

Pause

News and views from the Quiet Garden Movement


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Our guide to silence and stillness

At the core of the Quiet Garden Movement is the understanding that silence is profoundly important for our health and wellbeing, as well as for our spiritual development – and time in silence outdoors in particular seems to nourish the soul. In this article we explore what we mean by silence, why it's important and some simple tools, known as 'anchors', that can help you experience silence and stillness.

In day to day life we will rarely ever encounter a complete lack of audible sound. Noise pervades everywhere. No matter how remote we are, it is very likely that sounds from cars or aeroplanes will be heard at some point. A total absence of noise is not realistic. Even if not a manmade sound, nature will be heard: birds singing, leaves rustling, dogs barking. Quiet stillness can in some respects

be interpreted as a form of sound – a symphony of silence.

When we refer to silence we are not talking in the literal sense of a complete absence of sound, but rather the condition or quality of being quiet or still - an intentional period of time or space without noise, whilst accepting that there will be varying degrees of internal and ambient sound.

There are many phrases to describe this experience: inner silence, internal silence, stillness, contemplation – all of which suggest more than the mere absence of physical sound. The state of 'being in silence' calms our 'chattering mind' –and is really less about absence and more about presence and being aware.

We will all find there are barriers

to being silent. Some of us struggle with *permission* to make the time, whilst for others it is actually finding the time in a busy schedule. We might find it is simply difficult to find a space in which to be silent (Quiet Gardens can help there!), or for others there may be a negative reaction to the silence.

Regardless of the particular distraction or adverse feeling, we can be assured that we are not alone. We all get distracted, and we all find barriers to silence.

The strongest distraction is often in our own mind. No matter where we are, we always take ourselves with us! The head is so often full of noise; the constant chatter of the 'inner voice'. The quietest place in the world can become as 'noisy' as a busy high street.

Conversely, even when in the noisiest spaces it is possible to experience inner silence. With practice, we can 'watch' the noise pass by. Let it be – and know that we are not a part of the noise.

There are many tools to help us. When practicing contemplation, and one such tool is an 'anchor'. You use your anchor to help bring you back to the stillness whenever you notice you've been distracted.

Anchors can take many forms. For example, you can simply use the breath: Get yourself comfortable and spend time in silence. Notice your breath, as you inhale and exhale. Each time your mind



Prayer word exercise

Words are a valuable anchor in contemplative prayer. A 'prayer word' or 'breath prayer' is a single word repeated with every breath.

For example, 'maranatha', which means 'Come Lord Jesus' in Aramaic, has long been used with the first two beats of the in-breath, and the last two on the out-breath - '*Ma-ra na-tha*'. Phrases can be used, with perhaps the most well-known being the 'Jesus Prayer' - "Lord Jesus Christ, Son of God, have mercy on me a sinner". The phrase may be repeated to the rhythm of the breath – "(inhale) Lord Jesus Christ, (exhale) Son of God, (inhale) have mercy on me (exhale) a sinner".

In the following exercise you can develop your own prayer word to use in silence and contemplation:

1. Be still for a moment – you might like to say, "Be still and know that I am God" (Psalm 46:10). Be still, calm, peaceful, open to the presence of God.
2. Imagine that God is asking you "what is your deepest desire?" You might want to read Luke 18: 35-43 – and explain that like the blind man on the road to Jericho, Jesus kindly looks you in the eyes and asks, "What do you want from me?"
3. Give a simple and direct answer that comes in response. Don't think about it too much – just whatever surfaces for you. Write down the answer(s). Your answer may be one word such as '*peace*', or '*love*', or '*help*'. It may be several words or a phrase such as, '*feel your presence*' or '*lead me into life*'. Whatever your answers, they are the foundation of your breath prayer.
4. Select the name that you are most comfortable using to speak with God. Combine it with your written answer. This is your prayer.
5. Breathe in the first phrase/word (generally your invocation of God's name) and breathe out the second phrase/word (request or need).

wanders, gently bring it back to noticing your breath. Repeat.

There are many other forms of anchors, for example it could be something natural around you that you choose to focus on, an object in your hand, or a prayer word (the exercise above helps you to create your own).

We hope this article has been useful. Explore more like it in our Quiet25 course and other resources - and find your local Quiet Gardens on our website.