Taking ‘time out’ paradoxically can be just the thing we need to ‘tune in’ and ‘take action’. The natural seasonal rhythms in nature revolve around activity and rest. It may appear that not much is happening in Autumn and Winter, but nature is actually preparing for the activity we see in Spring and Summer. Taking time to notice this and make space in our daily lives for the structure we find in the rhythms of the seasons can help us create a healthy balance in our life, in the ‘doing and being’.

Irrespective of where you stand in the debate about methods, it has been heartening to see the importance given to meditation during the recent climate demonstrations by Extinction Rebellion and the School Strikes. These actions have often been fuelled by moments of inspiration and contemplation.

The relationship between ‘doing’ and ‘being’ - the activist and contemplative - is a dynamic that may not be immediately obvious when thinking about Quiet Gardens. Yet the original vision for Quiet Gardens was developed by a group drawn to the contemplative dimension of the Gospel, who wished to explore the creative tension between action and contemplation, between involvement and withdrawal, between work and prayer. Indeed, one of the core beliefs of the Quiet Garden Movement is that, “Time spent in the natural environment will inspire our reflection and invigorate our action”.

Focus on nature - a simple practice using nature as an ‘anchor’, for contemplation...

Close your eyes and take three mindful breaths, in and out – then open your eyes and look for something natural around you that attracts your eye. Place your attention on that object, for example, a tree, a flower, a rock, leaf, shape or pattern in the landscape. Spend 5 minutes like this, coming back to focus on the object each time you are distracted.
of calm and meditation, with protestors taking time out in the heat of protest and confrontation with police to enable peaceful protest to be maintained.

In addition to the peace and energy we find in moments of calm in nature, we can also find it creates the space we need for inspiration, which may lead to those ‘aha’ moments that create new approaches to life and action.

Not only does research show that being outside is good for our souls and can make us happier, it also seems that we are moved to act by nature. All of which are vital for inspiring creative acts, and when looking at how we respond to the climate crisis, we surely need to be inspired to think creatively.

Quiet Garden spaces are there to help fuel and inspire you in your ‘doing’ as well as your ‘being’. We must remember the quiet and calm found in Quiet Garden experiences lead to action and hope beyond the boundaries of the garden.

Matt Freer, Projects Manager

Continue exploring these themes at www.quietgarden.org/advent2019

“Silence and solitude are precursors to service. They can seem to be escapist, but in fact a true silence and a true solitude lead to a full expression of care and love; so the call to love and heal is integrally bound up with the call to be hidden and alone.”

Philip Roderick on the Encountering Silence Podcast, episodes 70 & 71

Listen at quietgarden.org/advent2019

Stillness is the key
by Ryan Holiday

Written by an American ‘marketer and entrepreneur’, this isn’t the most traditional author to find in a Quiet Garden, yet this small book creatively presents a range of simple universal practices for finding peace in ‘modern life’ and will be relevant and engaging for many readers, perhaps especially those not accustomed to being in a Quiet Garden.

In three sections, Mind, Soul and Body, the book uses historical anecdotes and figures from politics, commerce, sports, and history, as well as religions, to explore ‘stillness’ and how it can be cultivated in our lives. It is an engaging and accessible resource for those new to contemplation and the practices of stillness and silence, making it a great gift for someone in need of finding calm, and also a worthy addition to a book shelf for visitors to a Quiet Garden to dip into.

“Be here. Be all of you. Be present. And if you’ve had trouble with this in the past? That’s okay. That’s the nice thing about the present. It keeps showing up to give you a second chance.”

Matt Freer

Stillness is the key – An ancient strategy for modern life is published by Profile Books (2019)
Sabbath – The hidden heartbeat in our lives by Nicola Slee

Wendell Berry’s sequence of Sabbath poems inspires this deep reflection on the practice of Sabbath. Weaving her own words alongside Berry’s prose, Nicola invites us to move away from our regime, our driveness, our striving for success and embrace the Sabbath as a ‘sanitizing, temporary reprieve’. She encourages us to see that we all need a buffer – time out – to create an alternative space for our sanity and spirituality to recover. Finding this space in nature is reflected in Berry’s poem, ‘I go among the trees’:

I go among the trees and sit still
All my stirring becomes quiet around me like circles on water.

The invitation into the woods – takes us into a place of not-doing, not-pursuing where we lie fallow, helping us to see that it is a gift, not an empty space. We are not machines – Nicola writes – just as mammals hibernate during the cold months and fields are left fallow to restore their nutrients, so we too need dormancy and rest. A review does not do this beautifully composed piece any justice – read it and be inspired to pause and take care.

Sarah Godson / Sabbath – The hidden heartbeat in our lives is published by DLT Books (2019)
We were delighted that the first Annual Quiet Garden Day in July was marked in many different ways by Quiet Gardens, with lots taking the opportunity to try something different. Instead of a sermon Sue Nightingale, invited her church to wander round the church garden in silence, looking at a particular leaf or flower as they did so. Since then she has been asked to run similar services and possibly create a Quiet Garden at the church. Yew Tree House Quiet Garden told us they are usually very low key on summer afternoons, with maybe six to ten people coming, but this year they advertised the day locally on notice boards, shops and in windows, opening from noon until 6.00 pm. As a result, they had a steady stream of people throughout the afternoon, around 40 people in total, offering good feedback and several having asked if they can come back. Next year the date will be Sunday 19 July 2020.

ANNUAL QUIET GARDEN DAY

We are grateful to Sue Nightingale who retired as Chair of Trustees for Quiet Gardens in November. She said, “I have held the post for the last eight years, a real privilege. You have all taught me so much. I have seen gardens in the USA, Australia and of course, here in Yorkshire. We became involved over 20 years ago when we opened our garden in Sheriff Hutton, N Yorkshire. Now retired, we plan to start a Quiet Garden at our church.”

The garden at St Mary’s Church, The Boltons, London, has reopened as a place of quiet and rest for many people who visit the church and for many more passers-by who simply want to sit in a green space, to read, reflect, eat their lunch. Garden designer Non Morris followed a brief to include biblical plants where possible and to provide cut flowers. The Revd Jenny Welsh said, “this project has achieved far more than the work we were initially considering. This is a significant milestones in the life of the parish... The garden is the only publicly accessible garden in the area.”

Holy Rood House, N Yorkshire, have been given a once in a life-time opportunity to purchase the house and gardens from their landlords. Find out how to support them at www.holyroodhouse.org.uk.

New Quiet Gardens

Welcome to the following new Quiet Gardens affiliated in the last 6 months:

Africa
Forest Garden, Nairobi (Kenya)
The Story Garden, Prince Albert (S Africa)

England
Bishop’s House Garden, Norwich
Breathing Space Coventry, Warwickshire
The Fellowship of Meditation, Dorset
Fulligrove House Garden, Bristol
St Barnabas Church, Woodford Green, Essex
Warmth and Wonder, Herefordshire

Wales
Cae Mair Garden, Anglesey

For a full list of Quiet Gardens visit: www.quietgarden.org/find-gardens

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