

Erling Kagge on Our Deep Need For Silence

by Randy Kambic

Explorer, publisher, art collector and author Erling Kagge inspires us to find silence around and within us as a transformative experience. The lengths he's gone to make himself an authority in this pursuit include being the first person to complete the Three Poles Challenge on foot—the North and South poles and Mount Everest summit. He has also traveled to Japan to meditate and practice yoga.

The Norwegian's seventh book, *Silence: In the Age of Noise*, selected as a 2017 Great Read from the Indie Next List, recounts his experiences and presents observations of many past and present poets, philosophers, artists and other explorers—including Plato, Aristotle, Søren Kierkegaard, Oliver Sacks, Blaise Pascal, Martin Heidegger, Ludwig Wittgenstein, Stendhal, Denis Diderot and Mark Rothko—in exploring where we find silence and how to invoke it to improve well-being. It provokes reader reflection, demonstrating the kind of active engagement Kagge believes silence invites. He explores why it's essential to our sanity and happiness and how it can open doors to wonder and gratitude.

Kagge, whose previous books address exploration, philosophy and art collecting, runs Kagge Forlag, a publishing company in Oslo, where he lives.

Why do you consider silence, “the new luxury”, more important now than ever before?

Silence in itself is rich. It is a quality, something exclusive and luxurious, and also a



practical resource for living a richer life. Silence is a deep human need that in our age, has ended up being scarcer than plastic bags from Louis Vuitton. To me, silence is a key to unlock new ways of thinking. I wanted to write about silence because I consider it nearly extinct.

Which insight from the great thinkers cited in your latest book means the most to you?

The Roman philosopher Seneca, 2,000 years ago, said, “Life is very short and anxious for those who forget the past, neglect the present and fear the future.

When they come to the end of it, the poor wretches realize too late that for all this time, they have been preoccupied in doing nothing.”

Everything Earthly can be snatched away in an instant. Life is long if you know how to use it. Even if we were to live 1,000 years, our lives would feel short if we threw away this present time. We exist, but few of us actually live.

What have been the most helpful takeaways from your experiences?

Your mind—in silence—can be wider than the sky. Silence is about getting inside what you are doing—experiencing, rather than overthinking, and not living through electronic devices and other people.

Where may silence be found?

It's easier to find silence than many people think or believe. I walked alone to the South Pole for 50 days and nights under the midnight sun in search of total silence; but I never found it before I turned inward toward inner silence and uncovered forgotten sides of a universe just as mysterious as outer space. One universe stretches outward, the other inward.

Are there practical steps to achieve a state of silence?

You can shut out the world and fashion your own inner silence whenever you run, cook food, have sex, study, chat, work, think of a new idea, read or dance.

Silence is not about turning your back on your surroundings, but the opposite; it's seeing the world a bit more clearly, staying on a course and aiming to love your life as much as you can. I had to use my legs to go far away in order to discover this, but I now know it's possible to reach silence anywhere. One only needs to subtract. It's about finding your own South Pole.

Randy Kambic, an Estero, FL, freelance writer and editor, regularly contributes to Natural Awakenings.