

Stillness

By Aidan Childs, Okehampton Quaker Meeting

In a world that is always rushing, it is hard to be still. I find it hard to pause on a woodland path just to look at the patterns in the leaves, or to be calm and focus my mind on a piece of paper to create a poem, story or an essay. I find it even harder to let the aggression I sometimes feel at life sink away. There are things about which it is right to be angry, but often my thoughts seem to be a swirl of unfair little grudges. These tensions do nothing to make my life, or anyone else's life, any better. When I manage to let them go and be peaceful, even for a few moments, I know that what is left in my mind is what needs attention.

The Quaker form of worship is grounded in all these types of stillness, which is what makes it powerful and valuable, and also very difficult to practice. We sit together quietly for an hour, giving our mind space to deal with the promptings that do not drop away with the stillness but grow stronger. Many Quakers would call these stirrings "leadings of the Spirit". If someone in the meeting feels moved to say something, they may rise and say it, before sitting back down in silence.

Often in a Quaker meeting, I find it impossible to stop chasing thought after thought around in my head, and that is frustrating. But at other times I feel a deep, electrifying peace, and a special connection with everyone else in the meeting. It is from the fleeting moments of tranquillity like this that my truest convictions, the things I live for and do not just argue for, come.

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