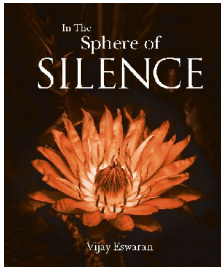


Book Review

## The Sound Of Silence



Paul Maidment, 03.22.07, 12:23 PM ET



There is scant space for silence today. We saturate ourselves in sound. We have largely grown uneasy with the domain of the imagination and the inner life, the silence of our own minds--a place that the poet e.e. cummings described as "the turning edge of life."

Yet Vijay Eswaran, chief executive of the Qi Group, a Hong Kong conglomerate, believes that time spent there makes him a better businessman. He has written a management book, *In the Sphere of Silence*, in praise of the power of an hour of quiet introspection every day to sharpen the mind.

Eswaran, whose 9-year-old, \$700 million (sales) company has interests ranging from e-commerce to ecotourism and interactive marketing, is a Malaysian who grew up in a meditative Hindu tradition that reflected his family's Indian origins. He learned *mouna vratham*, a ritual of silence, at his grandfather's knee.

A part from the hour's meditation, of which more later, the book's advice can be summed up: listen a lot; think before you speak; make to-do lists daily.

None of it necessarily bad advice for any leader; quite the contrary. Stretching it to book length requires a lot of large type, centered text, many aphorisms and quotations from an eclectic list that ranges from Mother Theresa to Norman Schwarzkopf by way of Aristotle, Keats and the Prophet Mohammed.

The book has sold modestly well in Southeast Asia, where Eswaran is developing a reputation as a spiritual guru for the CEO set. First published in Asia in 2005 by Rythm House, Eswaran's publishing arm that is an acronym for Raise Yourself to Help Mankind, it is newly published in the U.S.

Eswaran attributes his business success to following the book's precepts for 18 years. This would mean he takes an hour a day to be in absolute silence. But this is proactive being.

He divides the hour into five parts. The first three and the fifth take 10 minutes each, the fourth 20 minutes. Optimal time is between 4:30 a.m. and 6 a.m. If, for any reason, the silence is broken you start again.

The first part is to be taken up with reflection about the previous day, what could have been done to make it better, and analysis of why the better way was not taken yesterday.

Part Two is to write down all the things that you need to do today.

Part Three is to write down one's goals--for the next seven days, for the next 12 months and for the next five years. Restate these goals daily.

Part Four is to read for 15 minutes. The book can be inspirational or informative, and about anything that tells you something new. Spend the final five minutes of this part jotting down a summary of what you have just read. The following day, read the summary before you start your 15 minutes of reading.

Part Five is to communicate with your god, in the way that is most comfortable to you, and write a summary of that reflection.

Do all this for 21 days, says Eswaran, and it becomes a habit. The silence and introspection make you a better you, because they help you channel your energies to maximum effect. And being a better you makes you better at business.

This is a small book, quickly read. It will probably be the oddest management book you'll read this year, but it has a message to contemplate.