

Silence

The first work of the initiate

I had already envisaged this piece of architecture at the time of my elevation to the previous degree. I had in mind a thoughtful plan with beautiful ideas. First I would have started with a moment of absolute Silence totally destabilizing, then by guiding myself with some maxims, like the Swiss saying "*Speech is silver, silence is gold*" I would have been able to affirm that this ordeal of Silence that I had just faced served in fact to prepare the Word, to affirm the Word, the one that deserves to be heard and listened.

I will not fail to mention this paradox which is to speak of its opposite, recalling that etymologically Silence is taken from the Latin *Silentium*, a word of the *Silere* family which means to be silent, therefore with a passive connotation.

I had already noted this apparent ambiguity where the Masonic work is based on oral transmission, while the Silence, always associated with the initiatory path, serves as an anchor point for this inner search.

This is how the apprentice, in the Silence, must observe in order to learn, and meditate before affirming.

But in saying this I remain close to everything that made up my education, not so far from what my grandmother Marguerite used to say: "we are on Earth to prepare for Heaven", or from various adages found in very different cultures that I quote from memory, "one must turn one's tongue seven times in one's mouth before expressing oneself" for the Chinese, or "one sows with words, one harvests in silence" for the Russian.

Nothing new, everyone knows that a good night where the mind works without constraint, is the promise of a beautiful day.

This obligatory stage is moreover reminded to us by Bro. Oswald Wirth for whom "*The Apprentice Freemason has for first duty to meditate the teachings of the Ritual in order to conform his conduct to it. It is his only duty and it encompasses all the others*" and moreover "*To learn to think it is necessary to practice isolation and abstraction*".

I already understood well that this Silence imposed on the new Initiate, recalled at each Lodge meeting and quite different from the Masonic Secret, (which could be the subject of another research paper) is in fact a real work offered to the Apprentice.

This work begins on the day of initiation in the chamber of reflection with the trial of the Earth, a

memory that is still very present because I immediately understood that this test had to serve me for something important.

In this place, even if it meant being withdrawn from the profane world, being stripped of my metals, I might as well go to the very depths of myself, totally respecting this exceptional time, putting me in communication with myself, in apparent rupture with the Universe, that was what I thought at the time. For the record, I remember, after having hastily written my philosophical will, having opened the bible and I was unable to leaf through, too impregnated by the spirit of this place which in fact was created in large part by my presence.

To say that at that time of my life I claimed my right to silence and that at that precise moment when it was offered to me, deep, rare, it was impossible for me to concentrate as if this exceptional situation was destabilizing and forced me to withdraw into myself.

I entered there in a certain logic where the Silence (because it cut me of my known universe) created this intimacy which pushed me to this conversation with myself.

Everything in the profane world is a manifestation of sound, an aggression par excellence, because no one can escape it (the howling of a siren of an emergency vehicle, the din of a teenager's two-wheeled vehicle noisily calling out to society, the cry of a child tearing the silence of the night...)
One has sometimes the impression, as Raymond Devos said, that *“As soon as silence is established, the people must break it”*.

This is understandable and perfectly acceptable if one admits that noise is the characteristic of life, like movement, multitude, walking, horizontality, earth, knowledge, light.

Silence, on the other hand, is constitutive of death, like immobility, solitude, elevation, verticality, space, knowledge, darkness.

If Silence makes the student so uncomfortable, it is because the profane life is marked by verbalization with its limits, thus opposing the initiatory process where Silence is a rule: we can evoke experiences such as spiritual retreats, travels or stays with an initiatory vocation, all of which have been mentioned many times in different works that we have heard here.

In the continuation of my Masonic course, experienced in great part in the Silence, my readings and the works lived in Lodge stimulated my reflections, guided my work, thus demonstrating that the Silence (in any initiatory culture that it is) is the first constraint imposed, the first work proposed to the Initiate.

Because if Transmission is an obligation for any Human Being through the transmission of life, it is also an inescapable duty for any Initiatic movement through the transmission of Knowledge.

The extraordinary aspect of this mission is there but what to transmit, how to transmit it and to whom?

The search for answers to these existential questions can only begin in Silence because what we wish to transmit we prefer to do so by showing it rather than by saying it.

We know that more than words that evaporate, what makes the value of a teaching are the indelible traces that they leave in us and that by guiding our reflection serve as beacons throughout our initiatory journey.

Masonic learning as it should be cannot be defined, cannot be expressed, it can only be lived.

This is where I would place the Masonic Secret, the foundation of our working method, because it forces each one, at his own pace, to a progressive discovery of himself. The trials experienced during the Masonic initiation (trial of the Earth...), then all the time of the apprenticeship are marked by Silence (listening, watching, abstaining from intervening in Lodge) etc...

Throughout his apprenticeship, the apprentice does not experience the state of Silence himself, since he hears, but in the same way as the Venerable who radiates Light, the apprentice takes his place in the Lodge by radiating Silence, thus giving it a positive value.

The Silence then takes on the value of a symbol in all its strength, a symbol that I cannot easily speak of because it is a symbol that when I live it, is a symbol that invades me and that I am.

In Silence man will forget what is around him, what is his, to return to himself.

Silence will thus serve to stimulate his inner meditation, allowing him to consider the infinite character of his own search for Truth.

How, after having understood this, to still have the courage to take the Word.

This exploration of the world of Silence shows clearly that for every man, Silence, as long as one takes the trouble to accept it and to offer it as a mirror to others, is first and foremost a proposal, that of attentive listening, of openness towards the other, a most respectful fraternal act. For the Initiate, it is moreover a taking into account of the language of symbols, an injunction to explore his inner world. It is to accept the Ritual, to be open to the subtle, to touch the impalpable, to understand the implicit, to hear the murmur of other consciousnesses.

More than the Word that allows us to externalize what we seem to be, Silence pushes us to internalize, to explore what we really are. It is a necessary way of passage on the path of Truth and that is why it must be sought and even provoked by the Initiate. By the Word man says what he thinks, by the Silence the Initiate thinks what he says. Through this test, first imposed, then freely lived, the Apprentice Freemason learns by crossing the borders of the profane language, to discover this unsuspected world which is in him, to explore this unexpected universe which is him.

Silence then takes all its value, because contrary to mutism, it is not at all the negation of the word, it would be rather the limit, because to remain silent is not "*to say nothing*", it is to say; "*Nothing*".

To withhold speech is to express something unspoken, something that is part of our most secret

intimacy. We have chosen a non-verbal mode of communication.

As a profane, I thought I had mastered the essentials of what was useful to me, I displayed my meager knowledge and was surprised that I was not understood. Now, as an Initiate, I can hope to access the universe of Knowledge, and this work is done in Silence because the Initiatory Way is a path that one takes alone.

I was a prisoner of the Word and could only escape through Silence, and that is why I am here today.

Thus, from an incomprehensible Being, I intend to become in Silence, and through Silence, a communicating Being because I am listening to the other, to myself and thus to the Universe. Indeed, if we consider the strength of expression of a wise, strong and beautiful word born of a dignified and respectful Silence, we are entitled to say that it is the right way on the way to Truth and Wisdom.

I have spoken W.:M.:

Bro.: R.:G.: