



# mindset

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## silence

I am wondering what feelings the word silence conjures up for you, the reader of this issue of *Health & Healing*. I hope that the word calls to mind the experience of deep stillness, a state of calm and peace, a sanctuary where you feel safe and secure. Perhaps you call to mind the quiet of a cool forest on a summer day or an inner state of meditation when your mind has ceased its chatter and you feel you are at one with the universe. If you can, hold any of those pleasant experiences in your mind as I describe other thoughts that might be called up by the word.

For some the words “silence equals complicity” might come to mind, an unpleasant experience where someone has been silent in the face of abuse or intolerance, thereby implicitly supporting the aggressor and failing to stand up for the victim. Some may have felt unfairly criticized or treated poorly because of their race, ethnicity, age, or sexual orientation and no one stood up for them. In those cases silence becomes equated with abandonment and betrayal.

Unfortunately for some the word silence might call to mind very unpleasant experiences. Some readers may have been forced to be silent as children in the face of alcoholism or physical, sexual, or verbal abuse. Sometimes simple neglect or a parent who was depressed or severely mentally ill can have made childhood extremely difficult. A child is left to suffer in silence, not recognizing that their experience is out of the ordinary or that they deserved anything better. Silence becomes associated with dangerous secrets.

For some silence may call to mind the very unpleasant state of suffering alone, whether the suffering is physical or emotional. Many people suffer with anxiety and depression for years without seeking help because they feel that acknowledging problems means that they are weak or crazy or somehow deficient. Silence becomes a symptom of shame.

Silence can also mean to eliminate,

as in “her voice was silenced.” All of the negative experiences associated with silence—dangerous secrets, abandonment, betrayal, and shame—can make us feel diminished as a person, our voice silenced. We suffer tremendous blows to our sense of worth and self esteem. Our self confidence may be shaken to the core. Our real self is silenced and in its place a false self goes about our daily activities. That false self may be engaging, successful and well loved, but those feelings do not quite reach and eliminate the core feelings of unworthiness.

Healing comes about when we are able to recognize that the feelings of being unlovable are in fact aberrations and that our true self is infinitely lovable and acceptable. Healing involves sharing those secrets, betrayals, abandonments, and feelings of shame with others. Healing is like allowing the light of day to shine in our dark places. Emotional healing like physical healing involves cleaning out our wound, putting medicine on it and bandaging it. A scar may remain from the wound, but the wound itself is healed.

Love is the medicine of healing. We may start by telling our story in therapy, but the healing comes from all of our relationships. When we open our hearts to others, we allow love to reach those deep places of hurt and woundedness.

In his book, *Love and Miracles*, Dr. Ornstein describes a simple formula for healing. He says that love is based on intimacy and intimacy is based on vulnerability. Going backwards from that formula, when we are able to allow ourselves to be vulnerable to others, by letting them in on our secrets, we make a space for intimacy. Intimacy or open heartedness allows love to flow between people—family, friends, and partners. Love heals our wounds. Initially we must choose wisely those to whom we open our hearts. For some, letting go and opening our heart to the divine begins the healing. Ultimately for each of us I hope that healing will allow the word silence to call to mind only the inner peace and tranquility described at the beginning of this essay. **h&h**