

SILENCE

A silence of Life;

The forest is not always quiet or calm;

It can be a terrifying place, quite ferocious.

It can be dusty, ripped by desiccating winds.

Enervated in the heat with smoke, fear of fire, insect plague, electrical storms, hail, and the ugliness of mechanical noises, a trespass which people in their destructive self-hatred inflict as a defiant scream to the Creator, a shrei, a protest that we have been given, in love, the difficulties of awareness of good and evil and the ability to choose affirming or denying lifestyles.

We are not equal partners or co-creators with The Creator, (an artefact is not the partner of its creator: it is a product, a creation regardless of how intricate it may be). As creations we are mostly immature, behaving as if we were compelled to be oppressed slaves. We act out in protest, davka, as sociopathic child-adults; trail bikers destroying the peace of the forest areas, with high-tech rave parties, drugs, guns vandalism and thievery, mindless self-indulgent waste and contempt for this beautiful world which the mobile morons value not at all..

Back to the silence. It is more than the absence of aggression, more than an absence of Sinas Chinam, the hatred beyond sense and reason. It is much more than the negativity of an absence or environmental imbalances resulting from our mismanagement of natural resources. I recognise the contrasts and the perfections in the silence. From the same linguistic root, come Shalom, peace and Shleimus, complete or whole and perfectly formed. Thus the peacefulness we may feel in the silence is connected to the wholeness and integrity of the place, and that includes affirming attitudes of people.

The calm silence of the forest is an environment in which I can experience something of the love impelling the Briah, the Creation. It is a context in which I can meditate, through the silence to purpose and to the spiritual ambience of this physical paradise.

It is not a silence without sound. There is pulsing within my body, and whooshing of blood. If I place a finger against my ear, I can hear my internal workings as I walk amongst the trees.

There is a small discreet breeze, there is birdsong. There is rustling in the grass litter as lizards and small creatures do whatever they do. And a thumping of kangaroos, activity in the silent perfection of the Created world.

It is an overcast summer day in an ongoing drought; the clouds suggest the possibility, if not the actuality of rain. The convention that drought is punishment for moral and environmental crimes spirals me back into a bout self-incrimination. Storm without rain, heat and thunder, lightning, noisy north winds.

Another day several weeks into the heat. A ferocious day. Shabbos. Survival has a lot to do with trust, that even for Pickuach Nefesh, the over-ride mitzvah of saving a life including ones own, this heat will not lead to a bushfire, and the maniacs with matches will resist the temptation. With the thermometer going above 45 Celsius the winds are but gentle and there is a different silence, the silence of fear. The birds gather around the depleting dam in large numbers, as they flit from shade tree to shade tree, beaks open, gasping. The humans are hiding, the residents in their stone houses that protect from the oppressive heat, the ferals and Visigoths nowhere to be seen, and city dwellers are safe in urban air-conditioned comfort stressed by threats of power overloads as the effects of global warming make apparent the myth of ecological innocence. Here the day becomes an endurance test, of clock watching till the promised cool of evening. Well, Shabbos ends, but not the heat, 36 Celsius at 2300 hours, 30 Celsius at 0400 hours, 29 Celsius at 0600, and noon with 41 Celsius. Whatever happened

to the cool change? Alas silence does not always go with security and calm. Clichés: calm before the storm, silence of troops before battle, silence on uncovering a betrayal.

Now as I feel the noon heat creeping into my stone bunker, I escape through time back to cooler days, less complicated days.

The day I started writing this appreciation of silence, the downstairs stone section of my bush house was cool. I could fool myself in this comfort that the unpleasantness outside would not be dangerous and would be assuaged, with imminent rain moderating the threat of a predicted week of extreme heat.

It is quiet, peaceful. I am interrupting and weakening this by writing. Better to be still, but I feel an imperative to comment, to record.

Without memories I fear my diminution and extinction.

Alone with silence and memories of loving, memory movement and noisy passion in times of quiet touching, it is hard to recall the colour and texture. Bit by bit as the images fragment in fear-filled mundanities. As I grow older I realise that the physical vanities will have to be laid aside. Not so however the memory which gives identity to the timeless soul. In the silence I fear senility and the loss of identity although the sages and the scientists insist that nothing is really lost, and I promise myself to keep better records of daily life as well as of the strange and unusual.

For this I need silence and time. Gamzu le Tova, it's all for the best; although being an artist demands a strict self-imposed time regimen; I am rich in learning and wise teachers. I spend long periods of time isolated in the forest that can, after a while be lonely and lead to paranoid introspection but which also provides the opportunity to process, analyse and come to terms with obligations. I have creative time, quiet time, and values beyond any economic rationalist's comprehension. I have a life that they couldn't possibly understand. There is a Landscape of Memory which I am able to construct, edit, annotate, recreate, and to give it significant meaning within a Torah context. I am not alone. I think to my mitzvah obligations, to Mussar and to self-definition within Torah and I am calm, free to enjoy and to create within the silence. My freedom has been through identifying needs for space, for a clean and relatively safe, low-maintenance environment, and finding the means to achieve this. My freedom has been through understanding that I cannot live a life outside Torah. My freedom is in being able to accept that I often fail in my obligations. My freedom is in being able to feel badly when I fail or when a failing is pointed out to me, when I'm given Mussar, admonishment and when I can listen and make amends. Thus I am not always free, but when I have the silence, then I know that my freedom has returned as a Blessing.

In an apparent contradiction I need to be living in the present to construct and archive this Landscape of Memory. This is a layered history of facts, of world events and the personal context reaching through the material and the substantive to the many levels of timeless and spiritual realms. Memory becomes immediacy. It is re-invented, recreated, and in the valuable quiet days punctuated by fearfully hot and noisy days, I feel something of that which is identified as Ahavas HaShem, the love of HaShem, the constant energy flow into the Briah, the Created world, an energy without which everything would cease to be. Through this feeling of loving, ahavas I can retain a little of my own experience, fragmentary and discontinuous though this has been. The connection (dveikus) to the Creator in this silent meditative state assembles all the fragments of loving into a seamless topographic unit.

Darkness intensifies the perception of even the faintest light, as we see more easily the stars in the dark of a country night, away from city luminants. So, in like manner are we able to experience wholeness and peace within the nightmare landscape of hatred, madness, injustice, fraud, and the perversities that result from choices of civilisations and individuals to follow the path of the psychopathic in the spiritual void thus resulting from this choice.

But it is not yet the End of Days, the light is still there as a glimmer, a hint, and there is a song within the silence which is a clue to the light. The singing is accented with rest notes, and long bars of complex silences. We can learn that silence; on the higher levels is also a vibration as is sound. Through this Shir Ha Shem, this song of the Creator, there is affirmation of purpose to life, to every life, and to every aspect of the Creation.

Having now written, after the passage of a decade, I am again able to pause into the quiet and enjoy the silence of another day, less threatening than some of the intermediate days, and go outside, dig, move rocks do some maintenance work or make with art, whilst breathing the sweet fresh air.

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