validated in the following ways:**

1. Triangulating data sources from the Journals and the directive before-and-after questions with the workshop themes.
2. Member-checking: within a week of the follow-up meeting, participants will be sent a feed-back questionnaire. They asked to comment on their experience, and describe anything that might have been done differently or added.
3. Clarifying personal bias: Silence as a surrendered, heart-centred practice. Also evident in the five categories of interpretation (above).
4. Declarations of negative effects of this practice: There are valid reasons that the practice of Silence is not for everyone. Paradoxically, both an intact ego and a

conscious awareness of our wounding are helpful – perhaps even necessary – for the kenotic process of surrender to Silence. A basic guideline might be that if we are not willing to learn responsibility for our suffering (i.e., not place the blame outside ourselves), then we are not ready to practice Silence. The eight participants in this research project have fairly high levels of experience in self-exploration, healing, and meditation. Some have previous experience with Silent practice.

5. Prolonged time in related fields of study and work: Thirty years of experience in Psychiatric Nursing (mainly acute psychiatry and Eating Disorders) and twenty-one years in Psychotherapy have grounded me in an in-depth understanding of human suffering (my own and others) and its relationship to the spiritually challenging habits of the false self. My experience with the devotional (Bhakti) tradition of Guru Yoga for the past eleven years has given me glimpses into the mysterious grace of the surrendered heart. For the past three years at V.S.T., I have found writing in an academic framework about these experiences to be both challenging and illuminating. It is, in fact, V.S.T.'s theological framework that has facilitated my emerging discovery of Silence as a worthwhile topic. Among other helpful courses, I audited Jane Vennard's course on "Leading and Designing Silent Retreats" in the summer of 2009. One final influence is my undergraduate degree in Communications from Simon Fraser University (1992). This has strongly influenced my connection between the false self and Western materialism.
6. Peer-debriefing: Ms. Sharon Liebau ([sharon@cdnl.com](mailto:sharon@cdnl.com) or 604-681-8075.) is a friend and colleague of mine who is familiar with the organization of research-oriented statistics. She has kindly offered to debrief the study results, with me and thesis advisor Jane Vennard, before they are e-mailed out to participants for their "member-checking" (#2).

### Ethical Issues

Ethical issues are perhaps minimized in this study due to my previous relationship with participants; as private clients, friends, or acquaintances. The study, and their participation in it, is described to them in the initial general e-mail. As well, they will also be reading a more in depth description following registration and signing a consent form for participation in the study. Nearly half of the participants are regular meditators who are curious to explore their relationship to Silence. I have meditated, off and on, for almost thirty years: body-centred meditation, Vipassana, Guru-centred meditation, and Centering Prayer. While meditation is helpful emotionally, psychologically, and physically, it has been my experience that it generally lacks the living fire of the practice of surrendering to Silence. The reason for this is perhaps nothing more than an incomplete understanding of what meditation is: i.e., in our me-centred culture, meditation too easily becomes just another thing about "me": Did I have a good sit? Am I

enlightened yet?<sup>18</sup> Am I able to sit and focus even though my back's killing me and my legs are numb?

Without the humbling practice of surrender – through awareness of personal and cultural resistances, the compassionate observer, and the vulnerable experience of our yearning heart – we can inadvertently increase the sophistication of the false self, and actually further distance ourselves from an awareness of ever-present-intimacy with God. Keating reminds us that “... [God] is closer than breathing, closer than thinking, closer than choosing – closer than consciousness itself.”<sup>19</sup>

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<sup>18</sup> My spiritual teacher says there is such a thing as ego-enlightenment, and it's rampant in New Age spiritual circles.

<sup>19</sup> Keating, *Intimacy with God*, 41.

## **Appendix #4:** Workshop Outline (7 pages)

### **Friday Evening (7:00 - 9:30 AM)**

#### **(7:00 - 7:30)**

Brief Welcome and begin with 5 - 10 minute silent reflection on their decision to engage in Silence. (i.e., how is it feeling to have made that decision; what was the inclination to engage in Silence – an energetic draw, a knowing, spaciousness; how is your body feeling about that decision now, your thoughts, your emotions? Notice the rhythm of your breathing.)

Circle Introduction – Name and what you hope to gain from the W/E and 3 weeks of regular practice and journal writing. (Seating arrangement is circular.)

Circle Sharing of fears: participants randomly verbalize their fears into the circle.<sup>20</sup>

#### **(7:30 - 8:00)**

Personal Orientation to Silence:

Using Vennard's example, participants will respond to the following questions out loud or in written form:

- Has anyone ever used silence as punishment towards you?
- Have you punished others with silence?
- When has silence deepened a relationship?
- Were you ever silenced as a child, adolescent, adult?
- Have you ever worked in silence with a group or another person?
- Has group silence ever frightened you?
- When do you experience silence as a gift?
- Where and when do you long for more silence in your life?
- What is the difference for you between silence alone, and silence in a group?<sup>21</sup>

Dyad: Choose one or two of the most significant to discuss with your partner.

Discussion: What differences did you notice between the verbal and the non-verbal parts of the break? Having your tea while talking versus not talking.

**Tea Break:** 8:00 - 8:15 (7 minutes of talking – bell ringing – then 7 minutes of Silence).

Discussion (5 minutes): of break experience.

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<sup>20</sup> Vennard encourages circle exercises where we would put a word or phrase into the circle as a way of sharing. (Vennard's Outline Feedback, March 2010)

<sup>21</sup> Vennard, *Be Still*, 63-64.

### **Exploring Resistance (8:30 - 9:30)**

**Vennard's Guided Imagery:** Beginning in a safe or neutral place (e.g., a park or meadow) the participant is guided along a path, with a sign that points to "Silence and stillness," "self-nurture," or "wisdom" (to name a few); when suddenly they notice something blocking their path. The participants are invited to engage the block in dialogue – to discover what it is, what it wants, and what guidance it has to offer. When the "traveller" has heard and experienced all they can from the encounter, they are led back to the meadow or park that they initially created.

**Journal Writing or Drawing:** Following Silent time, participants will be encouraged to write in their journals or draw about their experience.

**Discussion:** Sharing on the experience of – or relationship to – resistance. In what form did resistance show itself?<sup>22</sup>

**Take Home Practice:** Engage resistance by allowing space for it as it occurs. Breathe. (Remember to enter silently tomorrow morning.)

### **Saturday Morning (9:30 AM - 1:00 PM)**

**\*\* Please enter silently and prepare for meditation**

#### **(9:30 - 10:15)**

**Partially Guided 20 minute Meditation:** While closing your eyes, gently enter Silence through the breath, grounding, feeling your clothes against our body, allowing your thoughts to pass by like clouds in the sky. Allow yourself to have a spacious relationship with whatever your experience is. Thoughts, judgements, feelings, allow any resistance to be there, allow Silence to be there. Allow the insight space, drawing no conclusions about it.

**Meditation Bell:** Meditation Bell signifying beginning and end of Silent practice (10 min.) Sustain relationship to this spaciousness by only slightly opening the eye lids (for one minute, from Robert Sardello).

**Discussion:** How was your relationship to resistance last night?

**Stretch and Bend:** allow sounds to emerge. Release and allow.

**Tea Break:** 10:45 - 11:00 (silent or not – personal preference – wear "Silent" name tag)

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<sup>22</sup> Vennard says that many people are surprised that the imagery does not lead them over or around the block so they can get on to their destination. Seeing, accepting, and engaging the block is new for many. (Vennard's Outline Feedback, Workshop Design, May 2010)



### **The Compassionate Observer: (11:00 - 12:30)**

**Exercise:** Participants divide a page of their journal into 2 sides: on one side they write all the reasons they cannot relate to Silence in their life, and on the other side, all of the reasons they can. (**Verbal sharing.**)

Then, with closed eyes and a few deep breaths, participants will be asked to be as fully present as they can with their experience of their body, feelings, and mind. They will then be directed to their heart area, allowing themselves to feel a spacious quality in their heart that is not identified with either of these lists – the heart of compassion. After a few moments with this experience, participants will be asked to open their eyes and read their lists – knowing that everything on both lists is true. Gently hold this place of paradox and mystery – allowing for clarity through non-judgment of self, others, and the world.<sup>23</sup> Be with this experience as you return to the room by slowly and gradually opening your eyes.

**Journal:** 10 minutes

**Dyad:** How do we experience compassion? Does the ability to hold inner paradox affect our ability to have compassionate understanding?

**Discussion:** As above.

**Silent Lunch Break 12:30 - 1:30:** (half an hour with eye contact, half an hour without) – while engaged in the activity of eating, practice awareness of resistance, the judge (others and self), the spaciousness of not knowing – just try to observe without finalizing or concluding. Practicing Silence is staying open and relaxed to what is, and Compassion may or may not arise out of that.<sup>24</sup>

### **Saturday Afternoon (1:30 PM - 5:00 PM)**

#### **(1:30 - 2:00)**

**Meditation:** Allow yourself to observe where your body is relaxed and where it isn't. During lunch, was your body more relaxed with or without eye contact? What did you discover about yourself? Now, imagine the cells of your skin as silent receptors ... your skeletal system ... your organs. Is there a sense that they are able to receive? Are you aware of a softening within that receiving? How does the heart area feel? We may feel a resistance or energetic hardening in the heart or we may feel a tenderness, a soft opening. Observe and notice only ... no conclusion, no right or wrong feeling, there is room for the truth to emerge.

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<sup>23</sup> If you find yourself judging, take a deep breath and “step” away from the judge and back to the (compassionate) observer. Just notice the judgment, don't try to ignore it or get rid of it. (Vennard's Outline Feedback, May 2010)

<sup>24</sup> Vennard says that we love to make the “heady” conclusion that we are compassionate beings before we give ourselves space to *discover* who we are. Practicing Silence is about discovering. (Vennard's Outline Feedback, May 2010)

Discussion: What was the difference between holding a relaxed Silence with and without eye contact? Was the compassionate observer more present in one than the other? What happened to your body when judgments or conclusions entered your consciousness?

**Surrender: (2:00 - 2:45)**

Surrender as Open Alignment: Christian Story (Bourgeault interpretation)

Peter, aligned heart-to-heart with his master is making his way miraculously across the water — until he becomes self-conscious, falls out of alignment, and literally "sinks" beneath the surface of his fear. Surprisingly, in nearly all the spiritual traditions the word for this "open alignment" is surrender. In its authentic spiritual sense, surrender doesn't mean outer capitulation; instead, it means "handing ourselves over" — entrusting ourselves — into the great "electromagnetic field of love" (as Kabir Helminski puts it) which encompasses and shelters us no matter how dark and terrifying the outer path may appear. For Christians this field is often personally experienced as the love of Christ. However you name it, though, the most important thing is to know it.<sup>25</sup>

Surrender as Devotion (lifting us out of the limitations of self-preoccupation):

O love, O pure deep love, be here, be now Be all; worlds  
dissolve into your stainless endless radiance, Frail living  
leaves burn with you brighter than cold stars: Make me your  
servant, your breath, your core.  
(Rumi, Sufi tradition)

Closed-eye Reflection: What is your experience of surrender? There is a vulnerability in surrender that we associate with weakness.<sup>26</sup> What is it that you are surrendering to when you do surrender? Like the story of Peter, what do you feel that you are aligned with?

Journal: journal writing or colouring about surrender.

**Silent Tea Break: 2:45 - 3:00**

**(3:00 - 5:00)**

Dyad: (different partner – language of your choice): There is a vulnerability in surrender that we associate with weakness. What has been your experience of surrender?

Discussion: of above.

Surrender Exercise: Weather permitting, participants will go outside and allow something natural – flower, branch, dirt, pine cone, blade of grass, a stone – to draw them. Allow yourselves to be open and simply drawn to something that speaks to you about Silence –

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<sup>25</sup> Bourgeault, *Spirituality and Practice E-course*.

<sup>26</sup> Some writers talk about "being surrendered" rather than surrendering. It shifts the focus – do WE surrender or are we surrendered? (Vennard, Outline Feedback, March, 2010.)

allow yourself to surrender to what it has to offer. Leave it where it is, commune with it in Silence, and quietly return (no eye contact).<sup>27</sup>

Journal: Draw the experience of surrender using colour and shape. This can also serve as a reminding symbol for your three weeks of practice.

Discussion: What did you find in this simple practice of surrender? Was your mind judgmental? Did you soften? Did you feel gratitude for the object or the exchange?

Evening Practice: Practice being surrendered to (aligned with) the object that you were drawn to: notice resistance, notice the compassionate observer, notice the body's response to both. Bring quotes or object from home that serve as reminders of Silence.

### **Sunday Morning (10:00 AM - 1:00 PM)**

#### **(9:40 - 10:15)**

Partially Guided 20 minute Meditation: (Meditation Bell)

Dyad: How did engaging in surrender compare just now, to your practice last night?

Discussion: As above. Was the alignment focus helpful or not in the practice of being surrendered to Silence?

#### **Heart Language: Prayer and Yearning as Alignment: (10:15 - 10:30)**

Orientation: The sheer proximity of Christian psalmody and its "purgative" emphasis are designed to awaken the heart's capacity for spiritual realities.<sup>28</sup> This differentiates it from, for example: classic Sufi "prayers of remembrance" (repetitive chanting of God's ninety-nine names) designed to lift the prayer to a level of ecstasy; or toning/mantric chants of some Hindu and Buddhist practices that work with sound vibration in order to produce effects in the inner body.<sup>29</sup>

Exercise: Choose one of the following scriptures (hand-out) that resonates for you. We will then reflect upon each of them using an adapted "Lectio Divina" process after the tea break. (Divine Listening: Listening to the book we believe to be divinely inspired – the most ancient method of developing friendship with God through Scripture)

#### **(10:30 - 11:15)**

Two or three Scripture Readings using adapted "Lectio Divina": Read the selection several times, individually or in unison (group's choice). 2. Dwell silently upon the

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<sup>27</sup> If the weather is bad, an alternative to this is the use of a few natural sounds – birds, ocean waves, waterfall, rain, thunder storm, crickets. The idea would be to practice receiving these sounds with the body's senses, rather than with mind association.

<sup>28</sup> Bourgeault, *Chanting the Psalms*, 163-164.

<sup>29</sup> Bourgeault, 163-164.

phrase or sentence that touches you. 3. Ask yourself what relevance or application this has to yourself. 4. Finally, sit in the afterglow of this reflection and open yourself to whatever new insight or message the Divine might have for you. Write in your journals if you wish. (from Bourgeault's *Chanting the Psalms*.)

**Tea Break:** 11:15 - 11:30 (something physical – walk quickly, yoga, stretching)

**(11:30 - 12:45)**

Two or three Scripture Readings using adapted "Lectio Divina"

Closing Reflection and Meditation: Which scripture seemed to speak with you most clearly or strongly? Did the one you picked, or another one resonate most strongly? Which one did you resist the most? How did hearing scripture differ from saying it – alone and in unison? Was there a space for silence? Be open to your body's response – to your heart's response.

When you are ready, slowly open your eyes and without looking up, silently read through the scripture that held the most impact for you ... allow yourself to notice the word or phrase that is particularly resonant or uplifting. Close your eyes again and allow an intelligence or flow of energy between yourself and this word (or phrase) to occur. Be attentive and aware of your responses – physical, emotional, energetic. Allow them to be what they are – without interpretation or judgement.

Wisdom Circle: (contemplative sharing) Share a word, phrase, insight, gratitude, awareness of the W/E. Can be more than one thing – piling wisdom up into the middle of the circle. Are your body and mind receiving or resisting? Your heart's response?

**12:45 - 1:00**

Questions about the practice: (Handout of Journal Themes)

Three Weeks of Silent Practice

Meditation Practice and Journal Writing Tips:

- Meditate in a quiet room where you won't be disturbed (10 to 50 minutes per day)
- Sit on the floor or in a chair with your feet flat on the floor.
- Try a chant or psalms before you meditate.
- Directly after meditating, journal about your experience.
- Keep in mind Merton's objective worship – whether you are "into it" or not.
- Sardello says practice with rhythm, like the breath – same time every day.
- Include resistance in the practice by learning from it, rather than succumbing to it.

- The “Silent Practice Kit” provides themes for journal entries: awareness of resistance, the observer, the body’s response to both (including breath), surrendered alignment, and the heart’s expression/yearning.
- Be open to surprises!

End-of-Day Journal Reflections:

- Silence may be experienced as freedom from our emotional and intellectual habits.
- Awareness is relaxed and non-judgmental. If effort and judgement have been themes in the day, include this in your journal.
- Awareness starts where you are. Focus on observing body senses and feelings. Avoid intellectualizing, instead, observe your thoughts.

**Appendix #5:** Participant Workshop Outline and Handouts (10 pages)

**Friday Evening (7:00 - 9:30 AM)**

**(7:00 - 7:30)**

Guided Meditation and Silent Meditation (10 minutes)

Circle Introduction – Name and what you hope to gain from the W/E and 3 weeks of regular practice and journal writing.

Circle Sharing of fears

**(7:30 - 8:00)**

Exercise - Personal Orientation to Silence

Choose 5 of the following to (briefly) write about in your journal:

- Has anyone ever used silence as punishment towards you?
- Have you punished others with silence?
- When has silence deepened a relationship?
- Were you ever silenced as a child, adolescent, adult?
- Have you ever worked in silence with a group or another person?
- Has group silence ever frightened you?
- When do you experience silence as a gift?
- Where and when do you long for more silence in your life?
- What is the difference for you between silence alone, and silence in a group?

Dyad: Choose one or two of the most significant to discuss with you partner.

Discussion: Share with the group one of your partner's issues and one of your own.

**Tea Break:** 8:00 - 8:15 (half in Silence)

Discussion (5 minutes): of break experience

**(8:30 - 9:30)**

Guided Imagery: Exploring Resistance

Journal Writing or Drawing

Discussion: Relating to resistance and how it shows up.

Take Home Practice: Engage resistance by allowing space for it as it occurs. *Breathe.*  
(Remember to enter silently tomorrow morning.)

**Saturday Morning (9:30 AM - 12:30 PM)**

**\*\* Please enter silently and prepare for meditation**

**(9:30 - 10:45)**

Partially Guided 20 minute Meditation: (Meditation Bell signifying beginning and end of Silent practice.)

Discussion: How was your relationship to resistance last night?

Stretching, Bending, and Sounding

**Tea Break:** 10:45 - 11:00 (silent or not – personal preference – wear “Silent” name tag)

**(11:00 - 12:30)**

Exercise: The Compassionate Observer

Journal: 10 minutes

Dyad: Compassion and holding paradox

Discussion:

**Silent Lunch Break (12:30 - 1:30):** (half an hour with eye contact, half an hour without) Observe without finalizing or concluding. Practicing Silence is staying open and relaxed to what is. Compassion may or may not arise out of that.

**Saturday Afternoon (1:30 PM - 5:00 PM)**

**\*\* Return to your seats silently please\*\***

**(1:30 - 2:00)**

Body-Centred Meditation (15 minutes)

Discussion: Eye contact and the Compassionate Observer. Body responses to judgement or conclusions.

**(2:00 - 2:45)**

Exercise: Surrender as Open Alignment

In its authentic spiritual sense, surrender doesn't mean outer capitulation; instead, it means "handing ourselves over" — entrusting ourselves — into the great "electromagnetic field of love" (as Kabir Helminski puts it, Bourgeault)

Surrender as Devotion (lifting us out of the limitations of self-preoccupation)

Closed-eye Reflection: What is your experience of surrender?

Journal: journal writing or colouring about surrender

**Silent Tea Break**: 2:45 - 3:00

**(3:00 - 5:00)**

Dyad: (different partner – language of your choice): There is a vulnerability in surrender that we associate with weakness. What has been your experience of surrender?

Discussion: of above.

Surrender Exercise: Practicing alignment with nature. Silent. Without eye contact.

Journal: Draw the experience of surrender using colour and shape. This can also serve as a reminding symbol for your three weeks of practice.

Discussion: What did you find in this simple practice of surrender?

Evening Practice: Practice being surrendered to (aligned with) the object that you were drawn to: notice resistance, notice the compassionate observer, notice the body's response to both. Bring quotes or object from home that serve as reminders of Silence.

### **Sunday Morning (9:30 AM - 1:00 PM)**

(10 minutes of casual gathering time – please be on time)

**(9:40 - 10:15)**

Partially Guided 20 minute Meditation: (Meditation Bell)

Dyad: How did engaging in surrender compare just now, to your practice last night?

Discussion: As above. Was the alignment focus helpful or not in the practice of being surrendered to Silence?

**(10:15 - 10:30)**

Heart Language: Prayer and Yearning as Alignment

Orientation: The sheer prolixity of Christian psalmody and its "purgative" emphasis are designed to awaken the heart's capacity for spiritual realities.<sup>30</sup>

Exercise: Choose one of the following scriptures (hand-out) that resonates for you.

Reflection will be an adapted "Lectio Divina" process.

**(10:30 - 11:15)**

Two or three Scripture Readings using adapted "Lectio Divina": Read the selection several times, individually or in unison (group's choice). 2. Dwell silently upon the phrase or sentence that touches you. 3. Ask yourself what relevance or application this has to yourself. 4. Finally, sit in the afterglow of this reflection and open yourself to

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<sup>30</sup> Bourgeault, *Chanting the Psalms*, 163-164.



whatever new insight or message the Divine might have for you. Write in your journals if you wish. (from Bourgeault's *Chanting the Psalms*.)

**Tea Break:** 11:15 - 11:30 (something physical – walk quickly, yoga, stretching)

**(11:30 - 12:45)**

Two or three Scripture Readings using adapted "Lectio Divina"

Closing Reflection and Meditation

Wisdom Circle: (contemplative sharing)

**12:45 - 1:00**

Questions about the 3 weeks of practice: (Handout: Journal Themes and Reflections)

### Three Weeks of Silent Practice

Meditation Practice and Journal Writing Tips:

- Meditate in a quiet room where you won't be disturbed (10 to 50 minutes per day)
- Sit on the floor or in a chair with your feet flat on the floor.
- Try a chant or psalms before you meditate.
- Directly after meditating, journal about your experience.
- Keep in mind Merton's objective worship – whether you are "into it" or not.
- Sardello says practice with rhythm, like the breath – same time every day.
- Include resistance in the practice by learning from it, rather than succumbing to it.
- The "Silent Practice Kit" provides themes for journal entries: awareness of resistance, the observer, the body's response to both (including breath), surrendered alignment, and the heart's expression/yearning.
- Be open to surprises!

End-of-Day Journal Reflections:

- Silence may be experienced as freedom from our emotional and intellectual habits.
- Awareness is relaxed and non-judgmental. If effort and judgement have been themes in the day, include this in your journal.
- Awareness starts where you are. Focus on observing body senses and feelings. Avoid intellectualizing, instead, observe your thoughts.

You can reach me by phone or e-mail: [lauramadsen@shaw.ca](mailto:lauramadsen@shaw.ca) or 604-222-4111

(I'm away June 25th to July 2nd)

\*\*\* Be aware we have created a Community of Silent Practice.

\*\*\* We reconvene July 5th, Monday (6:30 - 9:30) at 4795 West 6th Ave.

*Thank-you so much and good luck/ bon courage!*

### **Workshop Reflection: The Internal Observer** (See footnote)<sup>31</sup>

*William Shannon (Silence on Fire: The Prayer of Awareness) points to shades of the "Grand Inquisitor" that may be looking over one's shoulder when it seems as though we are suggesting that "God and I are one." He explains that it is not because he believes in pantheism or thinks that he is God, but because he is trying to describe in dualistic terms a reality that can only be understood non-dualistically. As he points out, many people have a strong consciousness of things in separateness rather than in oneness. We suffer from this.*

*In reviewing Merton he suggests that "attentiveness" (awareness) opens the door to our essential happiness: it does this precisely because it pushes us beyond the dualities that life seems to press upon us into a consciousness of "being at one with everything." Rooted in a Hidden Ground (hidden from dualistic consciousness), this non-dual consciousness is highly personal. It is there for us to experience.*

*As Shannon says, it is personal because this Hidden Ground is the Ground of Love. "It is the recovery of the original blessing of self-identity experienced in total awareness."*

*(Zen Buddhists call it the experience of "your original face before you were born.")*

### **Workshop Reflection: Surrender**

#### **Surrender as Open Alignment:**

*Christian Story (Bourgeault interpretation)*

*Peter, aligned heart-to-heart with his master is making his way miraculously across the water — until he becomes self-conscious, falls out of alignment, and literally "sinks" beneath the surface of his fear. Surprisingly, in nearly all the spiritual traditions the word for this "open alignment" is surrender. In its authentic spiritual sense, surrender doesn't mean outer capitulation; instead, it means "handing ourselves over" — entrusting ourselves — into the great "electromagnetic field of love" (as Kabir Helminski puts it) which encompasses and shelters us no matter how dark and terrifying the outer path may appear. For Christians this field is often personally experienced as the love of Christ. However you name it, though, the most important thing is to know it.<sup>32</sup>*

*Robert Sardello makes the point that without our natural and instinctual yearning spirit, we could not make connection with the "higher realms." He claims that this important instinctual spirit is virtually unknown in most spiritual practices. He sites St. John the Baptist, wearing his animal skins, as such an image of instinct in relation to Christ.*

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<sup>31</sup> Italics indicates "educational quotes" from various authors.

<sup>32</sup> Adaptation from Bourgeault, *Spirituality and Practice E-course*.

## Workshop Reflection: Yearning

### Expressed Yearning: Purification through self-emptying and surrender

*Among the many forms in which the human spirit has tried to express its innermost yearnings and perceptions, music is perhaps the most universal. There is something in music that transcends and unites. This is evident in the sacred music of every community – music that expresses the universal yearning that is shared by people all over the globe. (His Holiness the Dalai Lama)*

*Vennard states that many people claim that they need to figure out who God is before they pray, but Vennard recommends the other way around. She maintains that prayer is her theology and that old images of God – good and bad – are abstractions. She questions the possibility for intimacy with an abstraction. “Abstractions, although they help us to think about God, often don’t help us think about God and relate to God in our own hearts. “Prayer starts with God, not with us,” Vennard contends.*

*Accordingly, Merton claims that Christ is in us whether we think about it or not. Praising God, Merton stipulates, is independent of how we may feel about it. In fact, he confirms, it becomes easier precisely because we are not just doing it for ourselves.*

I will bless the Lord at all times;  
his praise shall ever be in my mouth.  
I will glory in the Lord;  
let the humble hear and rejoice.  
Proclaim with me the greatness of the Lord;  
let us exalt his name together.  
(Psalm 34:1-3)

### Difference between Chants and Psalms

*Bourgeault says that the Psalms arose from the heart and soul of the people of ancient Israel to give voice to Israel’s unique and remarkable sense of spiritual destiny. The bulk of the Psalms were written between 800-200 B.C.E. – the axial period – the period where human spiritual consciousness seemed to take a dramatic leap forward. China, the era of Lao-tze and Confucius; India, the Upanishads and teachings of the Buddha; in Greece, Pythagoras, Socrates, and Plato laid the foundations for Western philosophy; Persia, the mystical teachings of Zoroaster introduced the struggle of good and evil, personal choice, and personal salvation into the Near Eastern consciousness; Israel, the era of prophets and Wisdom philosophers.*

*Bourgeault says that the sheer prolixity of Christian psalmody and its “purgative” emphasis are designed to awaken the heart’s capacity for spiritual realities. This differentiates it from, for example: classic Sufi “prayers of remembrance” (repetitive*

*chanting of God's ninety-nine names) designed to lift the prayer to a level of ecstasy; or toning/mantric chants of some Hindu and Buddhist practices that work with sound vibration in order to produce effects in the inner body. Spiritual sanctuary allows for the passing of deep and violent emotions. The Psalms help us to stay grounded and connected, always guiding the heart. (I am still discovering that I am not the best guide of my heart, in spite of my very best intentions!)*

With all my voice I cry to the Lord.  
With all my voice I entreat the Lord.  
I pour out my troubles before him.  
(first phrase of Psalm 142)

*Bourgeault says that Psalms are metaphors and therefore act as bridges between the inner and outer worlds. She reminds us that the tension becomes the whole point. (The spiritual journey inevitably creates tension.) The interior journey anchored in the Psalms is a whole different journey – not about piety so much as a new kind of spiritual intelligence – naming the tension through the “metaphorical language of the psalms.*

John Main claims that “in a deep creative silence we meet God in a way that transcends all our powers of intellect and language.”

Mantra: *A meditation technique used a great deal in Tibetan Buddhism is uniting the mind with the sound of a mantra. The definition of mantra is “that which protects the mind.” That which protects the mind from negativity, or which protects you from your own mind, is mantra. When you are nervous, disoriented, or emotionally fragile, inspired chanting or reciting of a mantra can change the state of your mind completely, by transforming its energy and atmosphere. How is this possible? Mantra is the essence of sound, the embodiment of the truth in the form of sound. Each syllable is impregnated with spiritual power, condenses a deep spiritual truth, and vibrates with the blessing of the speech of the buddhas. It is also said that the mind rides on the subtle energy of the breath, the prana, which moves through and purifies the subtle channels of the body. So when you chant a mantra, you are charging your breath and energy with the energy of the mantra, and so working directly on your mind and your subtle body.<sup>33</sup>*

Kirtan is a devotional form of Yoga entailing call-and-response mantra chanting:  
OM AH HUM VAJRA GURU PADMA SIDDHI HUM

This is the mantra of all the buddhas, masters, and realized beings, and is uniquely powerful for peace, for healing, for transformation, and for protection in this violent, chaotic age. Recite the mantra quietly, with deep attention, and let your breath, the

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<sup>33</sup> *Glimpse of the Day*, daily Tibetan Buddhist quotes, [glimpse@rigpaus.org](mailto:glimpse@rigpaus.org), e-mailed Feb. 20, 2010.

mantra, and your awareness slowly become one. Rest in the profound silence that sometimes follows.<sup>34</sup>

**Workshop Reflection:**  
**Scriptural Orientation to Silence**

*It is extremely hard to rest undistracted in the nature of mind, even for a moment, let alone to self-liberate a single thought or emotion as it rises. We often assume that simply because we understand something intellectually, or think we do, we have actually realized it. This is a great delusion. It requires the maturity that only years of listening, contemplation, reflection, meditation, and sustained practice can ripen.*

*Robert Sardello (Silence) says that Silence must be recognized and honoured as a holy and autonomous realm. "We can easily become interested in Silence for what we think it can give us. But, in the face of its true reality, we are continually humbled and made aware that we are not adequate to be with Silence when relying on our own ordinary abilities." This is one of the reasons that I use Scripture. From every tradition Scripture reflects the "I-Thou" traits of: humility, service, self-emptying, praise, yearning, surrender, and devotion. Based on my research and my own experience, it is the development of relationship with these qualities that aligns us to the Silent realms – anything else is just too much noise.*

*Practice Rhythm: It is preferable to do the practice at the same time every day. Sardello writes, we have an instinctual response to rhythm because life is all about rhythms – the ocean's ebb and flow, rituals, inhaling and exhaling, birth and death, the seasons. Connection to self is fostered through the rhythm of our heart's connection to life – the letting go and the letting in, giving over and receiving, that Silence invites us to.*

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<sup>34</sup> Glimpse of the Day, Feb. 21, 2010.

## **Workshop Prayers and Chants**

Om (Hinduism and Tibetan Buddhism) - a sacred mantra and mystic syllable, appears at the beginning and end of most Sanskrit recitations, prayers, and texts. (3 or 4 parts)

“Be Still and Know that I am God” (Hebrew Bible)<sup>35</sup>

“Where can I find You —  
and where can I not find You?  
Above — only You;  
Below — only You;  
To the East — only You;  
To the West — only You;  
To the South — only You;  
To the North — only You;  
If it is good — it is You;  
If it is not — also You;  
It is You; It is only You.” (Judaism)<sup>36</sup>

I ... enter ... the ... silence.  
I enter ... the ... silence.  
I ... enter ... the silence.  
(Secular, from Robert Sardello)

## **Surrendered Devotion as Alignment**

(lifting us out of the limitations of self-preoccupation):

O love, O pure deep love, be here, be now  
Be all; worlds dissolve into your stainless endless radiance,  
Frail living leaves burn with you brighter than cold stars:  
Make me your servant, your breath, your core.  
(Rumi, Sufi tradition)

(over)

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<sup>35</sup> Psalm 46:10

<sup>36</sup> Rabbi Levi Yitzchok of Berdichev (1740-1809)

“Through devotion one knows Me truly, who I am and what My nature is. Having known Me in truth, one forthwith enters into Me.” (Hinduism)<sup>37</sup>

Kirtan is a devotional form of Yoga entailing call-and-response mantra chanting.

OM AH HUM VAJRA GURU PADMA SIDDHI HUM

### **Heart Yearning as Prayer**

“May I be an isle for those who yearn for land,  
a lamp for those who long for light;  
For all who need a resting place, a bed;  
For those who need a servant, may I be their slave.” (Buddhism)<sup>38</sup>

I will bless the Lord at all times;  
his praise shall ever be in my mouth.  
I will glory in the Lord;  
let the humble hear and rejoice.  
Proclaim with me the greatness of the Lord;  
let us exalt his name together.  
(Psalm 34:1-3)

With all my voice I cry to the Lord.  
With all my voice I entreat the Lord.  
I pour out my troubles before him.  
(first phrase of Psalm 142)

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<sup>37</sup> Bhagavad Gita, XVIII, verse 55.

<sup>38</sup> Shantideva, *Way of the Bodhisattva*, verse 19, chapter ten, Dedication.

**Appendix #6:** Before-And-After Questions with Interpretive Themes (2 pages)

On a scale of 0-5, rate the following statements:

(1 is “strongly agree,” 3 is “neutral”, 5 is “strongly agree” and N/A if irrelevant to you.

1. My experience with Silence is generally more positive than negative. \_\_\_\_\_(d)
2. I have tried meditating, but it doesn't really do much for me. \_\_\_\_\_(b)
3. Typically, I avoid Silence or being alone. \_\_\_\_\_(b)
4. I am very uncomfortable when I'm not busy doing something. \_\_\_\_\_(b)
5. Walks in nature help me to feel calmer and more internally Silent. \_\_\_\_\_(a)
6. When I experience Silence, my heart chakra (chest centre) feels less constricted and/or more open. \_\_\_\_\_(a)
7. I have the T.V. or radio on at home even when I am not listening to it. \_\_\_\_\_(b)
8. After I have meditated, I usually feel a calm stillness. \_\_\_\_\_(d)
9. After relating to Silence, I feel more fragile or vulnerable. \_\_\_\_\_(d)
10. After relating to Silence, I am less disturbed by external commotion. \_\_\_\_\_(a)
11. After relating to Silence, I am less disturbed by my usual internal dialogue. \_\_\_\_\_(d)
12. My body feels more relaxed when relating to Silence. \_\_\_\_\_(a)
13. If I am not busy I feel unimportant and disconnected. \_\_\_\_\_(c)
14. After relating to Silence, I feel refreshed. \_\_\_\_\_(a)
15. After relating to Silence, I feel more creative. \_\_\_\_\_(a)
16. Before I practice Silence, I find it helpful to chant. \_\_\_\_\_(e)
17. Before I practice Silence, I find it helpful to read a Scriptural text. \_\_\_\_\_(e)
18. I recognize that I run from Silence, but I can't help myself. \_\_\_\_\_(c)
19. When I am in touch with Silence, my breathing is slower and more regular. \_\_\_\_\_(a)
20. After relating to Silence, I seem to think more easily or clearly. \_\_\_\_\_(d)
21. Meaning is created through external engagements, not through Silence. \_\_\_\_\_(d)
22. Even though I have the time, I am afraid that I am not contributing or am being self-indulgent if I engage in regular Silent practice. \_\_\_\_\_(b)
23. Replacing my judgments of self and others with an “interior word” helps me feel more internal spaciousness. \_\_\_\_\_(e)
24. In relating to Silence, I sometimes feel a gentle invitational quality. \_\_\_\_\_(e)
25. I get frustrated or angry just thinking about relating to Silence. \_\_\_\_\_(b)
26. In relating to Silence, I sometimes feel a bubbling up of inexplicable joy. \_\_\_\_\_(e)
27. My experiences of Silence seem to have no connection to God or a higher power. \_\_\_\_\_(e)
28. Urban Silence is impossible; I have to wait until I am in the country. \_\_\_\_\_(b)
29. At times, I am surprised by moments of Silence in the middle of a busy day. \_\_\_\_\_(d)
30. When I am in touch with an internal Silence, the world feels softer. \_\_\_\_\_(d)
31. When I am in touch with an internal Silence, compassion seems available. \_\_\_\_\_(c)
32. I am restless and uncomfortable if I don't have something planned for the day. \_\_\_\_\_(b)
33. Relating to Silence allows me to slow down and connect with people and their situations in ways that I normally wouldn't have done before. \_\_\_\_\_(d)
34. The only Silence I have is when I am completely alone and undisturbed. \_\_\_\_\_(c)
35. When I try periods of not talking, I always notice how constant and loud my internal voice is. \_\_\_\_\_(c)



Interpretive Themes of the “Silent Practice Kit” (continued from Appendix 6)

Journal data and Before-And-After Questions will be divided into the following five (anticipated) categories:<sup>39</sup>

- A. Physical Responses: general physical/emotional/mental response to the stillness in Silence (i.e., easy full breathing, relaxed body, an absence of drive or compulsion, mental clarity, space between thoughts, relaxed alertness). This *can* be different from a surrendered state because it can be achieved without going through the awareness of the internal observer. For example, the participant could be relaxed from being in nature, getting a massage, from a good work out or Yoga class, or being with a person who exudes stillness. However, if we begin to *observe* feelings and thoughts that come out of relaxation, we can begin to work with them consciously when we are met with our physical/emotional/mental habits of resistance.
- B. Resistance: *Anything* that keeps us from the spaciousness of Silence: can be felt physically (i.e., any tension in the body); mentally (unfocused, nervous fear/worry, any driving compulsion); emotionally (repressed emotions – anger, jealousy, despondency, or emotional/mental states we cling to – driven by our desire control, security, and affection - Keating); attachment to suffering through an (unconscious) victim story.
- C. Internal Observer: Opens space for us to *observe*, rather than engage (or get lost in) the habits of resistance/contraction. We observe the physical/mental/emotional effects of Keating’s false self (desire for control, security, and affection). The internal observer allows us space between the triggering event (action/thought/emotion) and our habitual reaction to it (usually resistance). The internal observer may trigger the compassionate observer, but not necessarily.
- D. Surrender: Letting go of our personal story or preference (i.e., being able to be present for what’s happening even though we might not like it), openness, availability, responding rather than reacting, letting go of habitual judgements or thought patterns. Surrender begins to be a natural response, only after some time of internal observer practice, but it can also happen in a “lucky moment.”<sup>40</sup> A classic surrender understanding is that “life isn’t all about me.” Surrender allows space for humour, physical relaxation, gentleness, easy/relaxed (non-compulsive) kindness, connection, and deep respect for life (nature/all living things).
- E. Yearning: the Heart’s response to Silence, gentle awakening sensation in the heart chakra, sense of gratitude and wonder, humbleness, a sense of communion, creativity/ will to express a Divine yearning or call, natural desire to serve (i.e., wanting to give back), intercessory prayer/loving kindness practice. Yearning is a circular energy (i.e., deep call and response) and mainly non-individualistic (i.e., communal needs trump individual needs). The state of Yearning is highly relational and is therefore deeply connected to all of the other categories. It could be said that Yearning is “good medicine” – healing – for Keating’s “human condition.”

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<sup>39</sup> The results of the 35 before and after questions are organized thematically, e.g., the group’s responses to #1, 8,9,11,20,29,30, and 33 relate to the Surrender theme and are reflected in the Bar Graph as such.

<sup>40</sup> This a phrase my spiritual teacher used (Baul Tradition).

**Appendix #7:** Journal Data Entries: “Silent Practice Kit” Themes and “Outlier” Themes<sup>41</sup> (14 pages)

Meditation Journals

A. Physical Responses

1. I used the Rumi quote for chanting “O love, O pure deep love ...” when I said that out loud for the first time, a strong jolt of energy went through my body, like an electric shock, but not painful (a common phenomena for me when I contemplate or am very open.)
2. Feeling very discouraged with constant neck pain.
3. My mind is very active. My body wants to be active and I am emotionally excited about summer being here. I feel restless and want to get on with organizing the summer. I breathe deeply and connect with my body and feel more present.
4. When I stop chanting, my mind begins to open up with creativity. I feel open and energy flowing in the blocked part of my body (left shoulder and rib, right elbow, sacrum). I feel relaxed and calm, and connected within myself and my environment. I have a yearning to create a beautiful environment. Time passes quickly today.
5. Vibration from OM chanting helps me to relax and connect to my body, surrender to the moment, I sense the energy flowing through my hands, my internal observer is following the random thoughts. I breathe deeper, my body relaxes and surrenders to the moment – lost in Silence.
6. I could feel the penetrating quality of the “Be Still” in “Be Still and Know that I am God.” I could also feel the skittishness of my mind running around, not wanting to be still.

B. Resistance

1. I would rather curl up and sleep right now. The idea of writing just tires me. I will not be able to say it all - I will not have anything to say. ... That little word “I” weighs heavy today. I realize just how much I hate that “I”. It’s presence is stifling ... I want to go away. I am seeing resistance everywhere. I look inside- the resistance to resisting the resistance....

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<sup>41</sup> This accounts for about 40% of the total journal data from all participants. Slight changes to improve legibility are in parenthesis.

2. "I will Bless the Lord at all times." This gives me a Headache – trying to understand its concept. The word LORD takes from Catholicism so much for me. If I change the word to SILENCE, or some other (word), it feels better. "His praise shall be ever in my mouth" creates an illness in my stomach. "I will Glory in the Lord." I do not see the Glory. The word Glory brings up a negative experiences of destruction. "Let the humble hear and rejoice." I understood that being humble is a way to "give." "Proclaim with me the greatness of the LORD" (brings the) biggest resistance; visions of war, all the conflict this has caused the world comes up. "Let us exalt His name" (brings a) feeling of illness due to the sense of destruction from this phrase alone.
3. I was realizing that without this commitment to daily practice that I'm pretty sure I would have skipped meditation this week due to my intensely busy schedule right now, coupled with the fact that I'm feeling so good, so don't really "need" it – i.e., can put it on hold. I am appreciating having made the commitment so I fit it in anyway.
4. The Buddhist quote "may I be an Isle ..." sparked resistance in me. My mind has also been very active this morning... This Buddhist phrase I have great resistance to. It stirs up fear in me, the thought of such a degree of service, completely forsaking the wants of the ego self. And yet, as I sit with it, I also feel the serenity of it, the freedom in it.
5. I am the "class dunce." I only meditated for four or five days. It was very powerful, and then only half the time.
6. I am resisting the schedule and the discipline of meditation. Reminder (Thomas Merton) to do it whether I fell like it or not.... lots of resistance, just felt the energy – let it move and breathed.
7. I have lost the pure heart of me. Too much pain is the lie, the resistance.
8. I could not go into the "altered" state due to a little resistance from family and the feeling of losing myself (if I) do so. Compared to the first day of the Silent Retreat where Laura led the exercise. There, I felt profoundly safe to be so, and loved it. An interesting observation.

### C. Internal Observer

1. Noticed less judgement in my meditation, came back again to intention.

#### **(Observing clears space to ask questions.)**

2. When is Silence resistance? When is Silence just Silence? When is Silence hiding? When is Silence acceptance? Today, I can't say it resembles joy or peace. I don't feel profound. I don't feel vacuous. It's more like looking but giving up looking for something. Is that surrender? Or purposelessness.

3. Amazing Meditation!!!! I feel better. Before meditation, I (didn't feel well) and I recognized (my) need to HEAL myself and my family. It is not to be seen as a burden, but as a privilege. The lesson is "Lighten Up."

4. Even though my mind was busy during meditation, at the same time, I was aware of the warm glow of spirit shining away non-stop at the core, so that the process of thinking was light and enjoyable. There was enjoyment of all. For now, at least, there seems to be a fear that has been released, a fear of survival.

5. Chanting four-part "Om." Felt lots of anger moving.

6. I felt the sensation of how thoughts are taken for "what is." It is as though I was observing myself observing thoughts, observing the situation: Thoughts had nothing to do with situation, they are a filter to the seeing. Thoughts fuel the fear I feel in my body. Seeing thoughts as simply thoughts, I have a choice to think them or not. This creates spaciousness for me when I can let the chatter go and it is a better place to make decisions from. My ego or little self usually gets tangled up in them.

7. Sometimes Silence comes as a gift and sometimes you can call it to you.

8. I noticed that I began clapping while repeating "I enter the Silence." I have done this before and discovered that clapping seems to occur sometimes when there is a thick layer of mind to break through – assistance coming through to startle/stop the mind.

### D. Surrender/Alignment with

1. Is it a good thing to have nothing to say.

I hear the birds and the children playing on the playground and THAT fills me.

2. (Walking in a beautiful district in Montreal) I realize I can love the old gardens, old trees, unbelievable houses, but I don't need to own any of it.

3. I seem to be focussing on fixing someone else this morning. Thinking about my brother and his daughters.... Reminding myself to take care of my own ... I suppose

one can or has to find many ways to fill the empty space instead of letting things drop in like a breath of fresh (air). ... Glimpses of what trust feels like ... the sheer power of that. How there is very little to do or say when you are in that space. Then I can receive others from a different place.

4. I used the psalm "With all my voice I cry to the Lord." It is not one I relate to much, but it did produce a feeling of surrender in me.

5. I held an intention to tap into Silence – such a beautiful "place." It brought a smile to my face and a deep sense of relaxation. All sound seemed beautiful (the neighbour's lawn mower, etc.). All seemed perfect "as is," even those that are struggling with grave illness. I don't really like the word "perfect" though. It is too loaded with associations, better to say I felt at peace with everything as it is.

6. When I stop chanting, I feel serene, calm, and clear. I feel space between me and doing the activity. I feel peaceful, relaxed, calm, and happy. I feel no resistance today and feel still, surrendering to the moment.

#### E. Yearning and Devotion

1. "Through devotion one knows Me truly, who I am and what My nature is. Having known my truth, one forthwith enters into me."  
Interesting, how using ME so often in a sentence can put the I in it's rightful place.

2. [It is] tempting to make it my story or a story revolving around me. Inflating my part in the other's story... [I'm] calling for Grace and Humility.

3. Used Psalm 34:1-3 "I will bless the Lord at all times." This is the scriptural quote I had the most resistance to, but I found that I really enjoyed singing it. I used different melodies, rhythms, accents, pacing. I found that there was a sacredness to singing it. I could feel its power to bring people together in worship.

4. I am enjoying using the various scriptural phrases in contemplation. Like the command of "Be Still and Know that I am God," I realize that they are mostly addressing the mind wondering around to various topics of interest.

5. I used Rumi's "O love, O pure deep love ..." and *really* enjoyed working with that, letting it resonate in me. I felt open, relaxed, penetrable, letting the words soak in as I said them, enjoying using my voice.... (ten days later) ... Can say this out loud now with eyes closed – live it – the saying of it takes me over, fills my consciousness with the prayer, the yearning. After that, just sat in peace observing my mind's wanderings.

6. The “know” of “Be still and Know” resonated in my whole body. “Be Still” is a call to me to act on wisdom.
7. These experiences (saying the psalms and other sacred texts) have shown me the Power of WORDS on a visceral and spiritual level – very very interesting.
8. The POWER of Words themselves is immense – much more than I realized.
9. I am feeling that there is support in the universe and the connection of us all – Oneness.

### Day-end Journals

#### A. Physical Responses

1. I just feel all this space in my head.
2. Went through my workday today without stress after the Silent Workshop weekend. This is new to me as work has been frustrating and I have felt anxious about it. The weekend workshop dissolved the stress, and I was able to maintain a state of relaxation all day Monday, even when new frustrations cropped up. It seemed like a subjective feeling of less stress again today.
3. Things shifted. I felt a “letting go.” There was a settling and my body and mind calmed right down. All was right with the world. I felt present (for the play). There was no other running commentary in my head.
4. Relaxing with a friend – felt spaciousness, my mind at rest while hearing about her amazing vacation stories. I felt like I had a vicarious trip through her stories.
5. I am feeling more relaxed in my relationship to food (usually addictive). I can now feel well-rounded and calm with less food. The anxiety about not getting enough to eat is gone.
6. I watch and am more aware of my body postures when I am reading or working at my laptop.
7. I am restless and calm at the same time. My body feels healthy, my head is clearer and my heart feels restricted and patient.
8. Feeling calm and silent inside. Body feels good, mind is “empty.”

9. Connecting to Silence in the morning helped with the flow of today. I feel more present, less resistance, less sticky, energy moving, more aware of choices, and my body is feeling more alive and less reactive.

10. Life feels effortless when connecting to the silent place. It's surprising what can happen. I enjoyed connecting after church with a new friend. I felt happy and relaxed with the connection – felt a calmness in my body, no anxiety, fear or worry – a sense of spaciousness.

11. Intellectually, what I need is compassion – this is what my response could be. This isn't what I am feeling emotionally or physically (however). My reaction is to withdraw and shut down.

12. Since beginning to write (today's) reflection, I was feeling agitated, angry, and fractured. I am now feeling a different alignment in my body and my mind – a sense of peace and calm. A much better way to end the day!

13. (The) real definition of our senses is that we are separate and not together. It shows how incredibly busy our minds need to keep us.

#### B. Resistance

1. Angry, yearning, surrender. Envy. Not alone. Alone. All of us with envy. All of us alone. Then not. Around and around. I am part of that. This dance to nowhere. I guess all the teenager stuff brings this to the surface. It never really goes away. Just has less meaning. And then what does? What do I want? Does it matter. Tight spot. Let's keep it short.

2. Some (family) had different priorities and things get done in a very disorganized way. In the end I suppose they get done and what seemed so irritating this afternoon does not matter so much anymore. (*Switching to reflective observer*) Is it because they have been pushed aside by other minor irritations?

3. When I struggle with my fear and worry I am mindful of the obstacle they cause. The cost is that I am holding back and not moving forward. The pay off is that by playing it "safe," I am avoiding risk and staying in my comfort zone.

4. In the blink of an eye I got really irritated and into resistance when R. began coughing (in church). I had absolutely no compassion for his situation. All I knew was that I didn't want my time at church to be disturbed.

#### **(Resistance, observing it, and moving into Surrender)**

5. Over tired. Had to keep observing all the tightening spots associated with coming back (to Vancouver). Finding things not quite the way I like them. Giving up

wanting to control the situation. Not really having the energy to hang on (surrender).

**(Resistance moving into Surrender)**

6. Felt resistance listening to R.'s stresses; complaints about kids, job, health resulted in a low mood for me; burdened feeling, needing to fix things for him. Later moved into Surrender about it, lightened up, got creative, some good discussion about possibilities ensued. The rest of the day was lovely, lots of appreciation for each other, our love, our life.

7. I am in such resistance! I know it is me and not them ... I am in "reaction." It is so difficult to "respond." Right now I have no compassion for them or for myself. I have no peace. I am "doing battle" with myself!! ... It is as though the agitation and irritation are a cue for me that I have lost my center, my alignment with Self (the big one). It really isn't about my daughter or husband.

8. I have realized that when I can't forgive or surrender, I am attached to the story that I have going around the person, place or event.

**C. Internal Observer**

**(Observing resistance, then to a spacious surrender.)**

1. I notice the observer and the judge observing. It's just a huge body cramp. When I look and accept that this is what is happening, it fades and everything becomes more spacious... for awhile.

**(Observing intention)**

2. Seeing people walking around at the airport, I was wondering what we are all doing HERE. It really does not mean anything if there is no love. Be open to all it's manifestations.

3. M. also came in the kitchen at lunchtime and noted that having P. around was very draining.... And all I can do is stay put. Watch how I feel.

4. My reluctance is neither here or there. I know what needs to be done. Why wonder how to be of service to the community? This is it. So basic. Family needs you, you need them. You serve where you are needed. THAT IS THAT. End of the line. Excuses fall short, seem to demand too much energy.

5. I learned the value of not saying anything.



**(Reflective Observer)**

6. I messed up speaking to M. C. when I mentioned the coffee she had left on the stove last night. She was very defensive. She hung up and accused me of messing up her day. I realize she was already in a bad mood and she was ready to pick a fight. I just know I could have handled it better. After all there had been no serious damage.
7. When I struggle with my fear and worry I am mindful of the obstacle they cause. The cost is that I am holding back and not moving forward. The pay off is that by playing it "safe," I am avoiding risk and staying in my comfort zone.
8. The reading in church today: plowing the field and not looking back (meaning) not going back to the past/old ways.
9. I realize that my intention behind sending the e-mails was more reactive than reflective.
10. All the bad habits are just the duality we wish to transcend.
11. Quiet, clam, restful, focused. Also uncertain, questioning, not so self assured. Uncomfortable.
12. Quiet day today. Inside and out.
13. I am very aware of how "fragile" my Silence is right now. I compare it with the mountain meditation: how the mountain just is .. weather comes and goes. I am observing that while the weather is fine on my mountain, silence comes very easily, but when the weather turns nasty more often than not my mountain vanishes ... instead of being able to hold the Silence, I go off swirling with it ... I can see myself doing it!
14. I just realized that its not about "maintaining" Silence its about "coming back" to Silence again and again. The practice starts with returning.
15. Today I became aware of the tension between joy and fear. I became aware I had the choice to go either way – habit would have me default to fear.
16. Today I was experiencing more alignment than I have felt in the last week. It is important not to give up on the practice, during both the smooth and the rough times. They actually support each other – they are both the experience.
17. Today I was mindful of my fear and worry, allowing myself to have it, to sit with it, and to observe it.

18. Some situations at work today ... just leave me with a sense of stupidity. I did not enter the Silence, but I did catch myself and more in (the) observer mode. I watched as some people just DO NOT listen. I used the sense of trying to make things more simple to defuse work stuff. I could see so clearly how STUPID some things are – they just make me not want to indulge in any of this movement or affairs.

**(Compassionate self-Observer)**

19. One day of a workshop with opportunities to be in the compassionate observer. I observed various “wants,” strategies, mind, reactions, personality structure, accepting of how it operates, viewing self with fondness for (my) desire to control and desire for security.

20. I noticed a woman today who was quite plump and found myself admiring how beautiful the plumpness of her body was. It wasn't a case of finding her attractive “in spite of” being overweight, but rather, her plumpness itself was a thing of beauty. That was special for me because I get judgmental towards my own overweight body as being unattractive.

21. Sometimes (my partner's) mood rubs off on me, but today I was able to be more sympathetic, while maintaining my own sense of lightness and well-being.

**(Observing resistance)**

22. Heated conversation with my financial advisor, I don't have conflicts very often with people and its unsettling – still feeling a little on edge.

23. Was in the Observer, watching my desire for security at work today and the accompanying anxiety it produces: i.e., adding up the money I had, how much interest it would produce, how long I could live on it, etc. Found myself flipping back and forth between the Observer and then the fear from the body.

24. I am exhausted, tired, and ready for sleep. I notice I feel calm and spacious while I go about doing my mundane housework today. I notice pain on my left shoulder and right elbow (fall from Spring skiing). I am paying more attention to what I am doing.... I am calm content, and blissfully happy the whole day. I am paying more attention to what I am doing.

25. I am more authentic in response to my son's behaviours and requests. [I am] more aware of what I say and how I say it versus the habitual way of replying.

26. I notice lately that I am not drawn to watching TV in my free time... I am restless and calm at the same time.... I am speaking my mind and thought more often than before.

27. I just had no patience for him. I noticed his voice sounds very much like my dad's angry voice. So immediately part of me shrinks and another prepares for battle. (both resistance) I decided that I would be more useful completing my task upstairs.

**(Observing allowing space from self)**

28. I was cranky and tight. Just being aware allowed some flow.

29. I did remind myself before leaving that it (i.e., the family dinner) was not about me.

30. (My husband) and I are going on automatic and not listening to each other because of our assumptions about each other.

**(Observing surrender in action)**

31. It is amazing how working with Silence can get a job done. Does working with less Resistance make more space? Is there simply more room to act? I have been resisting organizing/cleaning this room. It is amazing how much lighter I feel and how much more willing I am to finish the job. With less resistance, there is more choice. A lot of effort goes into maintaining a rigid position. Resistance creates immobility, all energy focused on taking a stand. It can be so tiring. It would be easier and less stressful to just let it so. ... Rather than being in avoidance, I am more open to doing what needs to be done.

**D. Surrender/Alignment with**

1. Came upstairs to write in my journal. But as I sat in bed, I felt the Silence. I meditated for 20 minutes. Felt calmer. A little more accepting of the process. Less inclined to judge the non-silent parts.

2. Today I was experiencing more alignment than I have felt in the last week. It is important not to give up on the practice, during both the smooth and the rough times. They actually support each other – they are both the experience.

3. I listen for my day's agenda: forgive, forgive, forgive. ... Forgiveness is a path to surrender.... If I surrender to my husband, I feel like I'm going to die.

**(Surrender as non-resistance)**

4. There was no pleasure in trying to control the situation. More pleasure in letting go. I don't understand it. I can feel the freedom in my opinion or taste not mattering so much. That is totally new to me.

5. A bit of resistance with P. but agreed to make friends with it. It's funny.. it's like caving in but soft and cushy. There are more solutions in that place. Or... only minor inconveniences... Yes, spots of light ..more openings.

6. Her distress just hit me. Made me tense because I could not be here and there. I focused on the preparations and felt the anxiety melt away.

7. I gave (my daughter) space and came around. I have to remember that she cycles around, sometimes close, sometimes further away, and not to take it personally.

8. For me surrendering feels like a relaxation into the source. Stop fighting the river – and just allow yourself to be floated away.

**(Surrender as being in the present)**

9. Walking home from the grocery store tonight with R. I noticed how present I was, enjoying the fresh air, the smell of cut grass, the two of us, even noticing how tired my body was, but able to enjoy the whole thing.

10. A spacious relaxed day. Enjoyed everything I was doing: the work, meditation, exercise, grocery shopping, eating, making dinner, dishes, etc.... Was in the present moment a fair amount of the time. Appreciating my continued ease with food, such a gift that is.

11. Things shifted. I felt a “letting go.” There was a settling and my body and mind calmed right down. All was right with the world. I felt present (for the play). There was no other running commentary in my head.

12. It is easy to quiet myself in the van waiting for my son’s soccer camp. I feel creative and my body feels flexible.

13. The meditation time helps me to calm my mind and stay focused with what is happening at present. For example, I am able to be more authentic in my decision about little things in the day, e.g., what to buy, what to agree to, and what not to agree to with more clarity and with less guilt.

14. When I let go, let things be, come back to the present moment, I find compassion and glimpses of spaciousness.

**(Surrender as non-judgement and equanimity/calmness)**

15. Since beginning to write (today’s) reflection, I was feeling agitated, angry, and fractured. I am now feeling a different alignment in my body and my mind - a sense of peace and calm.

16. There is a certain peace in making sense of things: “knowing” helps to surrender. i.e., I am not crazy for having such a strong reaction, for being “too sensitive/overreactive.”... It is as though the struggle is over because I have what I need to know.

17. I remembered that all I needed to do was listen when R. is upset with K. I often feel the need to try and fix things or I join him in his upset with K. At one point today, I felt quite neutral. I had lots of space for the whole situation.

18. A small incident where I felt very calm (wouldn't always be): (We) arrived home 10:30 P.M., there were a group of 20 somethings in the lane talking loudly, just hanging out and socializing – but too much noise to sleep with. R. was going to take a confrontational approach with them, I could see him tensing up in preparation, and I suddenly saw that a soft touch would get the job done harmoniously. I leaned over the balcony and called down to them politely, asking them if they could keep the noise down as it was bedtime. They immediately were quiet, and thanked me for asking so nicely.

19. Equanimity throughout the day in spite of getting drenched during my run on the seawall, gaining half a pound at my weekly weigh-in even though I'd eaten moderately last week – a mood of ease throughout the day.

20. Had a friend here for dinner. She's full of new projects and life changes. Everything is the same for me in contrast. Even though change and newness can be a source of joy (and) excitement for me, without it, I am very happy. There is no need for external sources of happiness these days.

21. Life feels effortless when connecting to the silent place. It's surprising what can happen. I enjoyed connecting after church with a new friend. I felt happy and relaxed with the connection – felt a calmness in my body, no anxiety, fear or worry – a sense of spaciousness.

**(Surrender as knowing our limitations and biases)**

22. At Yoga class tonight I was “knowing” what and how much to do. It felt good. Able to do more than I might have.

23. I am so glad that I went to the meeting. I guess I surrendered instead of feeling as though I had given something up. I felt that I was given space to be authentic and honest about how I felt. Moments like these make me grateful to be in the group – gratitude helps to create a spacious quality.

**(Surrendering as Love)**

24. When I am surrendering, it is as though I am bringing my whole self, all of my power and strength in the service of, an offering, to be used fully. I am surrendering to love.

25. Many simple surrenders as ordinary acts of love, e.g., surrendering a position, or an opposition, being right. Surrender makes room for the unknown.

**E. Yearning and Devotion**

**(Yearning as Group Activity)**

1. Chanting in a group and had an immediate sense of opening and joy as the chant began which carried on (throughout the group activities). I had a sense of the depth of the peace of my essential nature, of how immune it is to disturbance, and of how it is always there whether or not I am aware of it ... At the end of the evening, the peacefulness quickly disappeared, or I should say, my awareness of it disappeared when I became annoyed by something R. did.

**(Yearning as Gratitude)**

2. I am not used to having mostly positive things to say about a day. That in itself is an interesting dilemma. If I want to look at things that did not work, I am sure I could mention at least one thing. ... I guess this is where the word gratitude comes in. ... Gratitude that I am alive and that my husband and children are here with me. Gratitude for having caring siblings. Gratitude for having people to show me the way.

3. Today as I move through my day I will see the beauty that surrounds me, and I will give thanks for this.

4. Attributes of Silence: gentle, a flow, connected, safe, depth, healing, feels right, good in the garden, joy, enthusiasm, “velcro-less.” right action, creative beauty, inner direction, remembering, forgiveness, suspension of judgment, always there, breath of patience, gratitude.

5. It is as though my heart knows what to do, (but) I am not used to listening with “ears of the heart.”

6. The rest of the day was lovely, lots of appreciation for each other, our love, our life... Lots of gratitude for so many things: my relationship with R. my friends, family, home, etc etc this is a very common experience for me, to have lots of gratitude every day.

7. Silence as a Gift – infinitely spacious, mind chatter stops, all cares and worries are gone, peace and contentment.

8. You can change anything and everything with gratitude!

9. I notice the view out the window with appreciation and stillness. I feel relaxed. I am enjoying the empty state of my mind.

**(Yearning as Feelings of Separation)**

10. I am aware of my heart aching and of being distant. I rode the crest of the wave last week and this week I am down in the trough. I am just staying with the feelings ... this too will pass.

11. I feel disconnected from my heart and I am trying to figure my suffering (and my daughter's suffering) out in my head.

Outlier Themes in Meditation and Day-end Journals

**F. Courage**

1. I don't know who I am. What defines me. A year ago exactly, I was here with my mother. Just a few weeks before her death. The house is empty... My sister made a bed for me. I know that she loves me, but I feel abandoned. I don't know what I am doing here. Curious (and fearful) to find out.

**(Courage to look at oneself)**

2. When I don't trust my love, he (husband) is a monster.

**G. Intention**

1. Be of service. Make time to observe and contemplate. Having an intention, rather than a plan.

2. I accomplished a few tasks in the house. All in Silence. There is a radio but I chose not to turn it on.

3. Her distress just hit me. Made me tense because I could not be here and there. I focused on the preparations and felt the anxiety melt away.

4. Noticed an intention of gratitude today. Things just fell into place. The decision to go for a walk with M. at 5h30 am. Made it back in time to go to yoga.

Experienced a lot of softness working with the breath. At the dentist- getting my teeth cleaned, going in the back of my head where I could relax with the pain. Silence outside and inside me right now. A sense of space mixed with white noise.

**(Intention as remembering)**

5. Silence is always there, and sometimes just knowing this and intending to tap into it is enough – Remembering.

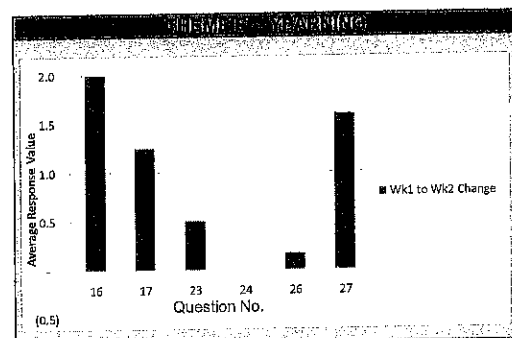
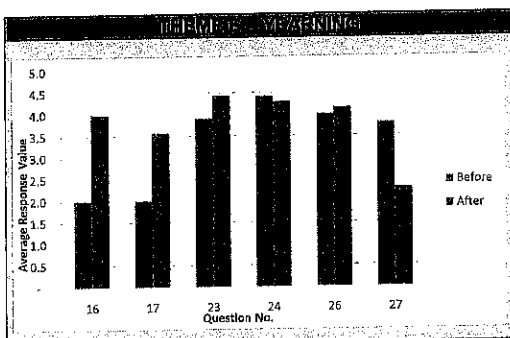
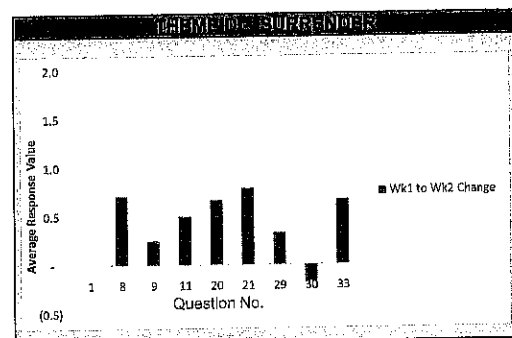
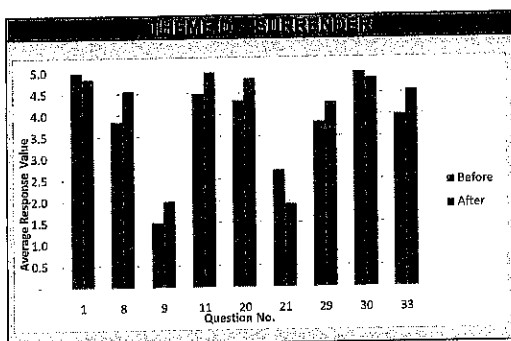
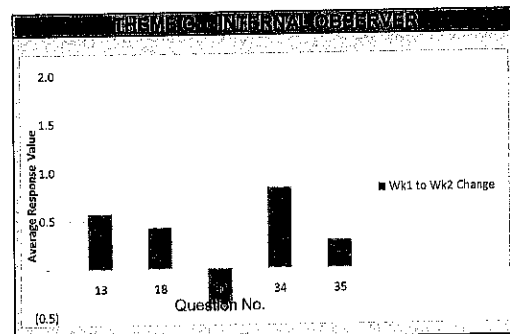
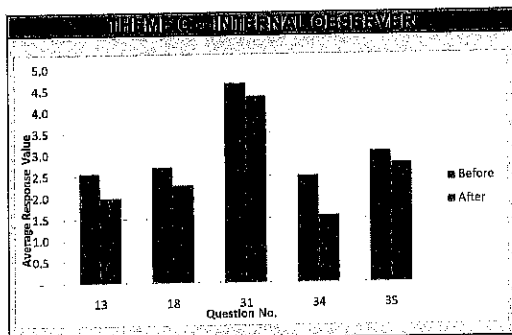
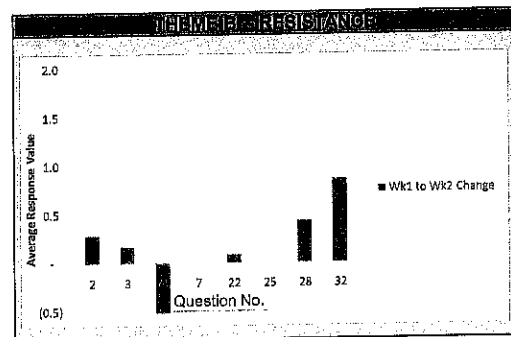
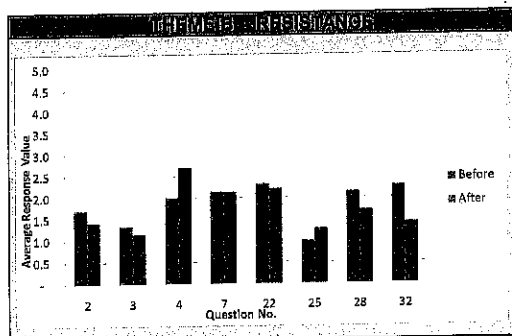
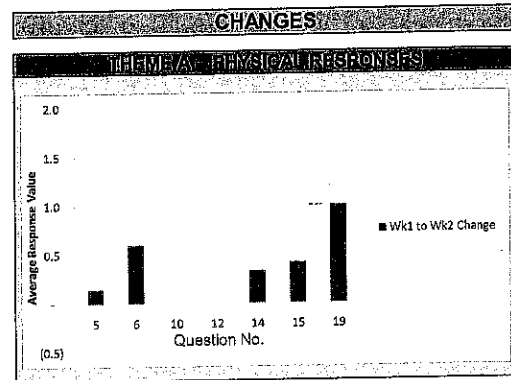
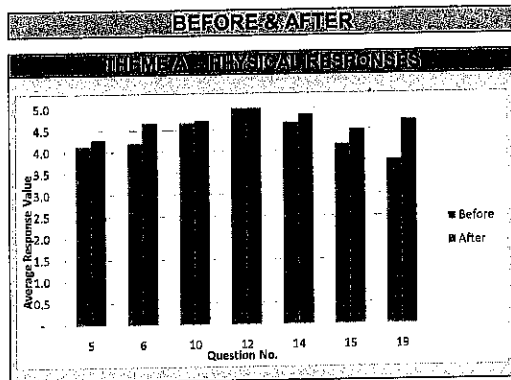
6. I realize that my intention behind sending the e-mails was more reactive than reflective.
7. During the meditation, I had the idea to intend to tap into Silence. What arose was this deep, bottomless feeling well of joy, freedom, potentiality, creativity. It was exciting. It had [the] effect of moving me to action. I wanted to end my meditation and get up and get on with my day – looking forward to it.

#### H. Simplicity

1. Why wonder how to be of service to the community? This is it. So basic. Family needs you, you need them. You serve where you are needed. THAT IS THAT. End of the line.
2. “Be Still and Know that I am God” Be still resonates most – the message I received was that this is a very SIMPLE access point to Truth.
3. Still feeling the simplicity, the bare basics. What does anything mean when thoughts, ideas, and concepts are not so important. ... Sometimes my mind is so empty I feel like a simpleton, and it does not feel bad. What happens when you let go of the idea of being smart, beautiful, funny, or wise? ... Humbled, put in my place, on the mat, I feel I belong.
4. Why does Silence have a new meaning to me today? Why after meditation for years now, did it seem so simple: All I have to do is sit and be quiet (still). There is nothing else to do or think about. Just make sure I breathe. I just let my brain do what it needs to do without reacting. Something gets resolved in that quiet space, there is no juggling or pondering. A thought just drops. Usually something clear and pristine and I think “Aaaahhh”! and I can store it or let it go, but it comes as an offering and because I am sitting quietly I am more open to it. Nice! ... Right now I feel my heart.



## Appendix #8: Bar Graph Before and After Questions



## **Appendix #9:** The Bengal Tiger and Interpretation (2 pages)

There was once a tiger, wild, proud and free who, when roaming the jungle, stepped into a trap set by a hunter. The tiger, whose foot was caught, in realizing that he couldn't escape, and who at first was driven to rage and then despondency, at last decided, since he was truly caught, to do something productive with his time. When the hunter eventually returned to the trap to find the magnificent tiger there, how amazed he was to discover that the tiger spoke his (the hunter's) language – one of the things the tiger had occupied his time learning while trapped in the situation he was in. The hunter realized that the tiger was worth far more for this unusual skill than for his pelt, and so an agreement was reached and a deal struck, and the tiger released from the trap.<sup>42</sup>

This allegorical story illustrates the spirituality behind the “Silent Practice Kit.” In the beginning, we are feeling “wild, proud and free” within the false self system. Our focus is on meeting the false self needs – conforming well with Western materialism. When our usual ways of meeting these needs are thwarted, we experience feeling “trapped.” Like the Bengal tiger, we experience Resistance and Suffering as we struggle against the (perceived) obstacles to our “personal freedom.”

Alternating between rage and despondency (false self needs being intolerably loud at this point), we eventually calm down enough to Observe that we are indeed trapped. This is the beginning of Silent practice: the fiercely humbling Observation that we are “truly caught,” within the false self of the human condition, and how much we suffer because of it. As we Observe our Resistance rather than struggling with it, we begin to

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<sup>42</sup> Lee Lozowick, *Gasping for Air in a Vacuum: Poems and Prayers to Yogi Ramsuratkumar* (Arizona, Hohm Press, 2004), 662.

Surrender or “let go” to the point where we are learning something “productive,” in this case, the Hunter’s language.

The Bengal tiger story addresses Keating’s belief that the fundamental illusion of the human condition is that God is absent.<sup>43</sup> It may be a stretch to view God as a hunter laying traps, but this simple story offers helpful metaphors for the learning of God’s language through Silence practice. Firstly, it illustrates how the false self rages and becomes despondent when things don’t go as planned (Resistance and Suffering). Secondly, it illustrates how our God-Yearning emerges when the false self is no longer indulged (Observed, but not indulged). Thirdly, we are then free to see ourselves and others within God, and can therefore be truly “productive,” as we are no longer trapped by incessant false self needs. God-as-Hunter also illustrates how God is never absent; existing within our (perceived) traps *and* our freedom. Finally, God-as-Hunter illustrates that our relationship with God sets us free, never ourselves.

The essence of the “Silent Practice Kit” is to help participants learn to sit still within the distracting discomfort of the false self. When the personal discomfort of the false self is no longer centre-stage in our consciousness, we are no longer trapped by it, and are free to open our hearts to a new language. Bourgeault refers to this language as “mystical hope” because it is “no longer tied to a good [personal] outcome, but ... lives a life of its own, seemingly without reference to external circumstances and conditions.”<sup>44</sup>

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<sup>43</sup> Cynthia Bourgeault, *Mystical Hope: Trusting in the Mercy of God* (Cowley Publications, Cambridge, 2001), 41.

<sup>44</sup> *Ibid.*, 9.

## **Appendix #10:** Participant Feedback (7 pages)

### Workshop Feedback

Four days after the Workshop weekend, participants were sent the following questions. The following is an edited version of the responses, as some were quite lengthy.

#### 1. What did I most appreciate/like about the workshop?

- The possibility to hear others talk and share their own experience.
- The recurrence of the theme of surrender.
- Looking into someone else's eyes.
- The openings.(all kinds)
- The opportunities to contact Silence, the Sunday chanting exercise with "Be Still and Know I Am God" (very powerful to let those words sink in slowly and with repetition).
- Your style of facilitation: honoring each person's contributions, holding a space of comfort and safety for people to communicate into.
- Good use of silent breaks, so that participants could assimilate one piece before moving to the next, get up stretch and refresh/rejuvenate.
- Your words of wisdom throughout - it was lovely to see/hear you in that role, sharing the wisdom you have gained over the years. (A few things I jotted down that meant a lot to me were the idea of our busyness being a form of violence. I've felt that lately with my current busyness, not having time for R. Another one was about that we live as if we don't know our own heart, which brings to mind the ways in which I overrule mine in favor of my head.
- Your asking us to think about objects in our home that help us to contact Silence - what came to mind for me was an Aromatherapy blend I used to have called "Sacred."
- I really liked the circle exercises where we would put a word or phrase into the circle as a way of sharing.
- I appreciated the time and space to have this conversation, the vessel you created for us to open up in, staying with the one psalm on Sunday was powerful, I loved where it went from the linear to the spiral.
- You are a gifted blessing to us all. You were so well prepared on so many levels.
- I appreciated the (workshop participants): open minded, already very spiritual, and loving and generous. The physical environment: couldn't find anything in Vancouver as serene as this place. The facilitator/teacher/guide: knowledgeable and humble, I felt so much goodness in Laura.
- I appreciated the sequence, intent, and structure of the exercises in the workshop; which allowed the richness of each of us to gently unfold, to become more and more present and connected within and without: leading to the Silent State.
- The opportunity to understand and explore (in a very cursory way) the practice of silence; the opportunity to be with and learn from others; listening to you and your

wisdom (drawn from practice and reading); tools for accessing and understanding silence; the introduction to resistance and obstacles.

## 2. What did I most struggle with?

- Myself
- Sometimes participants took us off topic, wanting to interject something at every turn. This often led to interesting discussions, but it also crowded some of the important pieces that were on our agenda.
- Guided meditations have never been my forte - I tend to go off.
- I struggle with what is meant by "God." It was fun to play with the psalm on Sunday. I felt I was taking it to another level for me, and it was OK to drop the word "God."
- I thought I was going to struggle with the guided imagery and I surprised myself. Reconciling words and silence (mind and heart), I am still working on that one!
- I have been influenced all my youth with the concepts of giving, and then I learned that if I do not know how to receive, I cannot give a chance to someone who wants to give. (Playing the game of life without being played by life.)
- Translating my inner experience after each exercise into words to share with the group.
- I struggled with some of the concepts: the notion of Little Self and Big Self is (believe it or not) new to me, the difference between surrender and defeat; surrender and giving up; surrender and slavery, and how to hold a paradox.

## 3. What would I have changed about the workshop?

- I expected more silence, however I think it was very balanced.
- The idea of having the dyad partner report on the other person's sharing (I would do that for something lighter like an Introduction).
- More dyads and less group discussion: dyads give everyone more time to share (and equal time to talk), while group discussions are dominated by the most verbal people.
- Distribute handouts by passing them around the circle so that we all get one of each thing (they looked too much the same sitting on the table - I ended up with 2 on surrender and none on resistance).
- It all worked for me ... even the location ... I was into the experience and getting what was for me, out of it.
- Nothing (x2)

## 4. Did I receive what I expected? If not, why not?

- I did not have any expectations. It just felt like something I should do.
- I guess you could say that I got more than I "expected." Silence was reconfigured for me. Silence is not the just the absence of words.

- Yes, I got a new approach and perspectives of what I have been studying and it seems that I have made a full circle: I came back with (an untraditional) Christian approach.
- Yes, definitely. (x2)
- I received far more than I expected. I feel much more equipped and ready to explore silence and awareness than I was last Friday morning.

5. Any other comments.

- All the various practices help to separate and connect what I am doing ... they each have their own place.
- Laura, you should do it as a professional to deliver workshop for masses, because *it is so good that it cannot be the privilege of a few*.
- The workshop exceeds my expectation. Excellent contents and leadership. Congratulations Laura. Look forward to the challenge of writing out my practices in the coming three weeks.
- I am anxious about my ability to fulfill my commitment to silence in the morning and to journal in the evening. Mornings are a bit hectic, getting kids out to school and me out to work. But, a promise is a promise.
- Many, many thanks, Laura.

A summary of the more constructive criticisms (from above) are as follows:

1. Sometimes participants took us off topic, wanting to interject something at every turn. This often led to interesting discussions, but it also crowded some of the important pieces that were on our agenda.
2. More dyads and less group discussion - dyads give everyone more time to share (and equal time to talk), while group discussions are dominated by the most verbal people.
3. Using dyads for introductions (i.e., lighter material, not partners obstacles to Silence for example).
4. Distribute handouts by passing them around the circle so that we all get one of each thing (they looked too much the same sitting on the table - I ended up with 2 on surrender and none on resistance).
5. The description of the Meditation Practice on the hand-out could be a little clearer, maybe point form, and adding some things for those that don't have a meditation practice.
6. A short one-on-one with you in the middle of the three-day workshop (possibly before or after the Silent lunch period) would allow participants to talk about their personal experience and their experience of you.
7. Given the time we had, I would have changed nothing. It was wonderful. I would have preferred a longer workshop, which gave us more time to be silent. It felt a little artificial to have short (15-20 minute) periods of silence, followed by discussion. Also, returning home in the evenings provided too many distractions for me, given my rudimentary stage. A residential workshop would probably have been better.

Post Four-Month Feedback:

(The following four questions were e-mailed to participants on Oct. 18, 2010.)

1. Which 5 themes (or combination thereof ) do you find most useful and/or have noticed the most in the past 4 months – Physical Response, Resistance, Internal Observer, Surrender, Yearning.

- I'm aware of the Internal Observer most of the time, and it's very useful! It allows for objectivity, non-attachment, compassion, peacefulness. Lately Surrender has been a theme in that R. is contemplating a new job in Victoria, as well as one in Vancouver, and I've let him know I'm open to either possibility (which would not have been the case in the recent past). I've been surprised at my willingness to go with the flow, knowing that I can be happy in either city, and I feel fully supportive of whatever choice will be the best one for him.

- Reflecting on the value of Silence and the yearning I continue to feel for it in my life, I would say that all modes or themes are useful to me. You have taught me that anything can be useful at any passing moment. If I notice that I have been less inclined to pray or surrender in gratitude I try to make space for that.

- Focusing on "silence" has helped me with my other practices ... meditation, yoga and Bio Energy ...tapping into silence helps me to return to "presence" and "essence" ... not only can I be aware of the chatter in my head and body but also I can turn it down and even off (quite thrilling when this happens!).

- The Yearning practices of "Enter (the) Silence" and "Be Still (and Know that I am God)" are my favorites to calm down the activities in my brain.

- I have noticed I pay attention to my physical responses and am trying to determine what they mean to me. I am feeling more ?????

- I am definitely with the internal observer more ( especially in work stuff) and I just state what I think without thinking of consequences – direct simple communication comes from stepping back and seeing differently.

- I understand Yearning better – at end of workshop I did not see it as well as I do now so this is growing...

- Resistance has fallen away in some aspects of my life (still a little with family and wanting to change things).

- In order of usefulness are the Physical response and Internal Observer. I noticed the resistance the most in the past few months.

- For the most part I would say it is the Internal Observer that operates the most consistently at this time.

2) Have you noticed periods of spaciousness and Silence – like Toni's 2 week example? (Toni shared this experience with the group during my Oral thesis presentation at V.S.T.)

- My two weeks of "spaciousness" (during the last 2 weeks of August) was such an interesting experience ... when I first encountered the feeling the only way I could describe it was in terms of Time ... there was simply more space and more time ... I wasn't rushed or anxious ... there was room to move, to make choices ... I could now see the forest and the trees! ... Time didn't exactly fit the experience so I just watched for other words ... spaciousness describes it better ... chores didn't seem to take as much time ... I was less irritable doing them ... cooking was even a pleasure (I am not a cook ... I will find any reason not to cook!) ... I even made my first granola! ... I was in less resistance ... maybe I would describe it now as ego taking a backseat ... I didn't have the little self nattering at me with likes and dislikes, judgements and criticisms, unhelpful comments, doubts, etc. ... I was just being and life was just flowing ... looking back it just seems so incredibly "simple" ... almost a "non-event" ... no bells and whistles, no fanfare ... almost "ordinary" albeit in a profound way.

- Yes, spaciousness appears in my life, not necessarily as much on the mat. But there are glimpses and moments of deep awareness. Although I do not have the same keenness I do feel the need to keep up with my practice. I do marvel with delight at the opportunity of being an observer in my own life, yes it might seem like a burden to notice all at times, but mostly, I find I can look at my own failings with more magnanimity.

What I have noticed is the following:

- When I get really stressed – I fall back into my main meditation from the 3 weeks which is “enter the silence” . I just stop whatever I am doing and use this to ground myself.
- I do not multitask as much – I work on only one thing at a time and for me – the queen of being able to hold space for many conversations at once this is a huge breakthrough.
- I am more comfortable with my own space... to be honest I crave it.
- Awareness of my dreams – huge one a few days ago about my brother and letting go.

- The longest period I had was during a retreat this summer, and it lasted for about 18 hours. I was in a place of being "one self", there was no separation between the Internal Observer and my mind or body - it was all one. And the very idea that there was something other than what I already was to observe seemed ludicrous. I was integrated. And it was so very simple. It was obvious. I felt free, joyful, playful, completely pure, undefended, spontaneous, no sense of effort, connected with others.



Shorter periods are more common. For example, it could be a few hours of being at home alone cleaning the house and there is a mood of joy, spaciousness, enjoyment of the tasks (which is not always present to be sure), lightness, gratitude, celebration.

- Gardening seems to be my silent practice these days.

- I do not have a routine where I perform Silence at the same time and yet I can claim that I am consistent almost everyday I have anything from 10 minutes to an hour. My average is 30 minutes.

- The longer the period of Silence the more effect I have.

When visiting Japan, I had extensive periods of Silence practice in very busy places like the Shinto, Buddhist temples and subways.

- Yes, very pronounced during and after my "Silence" practice. Your weekend has helped me to reconnect back to my source of peace and joy.

3. Were there reminders in today's presentation that were helpful? Or was it helpful to see the group again? (Oral Presentation, V.S.T., October 18, 2010)

- It was wonderful to see the group and feel the energy and sacred space that I believe we created by going through the workshop together. I think it would be impossible for any of us to treat each other in anything but coming from a most sincere "listening place" where we practiced silence together.

- It was helpful to be reminded and to witness the gap between the thinking/talking and experiencing/feeling. It is educational for me to observe your courage, focus and clarity in conveying a multi-sensory and multiple-levels research topic in an intellectual setting. Yes, it was helpful to see the group and to discuss the same topic of "Silence" in the presence of your supervisor.

- I was pleased to see that most of the group was present. I am always interested to hear what others have to say whether it differs with or corroborates my own experience. I love reminders, they are like hearing gongs in the distance. There is no prize to win at this game. It is humbling.

4. General comments – and any other way that you would like to describe your experience OR questions that you think I should be asking.

- The workshop helped me centre and calm and remember the truth of love as the centre of me, not the chatter of negativity that can take over my mind. Now I can more readily notice when I am off center by the chatter of judgement. I use the "be silent...(I think she

means "Be Still") quite often to still myself. I yearn for more stillness and silence, yet I stay "too busy". I feel if I don't get silent, my future is going to be a disaster. When the silence is present I love and flow happens with everything falling in place.

- The practice of Silence is VERY precious to me and has changed my life in many ways over the years. I've become more accepting of life as it is, and others as they are. I've had enough experiences in Silence of seeing the beauty and divine perfection in all of life that some of that knowledge sticks with me in an ordinary state of consciousness day to day. Letting go of thinking my husband should be different for example, because I deeply know and see his beauty on a daily basis, has transformed our relationship to one dominated by love, joy, and gratitude. Gratitude for my life, and for life itself, is something I experience an abundance of daily. I experience less fear due to Silent practice. Not no fear, but definitely less. And when I do feel afraid (if caused by my imagination and not a real threat), if I sit and am able to tap into the essence of what I am, the fear disappears, or loses it's reality. So Silent practice is incredibly practical!

- Silence was the presence of my Big Self not only in those solitary moments on the bench but also in those engaged moments out in the world. Freedom and compassion were also in those moments! It hasn't been easy to recapture; the memory is positive and the motivation to keep cultivating the practice!

- The participation in your study has reminded me of the benefits of staying connected to Silence in the city living. It has given me another language to explain and relate to the social structure we live in. The way you have organised the themes is helpful to communicate the experience of it. Since then, I have been able to continue the ten minutes before and end of day practices into my schedule. I am inspired and encouraged by your chosen topic and will be interested to read it when you are ready.

- [Private client.] Dear Laura, you have been my guide for many years now. I came to your workshop with a basic understanding of your approach to Silence. Ultimately my experience was coloured by my reactivity to being in a group situation. So that was what I had to focus on at the time. I don't know that I learned what you tried to teach me, I most likely fell prey to my many ways of shutting down. I was tested. I survived.

- One more thing. I enjoyed the journaling more than anticipated. However I have not kept it up, even though I took my little black book with me on my travels.

- The only other thing to say is THANK YOU – you are a brave soul to venture into this depth in a world that does not respect or share the same values. You are like a beacon in the night guiding souls through the darkness.

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