

General RE | All years | Lent Lesson

The lesson plan was originally designed for a General RE lesson. However, much of the content can be adapted for use with different age groups.

To get the best out of this lesson, you will need copies of both 'Into Great Silence' and 'The Big Silence'. DVD's for both of these are available, but parts of these are online.

Topic	siLENT Lesson
Learning Objectives	To consider about how much time they spend using technology To explore the place of silence in world religions To think about how silence could be of benefit in their lives
Knowledge/Concepts	Lent, Silence, Spirituality, Christianity and other world religions
Attitudes/Values	Truth, Joy, Freedom, Internationality
Skills	Communication, Creativity, Reflection
Activity: Icebreakers/Games: (Slides 2-4)	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. The Lesson begins with a few games/fun activities that broadly introduce them to the idea of Silence, but without saying explicitly what the theme is. Options are below <ol style="list-style-type: none"> a. What a laugh! Ask for a volunteer – someone who thinks that they will be able to keep a straight face. Ask other volunteers to see if they can make them laugh. How easy is it to keep the silence and not break into a smile? You could keep a league table and time individual students. b. Count to 30 This game requires good listening skills. Every one sits on a chair in silence. Invite the group to count to 30 – this happens by one person at a time standing a counting a number in sequence. If two or more people attempt to count at the same time, you must start again at 1. Students can only count one number at a time and must take turns (so the same student cannot count from 1-30 on their own). Do you get to 30? How long does it take? c. Birthday line Ask students to line up in birthday order – but they must form the line without communicating verbally. How easy is it to do this silently? Test their success by asking students to reveal their birthdates once the line is complete. d. Charades The classic silent game! e. Compass One student stands in the middle of the room wearing a blindfold or with eyes closed. The other students choose a corner to stand (north, south, east or west – you'll need to write these on paper and stick them on the wall). The student in the middle calls a corner and all those students in this place have to sit down. Keep going until there is a winner. Students

Slide 5-6:

Slide 7-13:

Slide 14-20:

Slide 21-34:

Slides 35-38-

have to be quiet or else the one in the middle will know where they are.

2. The students are then given the riddle '*If you speak my name, I vanish. What am I?*' to try and guess that the theme is 'Silence'
3. Silence is the Lent theme, but what is Lent? Slides take you through it.
4. Students are then invited to think about how much time they have for silence in their lives, and how much time they spend on social media and using modern technology. Provide sheets where they can fill this in so they are able to talk about it and compare.
5. While they're doing this you can put on John Cage's composition 4'33 which is a full orchestra performing 4 minutes and 33 seconds of Silence. There's a link on the bottom of the slide. (Video is 7 minutes long, so play if felt appropriate).
6. The next slides give some questions and a vague scale that you can use to get students up and about, and help them to see where they are on the list.
7. Silence in world religions
 - a. Split the students into 4/5 groups and give out the factsheets (below the lesson plan). Give them 5 or so minutes to come up with a short presentation on the topic they have.
 - b. After this some slides take you through a couple of world religions and atheism that haven't been covered on the fact sheets.
8. Silent Reflection
 - a. Click on the short reflection and you'll hear some reflective music and images and quotes will appear
 - b. Let the group experience 5 minutes in silence, just read out the following instructions and click on the link. After 5 minutes (or shorter if you click) the slide will move on to indicate time is up. Tell the students to sit upright in their chair with their hands palm down on the table. Ask them to think about their breathing, not control it, but just notice it. Try to feel the sensation of your breath on the inside of your nose, or on your lips. Try to let go of any other thoughts and distractions, let them float away, just think about the small sensation of the air passing over your skin.
9. What might the students decide to do this Lent?

Stay silent for a change.

Stay silent in solidarity with young people who don't have a voice.

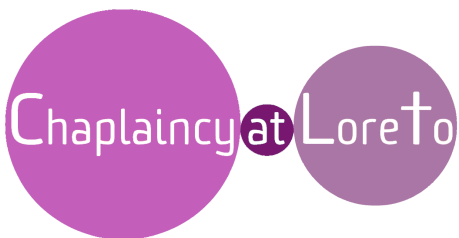
Help Million Minutes raise money for young people to make a change.
10. Sign up online: millionminutes.org/silent2019

Follow these simple steps:

 1. Sign up online millionminutes.org/silent

	<p>2. Set up an online fundraising page. Follow the link at: millionminutes.org/silent</p> <p>3. You can also download sponsor forms online.</p> <p>4. You can also get sponsored by text. To donate £5, text LENT24 £5 to 70070 (You can donate £1/ £2/ £3/ £4/ £5/ £10) Can be done individually or as part of a group.</p> <p>11. This Lent stay silent for a change. Get sponsored. Change Lives.</p>
<p>Resources</p>	<p>Powerpoint</p> <p>Fact sheets (see below)</p>

With thanks to Loreto College, Manchester, for the main content of this lesson.



Buddhism

What is Buddhist meditation?

In Buddhism the person meditating is not trying to get into a hypnotic state or contact angels or any other supernatural entity. Meditation involves the body and the mind. For Buddhists this is particularly important as they want to avoid what they call 'duality' and so their way of meditating must involve the body and the mind as a single entity.

In the most general definition, meditation is a way of taking control of the mind so that it becomes peaceful and focused, and the meditator becomes more aware. The purpose of meditation is to stop the mind rushing about in an aimless (or even a purposeful) stream of thoughts. People often say that the aim of meditation is to still the mind.

There are a number of methods of meditating - methods which have been used for a long time and have been shown to work. People can meditate on their own or in groups.

Meditating in a group - perhaps at a retreat called a sesshin or in a meditation room or zendo - has the benefit of reminding a person that they are both part of a larger Buddhist community, and part of the larger community of beings of every species.

The 'three trainings'

In the West, for many of those who want to explore a spiritual path, meditation is the first thing they encounter. In Buddhist tradition, meditation is the second part of the 'threefold path'.

There are many formulations of the Buddhist path to spiritual awakening but the threefold path is generally seen as the most basic one.

The first training, and the indispensable basis for spiritual development, according to the Buddha, is ethics (shila). Buddhism does not have laws or commandments but its five ethical precepts are guidelines for how to live in a way that avoids harming others or oneself.

Meditation (samadhi) is the second training. Acting ethically gives rise to a simpler life and a clear conscience, which are a sound basis for meditation practice.

Meditation clarifies and concentrates the mind in preparation for the third training: developing wisdom (prajna). The real aim of all Buddhist practice is to understand the true nature of our lives and experience.

Zen Meditation

Zen is about living in the present with complete awareness. Practitioners turn off the automatic pilot that most of us operate from throughout the day -- we don't really notice all the things that are going on around us or within our own minds.

They try to experience each moment directly. They don't let thoughts, memories, fears or hopes get in the way. They practice being aware of everything they see, hear, feel, taste, and smell.

Another way of looking at this is to say that a Zen practitioner tries to be completely aware in the activity of any particular moment -- to the extent that they are one with what they are doing. So, for example:

- when they eat they focus totally on the food and on the act of eating;
- when they meditate they open the mind to the reality of the moment, not allowing thoughts, feelings or sensations to preoccupy them, not even thoughts about enlightenment or Buddhism;
- when they work, they only work;
- when they brush their teeth, that's all they do -- they don't think about other things at the same time.

Zen practice is to realise that thoughts are a natural faculty of mind and should not be stopped, ignored, or rejected.

Source: http://www.bbc.co.uk/religion/religions/buddhism/customs/meditation_1.shtml



Benedictine Monks and Nuns



There have always been women and men who hear the voice of Jesus inviting them to leave behind their possessions, their jobs, their accustomed way of life, and to come and follow him. Some of those who

hear this invitation are called to the monastic way of life. Men who lead the monastic life are called "monks". Women who lead the monastic life are traditionally called "nuns". Sometimes the word "monastics" is used to refer to both men and women who lead the monastic life.

They respond to the invitation of Jesus by coming to a monastery. They make vows by which they give the whole of their lives, and their very selves, to God. They give up the right to marry and raise a family; they commit themselves to life-long membership of a community; they undertake to live a monastic way of life. The monastic life is an ordered life, with a fairly unchanging routine. It involves following the "evangelical counsels" -- chastity, poverty and obedience -- which Jesus commended to his followers.

In practical terms, the three main elements in the life of a monk or nun are prayer, reading and work.

Monks and nuns pray together in the monastery church. They gather together in the church several times a day: once to celebrate the Eucharist, and several times a day to pray the "Liturgy of the Hours", acts of worship centred on the psalms found in the Old Testament. They often call this "The Divine Office" or "The Work of God".

They pray on their own too. The time nuns and monks spend alone in prayer is time spent with God, listening to his voice, loving him, living in his presence, savouring his love for them.

The monk or nun is called to be a person who reads. Their reading is centred on the Word of God contained in Holy Scripture. The practice of *lectio divina*, "sacred reading", goes back to the earliest monks and nuns, and the last half-century has seen a revival of this ancient practice, which is becoming more widely appreciated by many outside monasteries too.

The work done by our monastic communities is very varied. We believe that the work we do is of service to the Church and to the world in which we live. And we value in a particular way the contribution of the older members of our communities. Their work may not be very "productive" in terms of income-generation, but their patient dedication to the work that has been given to them and their patient endurance of the weakness that comes with old age, is one of the means through which the Lord brings them to holiness.

Hospitality is an important part of the life of a Benedictine monastery, although the way it is practised will vary from one community to another. St Benedict tells his monks that guests should be welcomed as Christ.

Community is important for monks and nuns. That does not mean that we talk all the time: silence and solitude are an important part of our lives. But St Benedict clearly thinks that living together in community is a good way to come to holiness. He writes,

"they should each try to be the first to show respect to the other, supporting with the greatest patience one another's weaknesses of body or behaviour, and earnestly competing in obedience to one another. No one is to pursue what he judges better for himself, but instead what he judges better for someone else. To their fellow-monks they show the pure love of brothers; to God, loving fear; to their abbot, unfeigned and humble love. Let them prefer nothing whatever to Christ, and may he bring us all together to everlasting life".

Source: Benedictines

Judaism

What is Jewish meditation?

'Meditation' is a word used extensively today, and it has connotations that do not sit easily with Jewish mystical practices. If you think of meditation simply as a means of relaxation, then you will not understand why Jewish mystics follow practices that can be highly complex. The typical Jewish meditation appears far from relaxing.



A deeper grasp of the term meditation paves the way for my discussion of Jewish mystical practices. We must recognise that there are, in broad terms, two different ways of thinking. The first is normal, everyday rational thought - thinking about things you have to do, or about ideas, or about people around you. The second is, by comparison, less logical and less oriented to immediate everyday goals. This second is a more penetrating kind of thinking.

It involves shifting the centre of gravity of the mind away from the sense of 'I' which normally dominates our goals. Like all meditative practices, Jewish mystical techniques are directed towards enhancing this second form of thinking. At the same time, these practices cultivate an awareness of the divine presence in all things.

In fact, the first type of thinking is simply a surface layer of thought. If you imagine the mind as a sea, then rational thought is simply the surface level of waves on the water. The major currents operate at the deeper levels of the ocean. The objective of meditation is to engage with these deeper currents.

One of the major texts of Kabbalah, the 12th-century Bahir, writes that the biblical prophet Habakkuk 'understood God's thought.' It tells us:

Jewish mystical practices enable us to use thought to 'descend to the end of the world', that is, to plumb the depths where mind and physical reality are no longer separate.

Just as human thought has no end, for even a mere mortal can think and descend to the end of the world, so too the ear also has no end and is not satiated.

The goals of Jewish meditation

Within the overall framework of Judaism, meditative practices are intended to deepen the individual's engagement with all aspects of the religion. Meditation and techniques of concentration can:

- heighten one's understanding of the Torah
- develop an understanding of ritual and other religious observances
- give direction to prayer
- increase one's awareness of others' needs

More generally, Jewish meditation is understood as:

- promoting a greater closeness to God
- disciplining the mind, so that one has greater ability to focus mentally
- bringing an awareness of those regions of the mind that had previously been 'unconscious'

Hinduism - Mauna

Many think of silence simplistically, as just the absence of noise, or not speaking words. But silence, like life itself, is more complex and subtle than that. We all seek silent moments, islands in the sea of sound, to reflect upon and reap the lessons from life's experiences. Usually our quest for quietude is an outer search. We vacation to paradise or hike into the hills to escape the daily din. While Hindu saints and scriptures do emphasize the importance of serene surroundings as an aid to introspection, they stress more the cultivation of silence within. Outer peace is simply a means to help us find inner silence. Ultimately, we learn to maintain and enjoy innate serenity regardless of the cacophony that surrounds us. This is the basis of the Hindu practice of mauna, the vow to remain silent, and it is why some subdue speech altogether. Mauna is not the exclusive province of the sage. Brilliant orators and well-to-do intellectuals have also chosen to curb their speech. Mahatma Gandhi was perhaps the most prominent public figure to observe mauna. He tamed his tongue every Monday, communicating on that day only through writing.



The late Swami Nirmalananda of Karnataka had served the Army Postal Service in Europe during World War II. He later held various government posts in India. He travelled the globe and studied well the world's religions and philosophies. In the end, his burning search for truth culminated in silence. "If you desire to live in peace," he said, "hear all that falls on your ears, see all that appears before your eyes, realize that everything is in accordance with the eternal law of nature, and be silent." He did not speak for eleven years, and thereafter spoke sparingly. When he did, it was with clarity and conviction. "Wisdom to me is not a set of words, but freshness and emptiness of the mind. Empty the mind by self-observation, self-awareness and inner attention. Thus make the mind shine like a mirror. Then nothing is seen or known but the limitless radiance of eternity. This is a wonderful source of ever-renewed joy and inspiration beyond words."

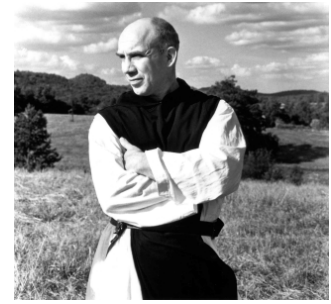
Mauna is practiced in varying degrees by spiritual leaders, ascetics, aspirants and householders alike, throughout India and abroad. Still, popular belief holds that the vow of silence can be followed only by ascetics and sages, that it lies beyond the capability of ordinary mortals. Hinduism Today correspondent, Choodie Shivaram of Bangalore, dispels this misconception, "I have seen ordinary people observing mauna in daily life. A very orthodox elderly cook in our house during my school days strictly observed mauna one day of the week. No matter how much we joked about her stony silence, she never budged. So, too, my great grand-aunt, Kadakka, observed mauna on certain days of the week. She insisted that we children keep perfect silence at least during meals. Of course, despite our valiant efforts, our childish giggles could not be contained."

Choodie continues, "In my childhood, an old friend of my father, Shri Chandrasekhar, would chat with me and my young friends. I had not seen him for many years, and I was shell-shocked last year when he refused to talk to me. Only later did I learn that he was observing mauna. Now in his eighties, Chandrasekhar spends most of his time at the Ramakrishna Math. He has been observing mauna for the past 17 years. Although with a wife and children, he speaks only for two hours on the first of every month. Even then, he is very choosy about to whom he speaks, and how much. Always clad in a white dhoti and half-sleeved white shirt, a sling bag over his shoulder, simplicity is his way of life."

Choodie heard Chandrasekhar's insights on his singular talking day last month: "Often people take me to be some worthless being, looking at my dress and silence. But it just does not matter to me. I began by talking for only one hour a day. After about one year, I began talking only once in a fortnight and gradually made it once a month. Now, I speak only two hours once a month. I plan to give it up totally. Besides talking, my communication is limited to written conversation with the brahmacharis in the ashram. That, too, is only done when I have to pass on some message or give instructions. I do not communicate with anyone else. I'm only a listener now. Silence teaches you to listen."

Christian Meditation

Christian meditation is a form of prayer in which a structured attempt is made to get in touch with and deliberately reflect upon the revelations of God. The word meditation comes from the Latin word *meditārī*, which has a range of meanings including to reflect on, to study and to practice. Christian meditation is the process of deliberately focusing on specific thoughts (such as a bible passage) and reflecting on their meaning in the context of the love of God.



Christian meditation aims to heighten the personal relationship based on the love of God that marks Christian communion. Both in Eastern and Western Christianity meditation is the middle level in a broad three-stage characterization of prayer: it involves more reflection than first level vocal prayer, but is more structured than the multiple layers of contemplative prayer.

Teachings in both the Eastern and Western Christian churches have emphasized the use of Christian meditation as an element in increasing one's knowledge of Christ.

Christian Meditation

Christian meditation involves looking back on Jesus' life, thanksgiving and adoration of God for his action in sending Jesus for human salvation. In her book *The Interior Castle* Saint Teresa of Avila defined Christian meditation as follows:

"By meditation I mean prolonged reasoning with the understanding, in this way. We begin by thinking of the favour which God bestowed upon us by giving us His only Son; and we do not stop there but proceed to consider the mysteries of His whole glorious life."

Quoting the Gospel of Matthew: *"No one knows the Father but only the Son and anyone whom the Son wants to reveal him"* and I Corinthians: *"But we have received the Spirit who is from God so that we may realize what God has freely given us"*, theologian Hans von Balthasar explained the context of Christian meditation as follows:

"The dimensions of Christian meditation develop from God's having completed his self-revelation in two directions: Speaking out of his own, and speaking as a man, through his Son, disclosing the depths of man.... And this meditation can take place only where the revealing man, God's Son, Jesus Christ, reveals God as his Father: in the Holy Spirit of God, so we may join in probing God's depths, which only God's Spirit probes."

Building on that theme, E. P. Clowney explained that three dimensions of Christian meditation are crucial, not merely for showing its distinctiveness, but for guiding its practice. The first is that Christian meditation is grounded in the Bible. Because the God of the Bible is a personal God who speaks in words of revelation, Christian meditation responds to this revelation and focuses on that aspect, in contrast to mystic meditations which use mantras. The second distinctive mark of Christian meditation is that it responds to the love of God, as in I John [4:19]: *"We love, for he first loved us"*. The personal relationship based on the love of God that marks Christian communion is thus heightened in Christian meditation. The third dimension is that the revelations of the Bible and the love of God lead to the worship of God: making Christian meditation an exercise in praise.

Thomas Merton characterized the goal of Christian meditation as follows: *"The true end of Christian meditation is practically the same as the end of liturgical prayer and the reception of the sacraments: a deeper union by grace and charity with the Incarnate Word, who is the only Mediator between God and man, Jesus Christ."* While Protestants view salvation in terms of faith and grace alone (i.e. *sola fide* and *sola gratia*) both Western and Eastern Christians see a role for meditation on the path to salvation and redemption. Apostle Paul stated in Epistle to the Romans 9:16 that salvation only comes from "God that hath mercy". The path to salvation in Christian meditation is not one of give and take, and the aim of meditation is to bring joy to the heart of God. The Word of God directs meditations to show the two aspects of love that please God: obedience and adoration. The initiative in Christian salvation is with God, and one does not meditate or love God to gain his favour.

Source: <http://174-136-19-21.static.directrouter.com/spirituality/meditation/2250-christian-meditation>