

Silence!! (pause)

I say Silence!! (pause)

Silence is the Absence of Sound. (pause)

Is there such a thing as? (pause)

There is no.....! (pause)

Silence is a Paradox: by saying it, by talking about it, we violate its surrounding presence. By listening, though, we unfailingly acknowledge the knowing.

Its lack, thereof, defines what it is not. After all, silence is a paradox.

We've heard the John Lennon quote "Life is what happens while you are busy making other plans." Sound is what happens while you are busy listening to silence.

During these days of awe, we are immersed in silence, the silence of sound, the random play of our ever-constant background audio track. Even if one's mind is clear, the chatter is there.

Many of you are familiar with John Cage, music visionary of the 20th century, who wrote the famous symphony **4'33"**. The audience saw him sit at the piano and lift the lid of the piano. Some time later, without having played any notes, he closed the lid. A while after that, again having played nothing, he lifted the lid. And after a further period of time, he closed the lid once more and rose from the piano. Although he timed the lengths on a stopwatch while turning the pages of the score, the piece had passed without a note being played and without the pianist having made any deliberate sound. Only then could the audience recognize what Cage insisted upon, that "There is no such thing as silence. Something is always happening that makes a sound." Anybody listening intently would have heard them: while nobody produced sound deliberately, there were nonetheless sounds in the concert hall. It is these sounds, unpredictable and unintentional, that are to be regarded as constituting the music in this piece.

We know that scientifically there can be no silence in any environment where there are atoms moving, it being a requirement that waves of moving particles are what carry sound. Since we do not have the ability to actually create 0° Kelvin (-273°C)

where all molecules stop moving, a state never attained in the laboratory, it is our lot to deal with this oxymoronic phenomena.

What are we to make of this situation at a time, during Yom Kippur, where each of us is examining the inner workings of our beings. In what place do we relegate the sacred nature of silence. What is the music of our soul?

Practicing the eastern spiritual techniques of meditation, one repeats a mantra and watches one's breath focusing; concurrently, there is cognizance of the yakkity-yak of mind chatter as it streams by, but without attaching to it. At Yom Kippur, the focus is similar, but with pronounced Jewish differences. Since we are directed to be active in "Tikun Olam", fixing the world, it goes without saying that there also is a Tikun Olam P'nimee, fixing one's inner world which precludes fixing the outer manifestation. After all how can we even know what righteous action is if we don't have an inner, wordless understanding of it? One might think that the act of naming, of assigning definitive words to an all-encompassing feeling, raises one's level of consciousness to a higher order of critical thinking. At the same time, though, this willful act is a denigration of all the nuance found in the non-definitive wordlessness of pure thought, which by definition is automatically limited when words are applied. Is it not at this level of sanctitude where we truly meet God, Adonai, the nameless and the unnamed in a totality of mutual acceptance, awe and understanding?

Our task, as Jews, at this time of year, dealing with the chatter of Tshuvah, is to address the rapturous state of being, by embracing forgiveness both in the giving and the receiving. I know that this sounds like wordplay, or should I say wordless play, but this is really the essence of the sanctification of multiple acts of silence.

In the Haftorah story of Rosh HaShana, Hannah is fervently praying in the temple with her lips moving, and yet no words escaping. This utter concentration is as succinct an image as we can get when it comes to the seriousness of the immersion in the endeavor of praying, the consideration of the one silence, within and without.

And so we deal with the noise of the outside and the noise of the inside with an inner focused intention, Kavanah. We quiet our minds and we, in turn, quiet our hearts.

יהיו לרצון אמריי־פי והגיון לבי לפניך יהוה צורי וגאלי

And we pray, "May the words of our lips and the meditations of our heart be acceptable to thee, O Lord, my Rock and my Redeemer." Psalms19:15

Can you hear me? (Cup mouth, facing up) (pause, hand to ear listening)

(Shaka thumbs up)

