

Silent sunny spaces

Music arises from silence. The silent spaces in between the musical notes allow us to hear the most beautiful sounds that noise jars and deafens. Our lives become beautiful and meaningful when we feel the peace of the silent spaces, like musical rests so that we can breathe easy and joyful.

If our day is a piece of music, then sunrise is its overture and sunset its finale. But what is music but silent spaces punctuated by varying sounds. Music is just sound; we make it beautiful by our inner silence and spaciousness.

Sunrise and sunset occur only for some moments at the start and the end of day. We can only experience them in our silence, even in the company of other beloved. No words can describe the moment: it is a living experience. Here, reading this, we reflect on the purpose of enjoying such moments.

With purpose comes meaning. Or, for some of us, we might come upon a vision of meaning in life, and hence see this as being suggesting a purpose.¹ Between the two is experience, bonding them, such as when we are silently watching a moonless cloudless night sky, full of stars. How can this be meaningful? They are all beautiful experiences but impermanent. Impermanence, in a useful sense, is the rarity of events.

In the case of the sun moving across the sky, we know that it is “really” the earth turning on its axis and around the sun. Such a scientific fact should only widen our wonder at how the sun seems to “rise” and to “set” in our lives. These events occur every day, and every time somewhere in the world. So it seems.

Let us reflect that the sun only rises and sets when we are there to watch it in all its glory. It does not occur when we fail to watch it, and we must watch in joyful wonder. Rising and setting are our own visions of the glowing sun, which moves on unmoved.

This is the same with the goodness in others. Goodness does not seem to be there if we do not look at others as we look at ourselves, and to see or recall them in wonder. The value of such moments is in their impermanence: they are rare. So they are precious, as there is so much we can learn from them. Learning arises when we see a good purpose in them; wisdom arises when we see meaning in them.

Goodness – truth and beauty – are impermanent and immeasurable. To measure something often means to be able to count it as being worthy of having. But we can never “have” truth or beauty. We can only “be” good, be true, be beautiful, be happy with goodness.

Such wise and happy moments are rare, not only in their fewness in occurrences: they are rare because we are unwilling or unable to notice them. We are somehow too busy with our own lives or lack of it, or we live blinkered by the notion that everyone and every thing are measurable.

But when there are spaces of silence in our lives, we are able to really engage with others at their best – just as music is best enjoyed in silence. Music may be measured sound, but they become beautiful when we free them from their measure. The best music can only be played by humans, not by machines or computers.

¹ See “A truly purposeful life,” R120: <http://dharmafarer.org/wordpress/wp-content/uploads/2009/12/100120-Truly-Purposeful-Life.pdf>

When the silence is spacious, it is a happy and healing gift to others. These are spaces for open learning, of knowing others better. It helps us to see ourselves more closely in the clear mirror of life. It empowers us to look deeper within and touch our latent genius for bringing forth truth and beauty into the world.

The beautiful truth is our language of love for others; true beauty is our appreciation of the being of others. A true friend is one who is so true that it is as if we are reading each other's minds. Beauty is the joy that such a friendship shows that our love is not only happy but also meaningful.

What we have might make us happy, but if we think only of "having" as happiness, then must want some more, and will always be in want. It is when we lose what we have, even losing all that we have, we begin to see meaning in our lives. We begin to ask ourselves the right questions.²

A meaningful life, as such, is more than merely "having," but a life of "being." True being is the ability to live or "be" the moment, whether this moment is as mundane as having a meal, or as complex as reading a sutta, or as profound as bidding a last farewell, gazing at the lifeless face of a loved one.

When we immerse ourselves in the reality of such rare moments, we might (looking back) notice that the rest of the world has come to a stop, waiting for us, as it were. Our mental stillness has the power to stop time, to take stock of things. When we are ready to step back into the space-time world, we are wiser in how we think, speak and act.

We must make true friends then, and to deepen and widen friendship. Friendship often starts with common chatter, grows with shared joys, but truly deepens when are able to enjoy the happy silence in one another's presence, like a leafy tree and its shade. The shade may not be there when it's dark, but we know with sunrise it will be there ever again. Friendship and love are but moments (like tree, shade and sun). But memories of them are beyond time and space; they are forever if we feel joy in them.

No matter how much we love company or depend on them, we must each breathe alone, just as every other person must breathe his own breaths. Yet we all see the same sun and sit and play in the same light and tree shade. Yet we all need to return to each our own homes. The windows of our homes are spaces through which we may watch the sun rising, shining and setting. As long as there are these spaces in our lives, we will be able to enjoy the radiant stillness that awaits us.

The sun stays constant on its course, neither rising nor setting. Others may see us as rising and setting: this depends on where they are and whether they care to look on or not. We must be above such measuring gazes. We should stay constant on our life's course, ever bringing light, love, life and liberation to all within our reach, even beyond.

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² See "What's the question, that's the answer" (R265): <http://dharmafarer.org/wordpress/wp-content/uploads/2009/11/R265-121107-Whats-the-question-thats-the-answer-xxx.pdf>