Soulful Songs and Stories

With a song and your stories, we co-create a soft place for hard conversations and a brave space for personal and spiritual growth.

Hi Soulful Song Lovers and Story Tellers,

This is the eighth of Friday emails that we're sending out about songs, stories, storytelling, community, or personal/spiritual growth until we meet again.

Knowing when to LISTEN, SPEAK, and be SILENT have been hallmarks of our Soulful Songs and Stories time together. Of course the heart's involved, as in listening wholeheatedly and speaking from an open heart. *("God breaks the heart again and again and again until it stays open." —Hazrat Inayat Khan)* We celebrate and explore this in song in Pete Seeger's "Turn, Turn, Turn" and Simon and Garfunkel's "The Sound of Silence." To help us consider this in story, we have Win Bassett, Parker J. Palmer, and Christian Scharen on silence, and André Lorde, Yevgeny Yevtushenko, and James Baldwin on speaking out. We leave you with musical suggestions to shake off the COVID-19 blues, music that's mellow and meaningful, and calming music to wash away the day's mishegas.

If you know of anyone who might be interested in getting these emails who's not already on the mailing list, ask them to register with Jessica Pond, Jpond@uucsr.org. You can access the PDF without registering for Soulful Songs and Stories at the webpage: www.j.mp/uucsr-sss.
IF YOU'D LIKE TO BE REMOVED FROM THIS MAILING LIST, PLEASE REPLY (NOT REPLY ALL) TO THIS EMAIL.

We sorely miss you and your stories. We miss hugs and laughter and coffee/tea with you. We know these mailings are no substitute for meeting face-to-face, but we hope that they, in some small way, may fill the gap until we meet again. Be well, and please do communicate with us and each other, by text, email, phone (actually talking!)—or with proper distancing—in person. If you're not listed in the UUCSR directory, PLEASE share your phone number and street address with us by replying to this email.

Take the spirit of Soulful Songs and Stories with you wherever you go; share it, and we hope to see you all, healthy and happy, sooner rather than later.

Namasté,

Alice and Steve

To every thing there is a season,
and a time to every purpose
under the heaven...
a time to keep silence,
and a time to speak.
—Ecclesiastes 3:1, 7b

In Song:

Pete Seeger's "Turn, Turn, Turn"
2012 https://youtu.be/q7pzic4mf7o
The Byrds
1965: https://youtu.be/39NXp5F4_Tk
2018: https://youtu.be/6a66tPuW-ms
Nina Simone 1968 https://youtu.be/CZv-RNdmYoI
The Sound of Silence "The words of the prophets are written on the subway walls, and tenement halls, and whispered in the sounds of silence."
Simon & Garfunkel (1964) 1981 (Central Park)
https://youtu.be/NAEppFUWLfc

In Story: a time to keep silence

Win Bassett: "The Silent Treatment,"
Parker J. Palmer: "The Gift of Presence"
Christian Scharen: "Fieldwork in Theology"

*In Story: **a time to speak***

Audré Lorde: "The Transformation of Silence into Language and Action"
Yevgeny Yevtushenko: "Truth and Silence"
James Baldwin: "The Artist's Struggle for Integrity"

Music

Perky *...when you have the COVID-19 blues*
Marzurka in C Major, Op. 24 No. 2, Chopin
The theme song of Steve Post's "Morning Music" on WNYC from 1981 to 2001
https://youtu.be/JhSjRbh8a6k
"Air à Danser," Penguin Cafe Orchestra
https://youtu.be/mFlKxfhMYls
"Handel in the Strand," Percy Grainger
https://youtu.be/dzIJ-Agobto
"I'll Fly Away," Fedner Faustin, soprano sax
https://youtu.be/oF1hFE7mBbU

Mellow and Moving

"Hallelujah!," Leonard Cohen, Rufus Wainwright + 1500 Singers https://youtu.be/AGRfJ6-qkr4
"Irlandaise," Claude Bolling, performed by James Galway https://youtu.be/8N6ulsmp8gY

Peaceful *...to shed the day's mishegas*

"Clair de Lune," Debussy, Piano for elephants
https://youtu.be/i1qQOGCyRbY
"Amazing Grace," Thiago Reis, Saxophone
https://youtu.be/Hb-wJTcCG3U
"It is well with my soul" David Kocijan, Saxaphone & Piano https://youtu.be/vUMMQ3Jtj3M

The Silent Treatment

A seminarian at Yale Divinity School looks back at what he learned as a hospital chaplain this past summer.
Win Bassett, *Commonweal*, Dec 17, 2014
www.j.mp/stfu2

For at least three hundred hours this past summer, I practiced what not to say. Most people who have completed a unit of clinical pastoral education (CPE), a standardized training program in hospital chaplaincy, describe their experience as a lesson in listening-often silently. Silence is easy in theory but often difficult in practice. We know we should let others tell their stories, but we often feel a strong urge to interrupt someone else's story with a similar story of our own. By contrast, understanding what not to say is tough both in theory and in practice.

In August of this year, the poet Gregory Orr wrote in the New York Times about losing his faith as a child. He didn't stop believing because his younger brother died after Orr accidently shot him while hunting. He lost his faith because "a well-meaning adult assured me that my dead brother was already, at that very moment, sitting down in heaven to feast with Jesus." Orr continued, "How could I tell her that my brother was still near me, still horribly close to me-that every time I squeezed shut my eyes to keep out the world, I saw him lying lifeless at my feet?"

During my training at the hospital, I, too, occasionally found myself offering unhelpful words when I needed to say something to a patient. For example, after hearing countless patients and family members suggest that an illness might be a test or an ordeal that God wished a patient to endure, I caught myself saying, "You'll be stronger having gone through this." I'd instantly regret saying this, since most of my patients had no chance of gaining strength.

Similarly, a day didn't pass without my hearing a patient's illness or pain described as "God's will." I sometimes uttered that phrase myself. At other times, I bristled at it. I wish that more of my encounters unfolded like those in Stephen Dunn's poem "A Coldness": "And I wished his wife / would say *A shame* / instead of *God's will*. Or if God / had such a will, *Shame on Him*."

Another expression one too often hears at hospitals: "Everything happens for a reason." Patients who were offered this bit of cheap wisdom would often reply by asking what the reason could be for a motor vehicle accident or the diabetes that had taken one of their limbs. "Surely God is great, and we do not know him," Elihu says in the Book of Job. "Can anyone understand the spreading of the clouds, the thunderings of his pavilion?"

Instead of trafficking in speculations about why a person experiences pain or becomes ill, I found it far more helpful to ask the question "What now?" Reynolds Price wrote that after his cancer diagnosis "the kindest thing anyone could have done for me would have been to look me square in the eye and say this clearly, 'Reynolds Price is dead. Who will you be now?'" I once presented this passage from Price at a conference, and a participant who had survived breast cancer told me that, years ago, she playfully added "2.0" at the end of her name.

Nevertheless, I bet she sometimes heard the wrong words at the wrong times during her recovery. We've all said them, and we don't do it because we fail to understand that these responses are theologically indefensible. We utter these words because they seem to be the only things that might give momentary comfort. Because these dubious phrases have become our default expression of consolation, we need God's help to put them aside, to remain silent until we have something truer and therefore more helpful to say. Sometimes the words never come, and silence itself is enough. With or without words, chaplains are there to offer another loving presence, sometimes the only loving presence. As the Episcopal priest and poet Spencer Reece writes in a poem about his own experience in a hospital chaplaincy, "It is correct to love even at the wrong time."

a time to be silent

The human soul doesn't want to be advised or fixed or saved. It simply wants to be witnessed—to be seen, heard and companioned exactly as it is. When we make that kind of deep bow to the soul of a suffering person, our respect reinforces the soul's healing resources, the only resources that can help the sufferer make it through.

Many of us "helper" types are as much or more concerned with being seen as good helpers as we are with serving the soul-deep needs of the person who needs help. Witnessing and companioning take time and patience, which we often lack—especially when we're in the presence of suffering so painful we can barely stand to be there, as if we were in danger of catching a contagious disease. We want to apply our "fix," then cut and run, figuring we've done the best we can to "save" the other person.

It's at a bedside where we finally learn that we have no "fix" or "save" to offer those who suffer deeply. And yet, we have something better: our gift of self in the form of personal presence and attention, the kind that invites the other's soul to show up.

—Parker J. Palmer, "The Gift of Presence, The Perils of Advice," excerpt, *OnBeing.com,* Apr 27, 2016

People have a right to their own lives, and we need to respect and honor that. It would be arrogant to assume we've all been deputized by God to interfere.

—Belleruth Naparstek, "Extrasensory Etiquette," *Utne Reader,* Nov 1991

During a women's retreat Nelle Morton led in 1971, a woman was struggling to name her experience and did not tell her story until the end of a week together. When she finally was able to speak, this is what Morton says happened:

When she reached a point of the most excruciating pain, no one moved. No one interrupted her. No one rushed to comfort her. No one cut her experience short. We simply sat. We sat in powerful silence. The women clustered about the weeping one and went with her to the deepest part of her life as if something so sacred was taking place they did not withdraw their presence or mar its visibility. The woman's response to this was equally remarkable, "You heard me. You heard me all the way.... I have a strange feeling you heard me before I started. You heard me to my own story. *You heard me to my own speech.*"

Yet Morton knew our capacity for holding a redemptive silence is sometimes more than we can bear. She relates a circle in which the woman speaking, clearly in pain, crying, and struggling to find words, was interrupted:

> Suddenly, the woman next to her turned to the woman on the other side of her and with her hand on her knee interrupted as she asked, "P_____, you have two children also. Do you ever feel that way? Tell us about it."

It turns out the woman who interrupted was in training to be a counselor, and her newfound knowledge about helping overwhelmed her ability to simply be present and go with the first woman "down all the way." Morton, as circle leader, said that she could hardly "bear the pain—of having the grace a woman pleaded for intercepted by women who could not go through the pain of hearing another into the depths of her own abyss where sound is born."

The very process of making space for another's story to be heard is a way to break from self-centeredness.

—Christian Scharen, *Fieldwork in Theology,* 2015

Audré Lorde

The Transformation of Silence ***into Language and Action***

I have come to believe over and over again that what is most important to me must be spoken, made verbal and shared, even at the risk of having it bruised or misunderstood. That the speaking profits me, beyond any other effect.

In becoming forcibly and essentially aware of my mortality, what I most regretted were my silences. I was going to die, if not sooner then later, whether or not I had ever spoken myself. My silences had not protected me. Your silence will not protect you.

What are the words you do not yet have? What do you need to say? What are the tyrannies you swallow day by day and attempt to make your own, until you will sicken and die of them, still in silence? Perhaps for some of you here today, I am the face of one of your fears. Because I am a woman, because I am Black, because I am lesbian, because I am myself—a Black woman warrior poet doing my work—come to ask you, are you doing yours?

In the cause of silence, each of us draws the face of her own fear—fear of contempt, of censure, of some judgment, or recognition, of challenge, of annihilation. But most of all, I think, we fear the visibility without which we cannot truly live.

And that visibility which makes us most vulnerable is that which also is the source of our greatest strength. Because the machine will try to grind you into dust anyway, whether or not we speak. We can sit in our corners mute forever while our sisters and our selves are wasted, while our children are distorted and destroyed, while our earth is poisoned; we can sit in our safe corners mute as bottles, and we will still be no less afraid.

Each of us is here now because in one way or another we share a commitment to language and to the power of language, and to the reclaiming of that language which has been made to work against us. In the transformation of silence into language and action, it is vitally necessary for each one of us to establish or examine her function in that transformation and to recognize her role as vital within that transformation.

For those of us who write, it is necessary to scrutinize not only the truth of what we speak, but the truth of that language by which we speak it. For others, it is to share and spread also those words that are meaningful to us. But primarily for us all, it is necessary to teach by living and speaking those truths which we believe and know beyond understanding. Because in this way alone can we survive, by taking part in a process of life that is creative and continuing, that is growth.

And it is never without fear—of visibility, of the harsh light of scrutiny and perhaps judgment, of pain, of death. But we have lived through all of those already, in silence, except death. And I remind myself all the time now that if I were to have been born mute, or had maintained an oath of silence my whole life long for safety, I would still have suffered, and I would still die. It is very good for establishing perspective.

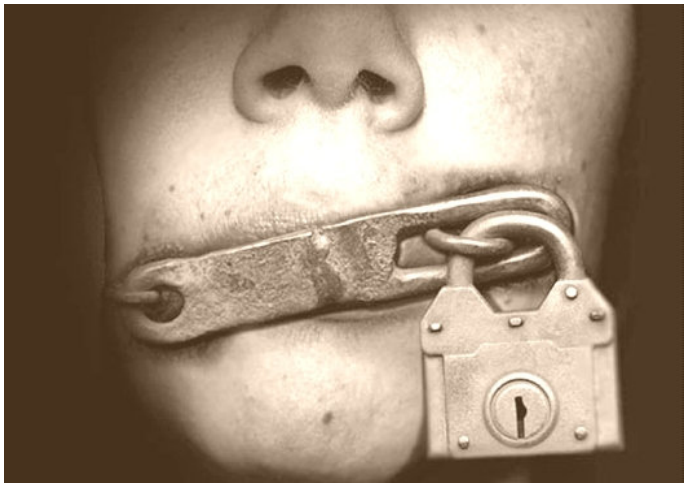
We can learn to work and speak when we are afraid in the same way we have learned to work and speak when we are tired. For we have been socialized to respect fear more than our own needs for language and definition, and while we wait in silence for that final luxury of fearlessness, the weight of that silence will choke us.

The fact that we are here and that I speak these words is an attempt to break that silence and bridge some of those differences between us, for it is not difference which immobilizes us, but silence. And there are so many silences to be broken.

—Audré Lorde, "The Transformation of Silence into Language and Action," originally delivered at the Modern Language Association's "Lesbian and Literature Panel," Chicago, Illinois, December 28, 1977; excerpted. In The Cancer Journals, *ISBN 978-1879960732; full piece: www.j.mp/altsl*

When the truth is replaced by silence, the silence is a lie.

Yevgeny Yevtushenko



Our lives begin to end the day we become silent about things that matter. **—MLK, Jr.**

To sin by silence, when we should protest, makes cowards out of us. **—Ella Wheeler Wilcox**

a time to speak

I am not interested really in talking to you as an artist. It seems to me that the artist's struggle for his integrity must be considered as a kind of metaphor for the struggle, which is universal and daily, of all human beings on the face of this globe to get to become human beings. It is not your fault, it is not my fault, that I write. And I never would come before you in the position of a complainant for doing something that I must do. The poets (by which I mean all artists) are finally the only people who know the truth about us. Soldiers don't. Statesmen don't. Priests don't. Union leaders don't. Only poets.

The crime of which you discover slowly you are guilty is not so much that you are ***aware***, which is bad enough, but that other people see that you are and cannot bear to watch it, because it testifies to the fact that they are not. You're bearing witness helplessly to something which everybody knows and nobody wants to face.

You must understand that your pain is trivial except insofar as you can use it to connect with other people's pain; and insofar as you can do that with your pain, you can be released from it, and then hopefully it works the other way around too; insofar as I can tell you what it is to suffer, perhaps I can help you to suffer less. Then, you make—oh, fifteen years later, several thousand drinks later, two or three divorces, God knows how many broken friendships and an exile of one kind or another—some kind of breakthrough, which is your first articulation of who you are: which is to say, your first articulation of who you suspect we all are.

When I was very young (and I am sure this is true of everybody here), I assumed that no one had ever been born who was only five feet six inches tall, or been born poor, or been born ugly, or masturbated, or done all those things which were my private property when I was fifteen. No one had ever suffered the way I suffered. Then you discover, and I discovered this through Dostoevsky, that it is common. Everybody did it. Not only did everybody do it, everybody's doing it. And all the time. It's a fantastic and terrifying liberation. The reason it is terrifying is because it makes you once and for all responsible to no one but yourself. Not to God the Father, not to Satan, not to anybody. Just you. If you think it's right, then you've got to do it. If you think it's wrong, then you mustn't do it. And not only do we all know how difficult it is, given what we are, to tell the difference between right and wrong, but the whole nature of life is so terrible that somebody's right is always somebody else's wrong. And these are the terrible choices one has always got to make.

Most people live in almost total darkness, people, millions of people whom you will never see, who don't know you, never will know you, people who may try to kill you in the morning, live in a darkness which—if you have that funny terrible thing which every artist can recognize and no artist can define—you are responsible to those people to lighten that darkness, and it does not matter what happens to you. It is impersonal. This force which you didn't ask for, and this destiny which you must accept, is also your responsibility. And if you survive it, if you don't cheat, if you don't lie, it is not only, you know, your glory, your achievement, it is almost our only hope—because only an artist can tell, and only artists have told since we have heard of man, what it is like for anyone who gets to this planet to survive it. What it is like to die, or to have somebody die; what it is like to see a death, what it is like to fear, what it is like to love, what it is like to be glad. Hymns don't do this, churches really cannot do it. The trouble is that although the artist can do it, the price that he has to pay himself and that you, the audience, must also pay, is a willingness to give up everything, to realize that although you spent twenty-seven years acquiring this house, this furniture, this position, although you spent forty years raising this child, these children, nothing, none of it belongs to you. You can only have it by letting it go. You can only take if you are prepared to give, and giving is not an investment. It is not a day at the bargain counter. It is a total risk of everything, of you and who you think you are, who you think you'd like to be, where you think you'd like to go—everything, and this forever, forever. •

—James Baldwin, "The Artist's Struggle for Integrity" (excerpts), talk at The Community Church of New York Unitarian Universalist, Nov 1962; also in *The Cross of Redemption: Uncollected Writings,* ISBN 0307275965

Full lecture (audio): www.j.mp/jbasi2

Maria Popova essay: www.j.mp/mpjbasi