Richard Rohr on silence

Silence is not the absence of being; it is a kind of being itself. It is not something distant, obtuse, or obscure of which only ascetics and hermits are capable. Most likely we have already experienced deep silence, and now we must feed and free it and allow it to become light within us. *We do not hear silence; rather, it is that by which we hear.* We cannot capture silence; it must enthrall us. Silence undergirds our very being as ceaseless, primary prayer.

Silence is a kind of thinking that is not thinking. It is a kind of thinking which truly *sees*(from the Latin *contemplata*meaning “to see”). Silence, then, is truly an alternative consciousness. It is a form of intelligence, a form of knowing beyond reacting, which is what we normally call emotion. It is a form of knowing beyond mental analysis, which is what we usually call thinking. … Most of us believe that we are what we think, but *we are so much more than our thoughts about things.*

The ego uses words to get what it wants. When we are in an argument with our family, friends, or colleagues, that is what we do. We pull out the words that give us power, make us look right or superior, and help us win the argument. But words at that level are rather useless and even dishonest and destructive.

The soul does not use words. It surrounds words with space, and that is what I mean by silence. Silence is a kind of wholeness. It can absorb contraries, paradoxes, and contradictions. Maybe that is why we do not like silence. There is nothing to argue about in true inner silence, and the mind likes to argue. It gives us something to do. The ego loves something it can take sides on. Yet true interior silence does not allow you to take sides. That is one reason contemplation is so liberating and calming. There are no sides to take and only a wholeness to rest in—which frees us to act on behalf of love.