Twitter Thread by Jawad Mian



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1) The ancient Greek philosopher Epictetus said, “Be silent for the most part.”

What did he mean? Allow me to explain.

Thread. ■

2) On August 29, 1952, the piano virtuoso David Tudor walked onto the stage of the barn-like Maverick Concert Hall on the outskirts of Woodstock in New York.

He sat at the piano, propped up six pages of blank sheet music, closed the keyboard lid, and clicked a stopwatch.

3) Thirty seconds passed.

The audience, a broad cross-section of the city’s classical musical community, waited for something to happen.

4) Tudor turned one of the blank pages but made no sound. For four and a half minutes, he went about doing nothing. He never played a note.

He then stood up, bowed, and walked off stage. That was all.

5) The piece was called “4’33” and it was composed by John Cage.

Its purpose wasn’t about listening to nothing. It was about listening to everything.

6) “There’s no such thing as silence,” Cage said, recalling the performance.

“You could hear the wind stirring outside, raindrops pattering the roof, and people themselves made all kinds of interesting sounds as they talked or walked out.”

7) This was music for Cage, who socialized with Joseph Campbell and Alan Watts and became friends with Indian musician Gita Sarabhai, who taught him, “The purpose of music is to quiet and sober the mind, making it susceptible to divine influences.”

8) Given the iconoclastic nature of Tudor's performance at Maverick, there was, understandably, a certain amount of uproar.

Even back then, sitting quietly for any length of time was not something people were accustomed to.

9)"Silence was expelled," as the Swiss writer Max Picard observed in his book, The World of Silence (1948).

"It cannot be exploited for profit. It is unproductive. Therefore, it is regarded as useless."

10) This goes against the great wisdom of the ages, wherein silence is held sacred, as it enables contemplation, introspection, meditation, and prayer.

11) Silence leads to stillness, and stillness leads to wisdom.

A Zen master, who when asked how to achieve enlightenment, gazed at the student with lips firmly sealed.

12) When Buddha got enlightened, he kept silent. Words end where truth begins.

The more we know, the quieter we become, and the quieter we become, the more we hear.

13) "Silence is the root of everything," said Rumi. "If you spiral into its void, a hundred voices will thunder messages you long to hear."

14) The problem is that we live in an age of noise.

Take a moment to think about the last time you could truly hear nothing.

15) So much is the space formerly occupied by silence full of clamor and activities that we don't even lament its absence, we are unaware that anything is missing.

16) Of course, silence has not vanished, we have only lost touch with it.

17) "It is possible to reach silence anywhere," according to Norwegian explorer Erling Kagge, the first person to reach all three of the earth's poles on foot—the North Pole, the South Pole and the summit of Mount Everest.

18) "I had to use my legs to go faraway in order to discover this. But I know silence can be anywhere, anytime—it's just in front of your nose."

19) Kagge creates it for himself as he walks up the stairs, prepares food, or focuses on his breath.

"You must create your own," he urges. "One only needs to subtract."

20) Silence is not merely an absence of external noise, because silence speaks, within us and around us.

21) It implores us to be more attentive to the world of which we are a part, to experience the fullness of time in the moment, and humbly observe and process even our most uncomfortable thoughts.

22) To quote John Cage, “We need not fear these silences, we may love them.”

23) Silence is something that should be pursued, and the achievement of silence is something of which we should be proud.

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24) If you enjoyed this, get more distilled infusions of clarity and inspiration in the Stray Reflections book.

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