

# Guide to Silence

What if 5 minutes of stillness in nature every day was as well established as the habit of brushing your teeth.

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The purpose of this guide book is to inspire you to:

**Go out in whatever nature area you can find - Be in stillness, listen and observe.**

Do this for at least 5 minutes every day (or 10 or 15 minutes). The world would probably be a different place if this habit of stillness in nature every day was as well established as brushing your teeth. We need contact with nature, we need stillness and we need to improve our ability to listen and observe.



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# Preface



*Lake Sorjosjaure in northern Sweden.* I sat there as a hut-warden for two short summers in the 1990's. A lot of outer silence, reflection and inner stillness. Maybe it could be called one of the birthplaces of the Guide to Silence idea. But it was in 1998 that the project really came alive. I was in charge of a EU-project together with a well known nature photographer (Bo Kristiansson). The result was a small guide book, printed in English, German and Swedish. The purpose was to market the silence, solitude and fantastic wilderness that you can find in the Swedish mountains and to help people wind down, lower their stress levels, find new levels of well-being and enjoy nature in new ways.

Fifteen years later the question came up: **Can you find relative silence in nature close to or in big cities?** To answer this question a method to evaluate the relative silence and the experiential values of green spaces in metropolitan areas was developed.



The following four years we searched for silence in nature reserves and parks all around the city of Stockholm and neighboring cities. More than 70 beautiful sites in 15 parks and nature reserves were identified. This work included a lot of walking, sitting, listening and observing nature. And the big insight emerged that the world would look different if 5 minutes of stillness in nature was a habit as well established as brushing your teeth.

The guide book you now are reading is one part of the Guide to Silence project that aim to ”sell” the habit of stillness in nature.

*Ulf Bohman, August 2020*



Note: We use two different symbols, the blue square one in nature (which corresponds to the Swedish Environmental Protection Agency’s signs posts used in nature reserves and national-parks) and the round green in printed material.





# 1. Silence in the outward sense and stillness in the inner sense



*"We all have within us a center of stillness surrounded by silence. This house, dedicated to work and debate in the service of peace, should have one room dedicated to silence in the outward sense and stillness in the inner sense"*  
*-Dag Hammarskjöld*

UN Secretary General Dag Hammarskjöld, wrote this in 1957 as an introduction to the visitors of the re-opened meditation room in the UN building in New York. Hammarskjöld was also a nature lover and outdoorsman. Commenting on the increased use of airplanes to reach the wilderness of the Swedish mountains, he in 1947 wrote. "Why deprive us the yield of the long trek into the wilderness, when stillness grows around us, catches us, clears us, recreates us." Hammarskjölds' words initiates and sets the tone for this Guide to Silence.

What if we expanded his words:

*"Every individual should have access to a place in nature that is dedicated to silence in the external sense and stillness in the inner sense."*

*"Every neighbourhood in small and large cities should identify, protect and make accessible places in nature that are dedicated to silence in the outer sense and stillness in the inner sense."*

Perhaps the world would look different if everyone had the opportunity to have a moment of stillness in nature every day.

It has now been more than 60 years since Dag Hammarskjöld reopened the meditation room at the UN and the world has in many ways become even more noisy and people in general have become more distanced from nature. The need for silence, stillness and nature is perhaps greater than ever.

This is first and foremost a guidebook showing the way to the center of stillness surrounded by silence we all have within us. But it's also an external guide that aims to inspire you to find your own places in nature. Places that offer tranquility and levels of silence. Places you can visit often, in parks, green areas or nature reserves close to your everyday life. Places that can make it easier to get in touch with your center of inner stillness surrounded by silence.



Facts, information, and step by step instructions - a guidebook often contains lots of this. But this is not the purpose of this Guide to Silence, instead questions will be asked and examples given that you as readers can link to your own experiences. This guide is also based on the fantastic human ability to observe. We can watch and observe our culture, our environment and how we ourselves think and act.



*"Everything is OK, there is nothing to worry about, everything has its time, everything has its place, everything is as it should be. The feeling came over me as I stood there and admired the view. I was completely at peace and, in that moment, felt like I had full contact with my inner core of stillness."*

Yes, I found myself in an incredibly beautiful place, away from my everyday life, away from all the normal commitments. But there was really no



external cause for this feeling of tranquility, of being completely at peace. The problems in my life situation were still there. I hadn't won the lottery or been promoted.

The ability to observe and be aware is extremely valuable when combined with inner stillness and openness while at the same time avoiding the urge to evaluate, judge and analyse. There is ample scientific evidence that nature and daily doses of silence are good for our health and well-being. But I will not highlight this. Instead, the aim is that every page, image and text will convey a feeling of stillness. Stillness that enable us to be at ease and fully present. Silence that favours creativity, solutions, compassion and understanding. Perhaps one could say that this guide tries to awaken the inner wisdom that we all possess.

This is a book you can read slowly, one paragraph or one chapter at a time with stops for silence, stillness and breaks from thinking. You can also start in whatever end of the book you want and jump around and find the chapters that first appeal to you. The chapters complement each other and highlight silence, tranquility and nature from different angles.

Nature perceived outdoors with all our senses, can never be replaced by an image. But images still have a strong influence on us and add an extra dimension to the text in this book. You will not find perfect images of extreme natural environments, instead you will find pictures of the very ordinary fantastic nature that can be found nearby. If the images feels exotic or everyday to you depends on where in the world you are and the experiences of nature you have. Do not analyse, evaluate and identify these images, let them convey their message without comments.

*It was one of those mornings. My 8-year-old daughter was angry. She was angry that her pants did not fit. She was angry that her shoes were too tight. That her backpack was too heavy. Everything was wrong. She complained, cried and protested. We finally managed to get out the door but her anger continued into the street. Living in a suburb of Stockholm, we have the advantage of being able to walk or bike to school. On this morning, the temperature was around freezing and it looked a bit slippery, so we decided to walk. When we walk to school, we often take a shortcut through a very small forest which is essentially a green wedge between two residential areas with a winding steep path. As we reached the forest, my daughter, who*

*was just seconds away from tears, grew silent. Completely silent. The forest, it seemed, had finally quieted her. There were a few birds in the forest, and with the new quiet, we could hear them clearly. By the time we passed through the forest, which only takes a few minutes, my daughter's anger was gone. And the rest of the walk to school was pleasant.*

How and why can a very small insignificant forest, a green wedge between two neighbourhoods, have such a dramatic effect? Yes I know, it does not work every time, sometimes the anger and frustration goes so deep that it can not be cured by a short walk in the woods. But I myself also find a walk through this small forest soothing. Is it the diversity of trees and the winding path that has this effect? Is it the sound of the wind in the trees? Imagine if everyone had the opportunity to go through a small forest in the morning or stop under a tree? Such a “forest bath” would perhaps support calmer and more pleasant workplaces and school environments.



This guidebook aims to show the way to and increase the value of quiet and to inspire and establish the habit of just being in nature. The habit of just being in nature and listening which allows us to find inner stillness. But the Guide to the Silence Project also has the ambition to give everyone access to calm nature wherever you live. Today, there are many successful examples where cities expand and develop parks, plant trees and limit traffic. If more and more people realise the value of the daily visits to quiet nature, the Guide to Silence project may be a part of helping to push cities around the world become greener, quieter and more adapted to life in all forms.



## 2. Silence



*Stepping out of the subway station, putting the noise from the trains and the cars behind me and walking into the small nature reserve. At the same time as the city's noise is fading I start to listen more attentively. When the silence takes over, I hear the sound of the wind in the trees and birds farther away. The silence around me slowly nurtures stillness inside.*

What do you hear right now? Is there silence around you? Are there pauses between the sounds? Or do you have a continuous noise in the background? Listen to your own breath; if your surroundings are quiet, you can hear it. Listen as you inhale .....pause ..... and exhale.

In the midst of a noisy urban environment our ears become dulled and partially switched off, there is too much noise, we can't process everything. When you walk from a noisy city street into the woods or into a park and the surrounding noise levels drop, your ears wake up and you listen. This awakening happens without you being aware of it. All you need is a measure of silence. Nature is never totally silent, but the sounds of nature are usually insignificant and to hear them you have to be quiet and fully present.

We can all agree that noise can be uncomfortable and create stress. All of us also have a very clear need for silence at least once every day, that is when we want to sleep. Noise during the night might disrupt our sleep considerably. Also when we find ourselves in the middle of the city and walk from a noisy street around the corner into a small park, the experience is pleasant, it's nice to get away from the noise. However, with our stressed high speed

lifestyle comes a strange adversity towards silence. We do not always experience silence in our surroundings as something positive. Silence seems to be troublesome and disturbing for many people. When we get home, shut the door and it is completely silent, we counteract the silence by turning on the radio, the TV, computer or tablet. When we step into a car, we directly turn on the radio. Do we link silence to loneliness? Perhaps it's our constant need of information or entertainment that makes us avoid the silence? Or is it just because silence is perceived as boring? The sounds (music, dialogue, information) we turn on to counteract the silence, don't get much of our attention, it often just becomes a screen of noise in the background.

Yet, we all deeply need silence and not only to sleep well. A measure of silence and tranquility enables us to be more attentive, present and focused. We also need peace and quiet to recover, to find solutions and balance in our life. A level of outer silence helps us get in touch with our center of stillness surrounded by silence.

Silence indoors at home is not the same as silence in nature. At home, it can be very quiet if your home is well insulated. But houses and apartments are seldom completely silent. We often have a



continuous mechanical buzzing from refrigerators, freezers or fans in the background.

In nature the wind, the birds, the crickets, the leaves create a varying soundscape, a unique symphony. Sometimes the small sounds of nature are so insignificant that we can only hear them with difficulty. But on a stormy day, nature roars at us. Total silence is rare in nature. There is often something calming and comforting in the sounds of nature.

Silence linked to communication between people can be perceived as positive or negative. To be quiet and really listen to someone is extremely positive. A good listener needs to be quiet, present and able to silence the mental commentary that often constantly plays in our heads. But to remain silent and not answer, to not respond or not acknowledge another human being is very negative.



*It was a sunny morning with high clear autumn skies in the small mountain village. I was the guide for a leadership training program. The group consisted of young women from a large company and most of them had not previously met. Some of them had previous experiences from hiking in the mountains, for others it was the first time. There was anticipation and some nervousness in the air. On the first day's hike they were divided into small groups and got no other instructions than to get to a certain point on the map. My task as a leader was to observe the group. They discussed which way to go and had a clear plan before heading out, the energy was high and the group was very talkative at the start of the hike. They shared experiences and got to know each other. We all do this when we meet new people, it's interesting to learn about other people's*



*lives. But we will miss some of the experiences of nature, we are not fully attentive when we walk and talk. They did go the wrong way, had to take a long detour and at the end of the day everyone was getting tired and fell silent. The second day it was snowing lightly and during the first half of the walk, they were instructed to walk in total silence. The silence, the slowly falling snow and the hike from the deep forest up onto open mountain meadows with views of the water and the mountains, was a very special experience. Afterward, they commented on how pleasant it was to just move in silence as a group, not having to figure out something to say. The feeling of presence was enhanced.*

To be a part of a group that walks in silence, a silence all have chosen and accepted and at the same time communicate / collaborate without talking is a different and unusual experience. The sense of connection, belonging and cooperation can be very strong during such silent walks. But even in a small group or just when we are two, the silence usually grows if you spend some time in nature.



**Listen.** When we walk into a park or a forest and listen, we awaken our numb ears. If we listen to nature's sounds, a strong sense of presence might embrace us. Wind, rattling leaves, birds or raindrops, sounds not created by humans. Listening to nature is a way to, just for a moment, step out of our virtual world of thoughts. As we listen, we also become more aware of the silence or lack of silence in our everyday lives. If we listen, we can hopefully realise that silence is needed to balance our, in many ways very, loud existence.



### 3. To be, just be, in nature



*Sitting by the water, the wind in my face is cool and fresh. Looking out over the blue surface listening to the rustle of leaves. I'm not going anywhere; I have plenty of time to just sit for a while. A pleasant calm feeling grows inside me.*

Being in nature, in silence, listening, feeling, watching. It must be one of the most original ancient activities we humans have. We can assume that our hunter-gatherer ancestors, wherever in the world they lived, had many opportunities for stillness in their everyday lives. There must have been time to spare after the necessary activities to provide food, water and shelter wrapped up. There must have been a large degree of silence in a world limited to nature in the immediate surroundings. A world without loads of information and entertainment, without roads and lights. The ability to be fully present with all senses and to observe. Our ancestors probably had that in abundance.

When you sit on a bench in a park and listen to the birds or go up on a little hill and look out over the water, you are performing one of the most original, ancient human activities. Being in stillness in nature.

We know that this being in stillness in nature, that our hunter-gatherer ancestors practiced in abundance, has also been an important part of the lifestyle of indigenous peoples around the world. In many cases, this reverence for nature and stillness is a part of indigenous cultures today. Native Americans, Same people, Eskimos and Australian

Aborigines have a strong connections to nature and a sense of stillness in relationship to the world. With the construction of the modern world we know today, we have come further and further away from nature. We have built a culture that largely involves exploiting nature for our own purpose, to strengthen our ego, consume and chase happiness elsewhere and in the future. We have lost touch with nature, the present and our inner core of stillness.

Rebuilding this connection, however, may be closer at hand and easier than we think.

*I met a fisherman who was standing by a lake in a beautiful and quiet natural area in Stockholm. The surface of the lake was glassy but the sun couldn't break through the haze. He told us that his goal was to catch fish for his cat. Asked if it was meditative standing there with his spinning rod in this calm and peaceful place, he directly answered no. No, he was certainly not practicing meditation, nothing fuzzy like that. But to stand there by the lake throwing with his spinning rod, alone in the stillness and silence, did look very pleasant and relaxing. It was the word meditation that he reacted to and he was in a sense right. It was not meditation in the formal sense he was practising but something even*

*more basic and simple - a moment of stillness and silence in nature.*



We live in a culture where it is important to have goals and objectives and to be active and achieve things. The berry picker, fisherman, birdwatcher and runner take off into nature with a clear purpose and goal, at least they think so. But maybe it's really an inherent deep need of stillness and nature that compels them to go out in nature. To catch fish, pick berries or increase their fitness could simply be a pretext to get a dose of stillness and nature.

Do we all have an inherent attraction to nature, a deep-rooted love of trees, grass, flowers, sea and wind? Undoubtedly we enjoy plants at home, at work and in schools. School playgrounds that offer



greenery have many positive effects. We know that green natural environments in hospitals are positive, even if it is just to provide a nice view. Large parks in cities such as Central Park in New York are extremely appreciated by residents. Cities with trees, water and greenery are perceived as positive, pleasant. Something inside us, maybe inherited from our ancestors' close relation to nature, makes us feel connected. But why then all these giant cities? Why do people move into crowded noisy cities all over the world? These big cities that have grown so fast and become so crowded that all kinds of nature have been squeezed. Of course, it is about survival, it is in the cities that work exists. But we are also social beings, herd animals. Most people want to live where other people live. The problem is that cities have been built with efficiency, productivity and profitability as guiding principles. This has led to either densely packed cities where all surfaces are utilized or scattered cities built around the car and where asphalt dominates. Although there are positive examples where urban architects and urban planners already in the 19th century had human well-being and the connection to nature included in planning. Cities with many and large parks or with trees along the streets. There is also a positive development right now. Some cities are becoming greener by creating more parks,

planting more trees and creating areas for gardening in the city. In addition, there is a trend to make parts of the cities car-free. It may become easier in the future to find tranquil nature even if we live in big cities.



**Just be in nature.** A few moments on a bench in the park, on a log in the forest or at the beach. Be a still observer, use all your senses and observe without analysing, assessing or trying to explain. Go out into nature with the aim to be. Be fully present under the tree, in the park, in the forest or by the sea. We seem to have a deep need for this original, ancient human activity. A regular dose of nature, stillness and silence, 5, 10 or 15 minutes every day. We need this contact with nature now more than ever.

## 4. A break from thinking



*Standing in a small forest glade, listening, taking some deep breaths and looking up into the canopy. After a while I move out of my world of thoughts and into this real forest. I stand there for five, maybe ten minutes. Surrounded by the forest. A measure of stillness grows inside.*

That day I had taken a short lunch walk. I needed a breath of fresh air, or rather a pause from all my thinking and doing. The morning had been filled with lots of planning and activities, it was intense and too many different things going on. That moment of stillness among the trees gave fresh air, fresh perspective, and a break from all the thinking. To think, plan and analyse are amazing human abilities, but we are poor at managing them. Much of our daily thought activity is repetitions, concerns and opinions. We ponder over what we should have done differently and what we must do. We worry about this, that and some other things. We throw ourselves frequently from one thought to another, our focus is easily broken. We often step into this flood of thoughts as soon as we wake up and do not step out until we fall asleep. In many ways we live our lives more in our own thoughts than in reality, more in the virtual past or future than in the real present moment.

Our smartphones have made it even easier to be lost in thought, we lose ourselves in the virtual screen world. Next time you are in a busy city, observe people on the streets, on buses and in cars, many are glued to their smart phones. Through the screen we get news and information which gives us things to think and worry about. We are alerted

about messages directly and somehow it seems like we must immediately react to everything. When we are engulfed in thoughts, our surroundings and nature becomes a diffuse scenery we pass. The need for breaks, the need to relax from and let go of thinking, if only for a moment, is greater than ever.



*It was a nice fall day and we had just finished a silent walk through one of Stockholm's nature reserves. On these walks we remain silent for much of the walk, we walk slowly and focus on the different sounds around us. After the walk, a woman came up to me and told me that she thought it was fantastic. She said that she often, almost every day, walked in this area. But she always walked with her head full of her own thoughts and ruminations.*

As we walked in silence, and the group was instructed to really listen, she experienced something totally different. The initial focus was the sound of their own steps on the path and we then moved onto the sounds nearby, the wind in the trees, the birds and finally to the faraway sounds, the sound horizon. This intense focus on sounds around us in the moment had made this woman "move out" from her head full of worries and move into nature and the present. She had experienced this for her so well known walk, in a whole new way. It was amazing she said. She was truly moved by the experience.

How do you quiet your mind? How do you get that much needed pause from the constant stream of thoughts? It's hard, not to say impossible, to just point blank stop thinking and leave all the worries and thoughts of have-to-dos and shouldn't-have-done's behind. It is especially hard to get a break from your own mind chatter if you have a lot going on and live a busy life. But one way to go might be to focus the mind on something else outside your ego self, for example the sounds of nature or nature in general. This is what the lady on the silent walk experienced. Another way to go is meditation. Anyone who has tried to meditate has likely discovered that when we sit and focus on our



breath, thoughts often keep passing by in a steady stream. We can't turn them off, but we can watch our thoughts, accept and let them pass. To go out in nature, walk slowly and just be in stillness, can be compared to meditation. To meditate is a form of training of the mind and we are encouraged to practice daily. The same recommendation applies to stillness in nature - try to get a little dose every day.



**A break from thinking.** For some this may seem absurd. A break from thinking? Thoughts shape who I am. I think to solve problems; I think to plan and manage my everyday life. Inside the river of thoughts we often are stuck in, it may seem that thoughts are everything. To take a break from thinking can be seen as to cease to exist. Yet, it is only when we take a step back, when we get a moment of stillness, that we can look at ourselves and our thoughts, our pondering. Perhaps this ability to be an observer of our surroundings, our own actions and our own thinking is the most amazing of all our human abilities. When this observation originates from an inner stillness, without judging and analysing, it becomes a real “break from thinking”.



## 5. Slowly



*I gently move forward on the trail walking slowly and focusing on how each foot hits the ground. At first it feels strange but after a while I start accepting and enjoying the slow pace. I stay with my slow walking pace and eventually my intense focus on the steps lifts. I look around and a strong sense of presence fill me. I am with all senses on the path; I am fully alive.*

We are used to walking at a certain pace. We have also been taught that it is good to walk briskly if you want to increase your heart rate, burn more energy and increase your fitness. Our goal when we go for a walk often seems to be to arrive at the final destination as quickly as possible. But if we go out with the simple purpose **to be in nature and experience with all senses**, we need to slow down. When we walk slowly our focus and attention moves from the goal, the distant end of the walk, to the present moment, the here and now.

Fastest wins. We live in a fast culture. Many of the sports we compete in are all about speed. In our work life the use of time and how much we can get done are common measures of efficiency. We move quickly between activities and stare at our smartphones when we are in transit or waiting. A slow internet connection, slow computer or slow service at a restaurant are sources of frustration. It's almost as if we are expecting life to move at lightning speed.

"Why deprive us the yield of the long trek into the wilderness, when stillness grows around us, catches us, clears us, recreates us." I return to the words Dag Hammarskjöld wrote in 1947 commenting on

the increased use of airplanes to quickly reach the wilderness.

Perhaps we should ask ourselves: Why do we deprive ourselves of everything beautiful, interesting, different we pass on the way when we try to reach the goal as quickly as possible? Can't we, at least from time to time, walk slowly and really look, listen and with all senses experience the reality that is life? Maybe even take that little detour through the park? The paths we walk in everyday life and especially the routes we walk to work, activities, shops, schools, etc. tend to be automated. We have taken our everyday route many times before, we know the way in detail and we have, as we say, seen what there is to see. We tend to react if big things change - roadworks, a roadblock or extreme weather. But otherwise we are minimally aware of our surroundings when we walk fast with our mind already fixed on the next activity. If, on that route we go every day, we would, for once, walk slowly and maybe even take that short detour, the experience would be completely different. We might see things we've never seen before, a building, a tree, the sun over the hill, the children playing. We might also realise that the detour through the park is not much longer and that the



greenery under the trees gives us a dose of silence and stillness.

If we choose, from time to time, to walk slow, really slow, we might have experiences beyond the ordinary. But walking slowly can be difficult and feel strange. On quiet walks in groups, where we focus on listening and experiencing the nature around us, we also walk slowly. There is always a measure of discomfort and impatience in the group when we start the slow walk. It is unusual and strange to walk much slower than your normal pace. After the first half hour, however, most people usually get into and accept the slow pace. When the hike is completed, the participants often comment that they found the slow pace pleasant. Walking

slowly can increase the experience of nature and the feeling of inner stillness.

Sometimes the quick walk, bike ride or run may be needed. Raising the heart rate and getting a little physically tired can in some cases also lead to inner stillness. Knowing there are different paths to take and different paces to get there is also important.

*It was one of those days with loads on the to do list, plenty to think about, much to plan and discuss. The head felt packed when I decided to go for a run on my lunch break. I ran out with my head completely filled with everything I had to do and should do. I ran fast and after 20 minutes I stopped at a peaceful location overlooking the water. A few deep breaths, a few minutes of silence and a large measure of calm appeared. On the way back I ran slowly and saw how beautiful it was.*

Most people have experienced days when there is too much to do and think about. There is a measure of stress hanging over the entire day. Then a fast walk, run or bike ride may be needed to “vent the stress out”. Maybe we walk fast the first bit, stop and walk back slowly. Or after a really sweaty run,

a few minutes of silence under the trees provides a strong sense of calm and inner stillness. There is not just one way. Sometimes we need the slow walk. Sometimes we have to go fast or run to find stillness inside.

In our fast-paced world, however, I believe more slowness is needed. It is therefore the slow walk and the calm pace that I would like to highlight in particular.



**Walk slowly.** It sounds so simple but most people who try to walk really slow will at first think it feels strange, troublesome and maybe even a little ridiculous. Walking slowly is not normal. But slow, conscious steps and a slow pace can make us experience and see so much more on a walk in nature or even in the city. The goal of always getting there as quickly as possible can sometimes be replaced with the goal of being present and experiencing.





## 6. Simplicity



*I stop on the small gravel road not far from the lake. The forest is surrounding me. It is dark, the lights from the city are visible in the distance and the sounds of traffic are also there, but far away. It's quiet, only a few birds and the clatter of horse hooves are heard. I'm at the halfway turning point for my evening run. This is the moment when I stand completely still, feel my heart rate settle down, listen and take a few deep breaths. I feel peaceful.*

Can it be that simple? Try it. Just get out in nature and be for a while. Stop, be quiet, feel and listen to nature for a moment. Perhaps it can be that simple, perhaps not. A daily dose of nature will not solve all of our problems, it won't make all of us healthy and happy. Silent nature is not a universal cure for everything. But a dose of peaceful nature might provide a new perspective, help us find solutions, make us slightly wiser and improve our ability to see, really see, this amazing life and all its forms. We live in a complex and complicated world. We have lots of different daily activities, lots of things we need to keep track of, lots of planning we need to do. We are all bombarded by news, communication and information through a variety of media channels. We live in a world full of human drama that sometimes we just observe and sometimes we are part of. We analyze everything, try to understand, to find explanations and have opinions. All this is part of our life situation in our fast-paced, technological world. It's not strange that we can feel a strong need for a simpler, less complicated life. We need breaks from the intense world we live in. We need to go out and observe nature without analysing, without trying to understand, to just observe. We need to appreciate that we are part of a world where most things happen, not because we humans have planned,



designed and built it. We need to allow ourselves to be fascinated by a leaf, an ant or a tree root, things created without the help of human hands and brains. These things in nature are what they are, are where they are, as a part of a large connected system. Nature is absolutely breathtaking.

We live in the midst of a natural system that is in balance in a fantastic way and we are completely dependent on nature. Unfortunately, we have lost touch with nature. We humans are today the biggest threat to our planet and the natural world. Some say that we need to learn more, gain more knowledge about how nature works to be able to save it and certainly that can be part of the solution. But maybe our even bigger need is to step out of our analytical minds and regain our lost connection to nature. The solution may be simple and accessible now. Go out

and get a daily dose of stillness in nature. Establish the habit of just being in nature, observing without analysing. Let yourself be fascinated by the simple, small, stunning inhabitants of our natural world.



*It was a very quiet morning, the lake was like a mirror in front of me where I stood and brushed my teeth. I rinsed out my mouth in the icy water; it was freezing cold even though it was the middle of summer and the air was warm. I sat as hut warden in one of the smallest tourist cabins in the Swedish mountains. The place was amazingly beautiful and on the other side of the glassy lake high snow-capped mountains rose in the distance. Life was simple. My only job was to keep the small cabin clean, greet visitors and keep statistics of the hikers that came by. But this summer, the visitors where*

*few and I was mostly alone. I spent my time going for short day hikes, fishing in front of the hut, reading books and observing nature. After a few weeks I realised that I would soon finish reading all my books. A worry grew inside me. What would I do when I finished all my books? I had very little to do. The rest of the summer my mood alternated between loneliness, the creeping unease when you don't have anything to do and total peace when I just accepted the situation and enjoyed being at this amazing place.*

To simplify life, work less have fewer scheduled activities and enjoy just being. Certainly there are many who want to simplify life, but it can be a challenge, our modern culture encourages busyness. We are expected to be busy and to fill moments of inactivity with entertainment and information. If we have extra time on our hands, or nothing to do a creeping worry, impatience and unease can grow inside us.



**Simplify.** Being able to enjoy, appreciate and observe the simple, small things in life. The aroma of our cup of tea or coffee, the sweetness of a fruit or the sound of the wind playing in the trees. Try to prioritize being a little less busy, and to plan for being in nature and finding moments of silence. To be still and be silent should be very simple, but we need practice, we need to train ourselves in the art of being still and doing nothing. Training in being, observing in silence can be considered just as important as training our physical fitness and strength.

## 7. The drama



*It's like walking through a tunnel, the wide path is straight and the tree cover dense.*

*Glimpses of the the water can be seen through the trees. The city noise is effectively dampened by the dense foliage, and instead the sound of the birds and the wind dominates. It is always pleasant to walk here. I meet a lot of people on this trail, it is a popular stretch, especially on the weekends. When I meet or pass by couples, or they pass me, I hear short sections of their conversation - "then he said", "she must understand," my boss is hard to .. "*

To communicate, to discuss, to vent opinions and talk to someone who really listens. We need this, it's important, but some of the couples I overheard on the path may not have noticed much of the beauty of the nature they passed. Instead they took the everyday drama of life into the forest, right there and then they were immersed in the story. One thing doesn't exclude the other, maybe the couples exchanged stories on the way out and then walked in silence, observed and had a fantastic experience of nature on the way back. However, we are often stuck in our own drama, with the story of our life and current situation going around in our head all day. We review what has happened and try to predict and plan for the future.

Our life story is associated with a lot of emotions. The woman on the path who shares the story about her boss's behaviour looked angry. The man who talks about his mother looks sad. Our life drama is emotionally charged. The news media also provides us with a constant replenishment of dramas and stories. In most cases we have no role and little influence on these.. A common way to take a break from our own drama is to watch a movie, read a book or listen to the radio. We then enter an alternative drama that can generate just as much or



even more emotion. Who hasn't cried during a movie?

When we try to explain what happens in nature, we often put the animals and plant life into a drama. This in particular applies to movies, books and magazines about nature for children. We give the animals names and human characteristics and discuss what happens from the standpoint of our own feelings and ideas. The drama is used as a way to explain. It's like we have to create a story in order to understand, but then nature mostly becomes a backdrop to this drama. Instead we can go out and listen, see and experience nature without explaining, analysing, commenting or creating stories. If we can observe what is and just be, the world will be so much more vivid and real, so much more than a drama in our head.

I had chaos in my head. I was full of uncertainty about the future. A new job, a family move, how would this affect the kids, finances? The questions were many and the options turned, twisted and discussed. The thought process alternated between hope and despair. I took a break and walked into the small forest nearby. I sat down in a clearing and listened. It was early spring, the sun was shining and the bird life was intense. The forest was full of

life. For a while I was present. That's when it hit me, the only thing I have and can be certain of is this present moment, this now. The feeling of presence right there in the amazing spring forest, didn't give me the solution to all my problems , but it gave me a peace of mind, an inner stillness that felt like an injection of energy and joy of being alive.



Moments of stillness in nature can give us distance from our own life drama. If we go out, observe and take a break from thinking, we might find the inner stillness needed for new answers and solutions to emerge. One of the main reasons we typically go out for a walk, run in the woods, take a bike ride or

sit in the park might be that we seek nature and stillness in order to gain perspective on our own life dramas. But isn't this just a way to escape our problems? No, too often think we have to think and discuss our way out of our problems. We trust that the solution lies in getting more information, to work more and harder. But it's often when we let problems be, when we give it time, when we sleep on them, that new solutions emerge. Go out in nature, be quiet and listen for a while. It might not only be the birds and the wind in the trees you hear, the answer to the questions of your life drama might come to you as a whisper.



**Out of the daily drama.** The injection of new energy and joy I get when I am being fully present with all senses in nature, gives me new opportunities to cope with my everyday life drama. The realisation that the only thing I have is the present moment might also follow me when I pick up the kids at school, go shopping or sit with my challenges at work. To go out in the woods will not automatically solve all our problems. Nature and stillness are not a magic formula, but they can change a lot, and not least, make life more vivid, colourful and real.

## 8. Feel



*The wind, the cool breeze on my face, is the first thing that greets me when I walk out onto the beach early in the morning. The smell of the sea comes next, and of course the sound of the waves. I take my shoes off and walk barefoot in the cool sand. There is something special about walking barefoot on a sandy beach, it's as if your feet wake up. The wind, the smell, the sound, the morning light and bare feet on the sand on a relaxed summer day. I am present with all my senses.*

When we walk out the door, it is often the hot or cold or cool wind against our skin we first notice. The wind on the skin makes us decide whether it's hot or cold if it blows a lot or a little. On a weekday morning, it is often only briefly we pay attention to this feeling of the wind, then we rush on towards the goals of the day. We have many senses that we only occasionally are aware of and that we only utilise a fraction of, as we rush around in our virtual world of thoughts.

*We were traversing up the mountain slope and passed one small creek after another. I was with a Sami girl in her teens who was going to help me get in touch with the outside world for the first time in several weeks. I spent that summer as hut warden in a stunningly beautiful place, a place that was completely isolated from the outside world. To communicate you needed a special mobile phone and a high enough vantage point. The father of the Sami girl had been extremely friendly and kindly offered that I could use their phone. He asked his daughter to follow me up the mountain to help me call my family. So we went hiking up the mountain slope, I was in a hurry to get up high enough and make the call. But the Sami girl stopped at every creek we passed and tasted the water, and*

*commented how the water in different streams tasted different. She was like a wine connoisseur. I thought at the time that it just sounded strange, wasn't it just water? I wanted her to hurry up. We eventually got to the top of the hill but were not able to get a connection to the outside world that day.*

My remaining memory of the day was how she, the Sami girl, tasted the water in the streams. And she was right, water from small streams can vary in taste, depending on whether the water comes directly from a glacier, has flowed through wetlands, over stone slabs or flower meadows. But the nuances in the taste of water are of course, small, very small. It takes great presence, great focus and alertness to be able taste the difference.



If you have seen children roaming around in a forest, you have probably noticed how they test everything - the depth of the puddle, how the bark of the tree feels and how the moss smells. We don't need to instruct or encourage young children to use all their senses in nature, it comes natural. We adults in contrast have our senses more or less dormant, it's only our thinking process that constantly seems to be on. But as we move away from the noise and further into a forest or park our hearing tend to wake up. We slowly start to be aware of the birds and the wind in the trees. We may also become more and more aware of how the wind feels after a moment in nature. The feeling of the wind becomes particularly pronounced on our bare skin.

In some cases, nature's aromas also catches our attention, for example in a damp forest, by the sea or on a flowery meadow in spring. Nature's scents can be so intense that we can't escape them. A walk out into nature can awaken one sense after another, assuming we are able to lower the volume of the thought chatter in our head. But even when we do manage to awaken several senses after spending some time in the forest, park or by the sea, it's one sense we often forget and that is our sense of touch. It may seem a bit awkward and strange to touch the bark of the tree or decayed leaves or a stone. For



small children it seems to be the opposite, reaching out to touch everything with their fingers and hands is the first thing they do when they walk into the woods. Next time you sit for a while in silence in nature, use your hands and touch what is nearby - leaves, bark, stones. Engage as many senses as you can, it may help you to be more present and experience nature in a different way.

*The spruce forest is dense, the shady slope steep and the ground covered with deep green moss. I sit and listen. It is quiet and the wind is softly blowing through the trees above me. The city is not far away and, if I listen carefully, I can hear a muffled noise from the highway in the distance, but then the sound of the wind in the trees returns and takes over the sound scape. It is the moist scent of the forest, however; that is the most obvious characteristic of this place. This shady moss covered north facing slope has a very special scent.*

There are places in nature where the view dominates our impressions. There are places where the forest is dense and a sense of primeval forest strong, there are hot, dry locations and cold damp places. The visual impression of a place in nature is the most common basis for how we describe it, an obvious example of this is locations with stunning

views. But it is not always the visuals that dominate. In some cases, other senses are more involved and provide the strongest impressions from a site. If we, even just for a moment, step out of our minds, walk out into nature and awaken all our senses, the effect can be stunning. There is so much to experience, there is so much to see, hear, feel, smell that we often miss. A slow walk and a moment of silence in nature can make us feel so much more alive.



**Awaken your senses.** When you have a moment of stillness in nature, engage all your senses. Look around, near and far away. Listen to all the sounds of nature, stretch your ears and listen to the small sounds on the horizon. Take in the scents of nature around you, flowers in the summer, moist soil in the fall and the cold smell of winter. Gently touch the bark of the tree, the leaves or the grass. Maybe even dare to taste a leaf.

## 9. Now



*Cold, the first snow amplifies the weak daylight. It is almost completely calm and quiet, as quiet as nature ever can be. Nature is frozen in a quiet moment. The cold normally makes us want to keep moving or quickly get back inside, but I'm dressed for the weather and can stand still, feel the icy cold on my face and listen to the silence.*



Now. Your now, right now as you read this. My now, right now as I write this. Take a deep breath, look, listen, feel, smell. Be still and engage all your senses, be fully here and now. Observe without analysing, let your senses get their impressions of what is right now uncommented.

Certainly one ought to be more ‘here and now’ and ‘smell the roses’. Yes we all should ‘seize the day’ and ‘live in the present’. We have all heard these catch phrases. Most of us may have the ambition to be more here and now, but we are still most of the time stuck in our stream of thoughts with our focus in the past or in the future.

*I was going fast, really fast, scary fast. I was pumping the brakes and the concentration in each turn was total. I was speeding down winding roads in the Austrian Alps on my bike. It was a gorgeous summer day but in that moment, down these steep*

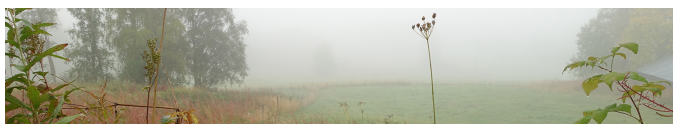
*winding roads, there was no time to admire the stunning scenery. My focus was on the road in front of me and the next curve. It was a bit scary but at the same time hugely satisfying and joyful. The sense of presence was overwhelming.*

Sometimes we are forced into complete presence - we are pushed into the here and now. On a bike at high speed down the winding roads in the Alps. On skis going down steep mountain slopes. Walking down a winding path that requires a total focus on each step. This total presence linked to activities that require focus and sometimes include a certain amount of manageable fear is called "flow". This flow can be linked to demanding sports where we are pushed to our limits and where the focus is total. Artists, writers and performers also describe flow experiences when they are at their most creative. But flow can also be found in our very ordinary everyday life. When we are fully absorbed in a challenging and inspiring task we can experience flow. Perhaps it is a good book that draws us in or a quiet run in the forest that just flows. When we experience flow we are not always fully in the present moment. We might be so concentrated on the book or the task at hand that we completely miss the bird that sits on the windowsill or the beautiful sun set. Flow is a concentrated form of presence

coupled to an activity. Flow is positive - we perform, are focused and there is a strong sense of delight and joy. But flow are moments when we are more or less forced into the here and now, when we are directed to a presence that is more or less distinct. Flow can be said to be a focus on the here and now, but with tunnel vision. If it is only in this active flow experience we are fully present, then there is a risk that we will constantly chase after this feeling. There are many examples of artists and athletes who have amazing flow experiences, but who have a difficulty managing calm, quiet and just being. It is not uncommon for athletes to become depressed when they are injured and for artists to struggle to cope with the emptiness, silence and inactivity between the creative experiences of flow and the high intensity when they perform or practice. The ability to enjoy silence and inactivity, to be in the moment, accept it, and with all your senses experience what is. This ability is needed to create a balance in our world of activities.

To practice doing nothing. It sounds a bit weird, but it is a challenge for many of us to just be in silence and stillness without any entertainment, information or activity. When we sit at home and have nothing to do, nothing going on, we get uneasy, bored and worried. We turn on the TV / computer / iPad, look

at the news or read a book. Whenever we have a few moments of inactivity we can now grab our smartphones and disappear into information, news and entertainment. It is easier than ever to completely avoid moments of stillness and inactivity. But maybe we all need these moments of stillness, silence and just being more than ever.



**Into the now.** Forced into the present moment, slipping into the present or practicing being here and now. There are different paths to get to the here and now. You may have been completely engulfed by what you do and then experienced what is called flow. When you experience flow, you are forced into the present moment and have tunnel vision. That is, you are completely focused on your activity and not fully aware of your surroundings. In other cases, you may slip into the present. It can be the beautiful nature scene or sunset that makes you stop, let your mind go quiet, the stillness to grow inside and your presence here and now become complete. This whole guidebook is also an attempt to show the way to greater presence. Daily moments of stillness in nature is a form of exercise to get into

being here and now. Meditation, some deep breaths or a short break when I see and hear the bird outside the window, are also pathways to a greater presence.



# 10. Wisdom



Walking slowly up the winding path, one step at a time. I have to push, it's strenuous, I'm breathing hard and my heart is pumping. It is demanding but not too tough. I get up the hill. Between the trees in the sparse pine forest I can see a small lake. I stop and sit for a while, winding down, breath slowing and suddenly it just feels like I know, I understand. I have not learned anything on my short walk or while sitting here in the forest. But the stillness and the quiet nature around me is a source of something that might be called wisdom.

A walk in a park, in a forest or along the sea, is a classic way to seek answers and solutions. To, ignore our problems and challenges for a moment, stop thinking and instead go out in nature provides distance, new perspectives and maybe solutions.

It isn't more knowledge, more apps, smarter smartphones or more information we need today. In a world full to the brim with news, entertainment, information and opinions of all kinds and shapes, our biggest need might be for more wisdom. Knowledge is something specific I can acquire and fill my brain with. Wisdom is something completely different.



What characterises the wise? Stillness, inner peace, time and a great ability to listen, observe and be

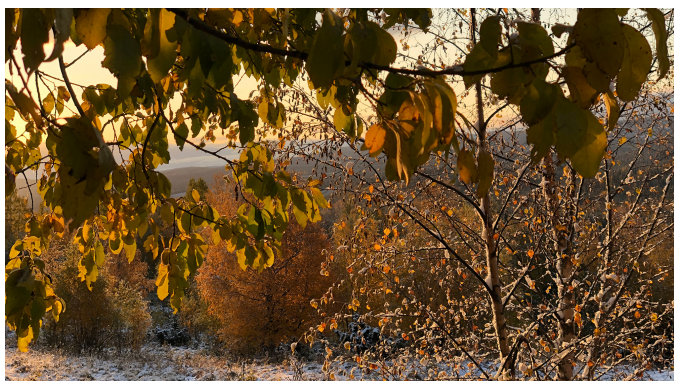
present. What does a wise person look like? Maybe like the monk or nun in their monastery or convent. Maybe like the hermit living in his cave that has left the world behind to live in simplicity? Or perhaps like the wise old woman or man from native cultures around the world, elders that have very high status? Or the grandmother/grandfather who through a long life have become experienced, calm and wise?

But do you have to leave the world behind, live in a monastery or be very old to be wise? Can't wisdom be found in our ordinary everyday life, regardless of age? Here and now, in the middle of the life situation we are in, with all its challenges. Maybe moments of stillness in peaceful nature can provide us with this kind of wisdom.

We have lots of ways to get knowledge and information. We have a school systems that systematically fills our kids with knowledge. But even if knowledge is the main focus of most schools, they do also, to a greater or lesser extent, give our children the opportunities to develop their creativity and physical abilities. Many schools also train children in compassion and the ability to manage and resolve conflicts. But wisdom? Do our schools provide children with wisdom? Small children are in many ways wise by nature, they are

honest, curious and fully present. At the same time as our kids enter the world of formal education their egos also start growing, which is a natural part of a child's brain and body development. But our kids don't have to lose wisdom completely. What if kids had the opportunity to be in silence under a tree, in a park or in whatever patch of nature that could be found in the school's vicinity. What if they had ten minutes to be in stillness in nature, at least once a day as a scheduled activity? Impossible, you might say. What about all those over active children who can neither be still or quiet? Perhaps that is a problem, perhaps not, a dose of nature could have remarkable effects. Perhaps our children would become calmer and wiser. Perhaps they would begin to appreciate stillness and silence in a new way. Maybe our kids, if this daily stillness in nature practice would be a reality, would be better equipped to balance the active, information and entertainment filled life most of them live.

There are plenty of examples of schools around the world that have introduced mindfulness meditation on the schedule with positive results. Meditation and quiet moments in the classroom may be easier to introduce and set aside time for in the schedule, especially for schools in the cities. Hopefully, stillness in nature can be the next step.



A walk in the woods, a moment under a tree in the park or sitting on the beach listening to the waves. Yes these are classic ways to find new viewpoints, solutions and ideas. When we walk out into nature and for a while just listen and observe, we also walk out of our own mind of thinking. We move from the world of thoughts into the world of intense aliveness and we engage our senses. As we do this we relax. We let, if even just for a moment, our everyday problems go. This is when the solution, the new idea, the new viewpoint might pop up. The solution doesn't come from more knowledge or information but from going outside, taking a break and just being. If everyone added the habit to just be in stillness in nature every day, we might all be wiser and the world a more peaceful place.



**Become wise.** To listen - might just be the most important aspect of becoming wiser. Listen to nature, listen to other people, listen to the inner voice we also call our conscience. Mixing up all the information we capture every day with moments of silence in nature might also help turn knowledge into wisdom.

# 11. Fearful or content



*It was late in the evening. We were moving forward in silence. I was one of the guides for a group of managers and this afternoon our plans had suddenly changed. We had been out in the mountains for a few days sleeping in tents. On this day, we were at a high plateau and it had rained almost all day.*

*After the last tasks were completed, all were soaking wet. We had no way to start a fire or to find alternative shelter.*

*A joint decision was taken. Instead of staying in our tents over night, we would walk down to the nearest mountain station, which would take 3-4 hours in the dark. In addition, the group received the instruction to walk and communicate in silence. That is why we ended up walking in silence in the dark. We walked close together. It was as if we all sought proximity, the darkness around us was intrusive. No human light was to be seen anywhere. At first we walked on small winding paths and everyone took it slowly and gently. When we came down to a broader path, we all picked up speed, but the group stayed together tightly. Being a part of a large group, walking in complete silence in the dark, it was a very special experience. The rhythmic sound of tired breathing, boots on the trail and the surrounding darkness. We reached the mountain lodge late.*



To walk into a forest in the dark is, for most people, associated with a certain amount of anxiety and fear. We have been taught that the dark forest or mountains can be dangerous. If we venture into a dark wilderness setting we are told to beware of wild animals. If we visit nature close to the city at night we are told to beware of shady/scary people. Clearly we need to have a measure of respect when we venture into the wilderness in darkness, even though the dangers are often overestimated. But nature can also scare us in broad daylight.

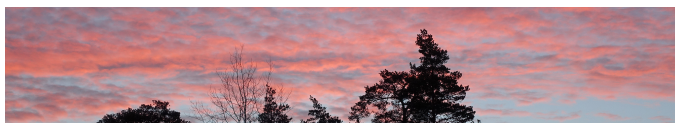
Depending on where in the world we grew up and the experiences we have had, we usually feel safer in the kind of nature we are used to. Some prefer open landscapes others love deep forests. For some, the sea is the most peaceful place, for others it's the mountains. And, of course, for people who have spent their entire life in cities, nature in general might seem scary. To ward off the fear and feel safe in nature is largely about getting used to it. A good starting point, if fear for nature is a problem, is to join an experienced friend, or a group. After a few visits in nature a feeling of safety and trust hopefully grows. Furthermore the benefits of being in nature can be found in the nearest park. Not everyone needs to visit the wildest wilderness far away. The nature we have access to in our everyday lives is in many ways extra valuable.

The opposite to fear and anxiety when we are out in nature is to feel a sense of being content and at peace. The silence and stillness we experience as we walk or sit in nature can be transformed into a deep sense of being at ease, being content, being peaceful. In a world where personal goals and characteristics include things such as: *to never be satisfied, to always be heading towards new goals, to climb on the career ladder, to get better, earn more and win more*, seem to be revered by most, the ability to be content and at peace is overlooked and in short supply. There is nothing wrong with our wants and our need to develop ourselves, improve and reach new goals, but we need a balance. One part in that balance is to be at peace here and now. To be able to fully enjoy what is here right now.



*The sound of small waves against the rocks are calming. I'm sitting on the beach, a spot that I easily can visit everyday as it is just a little detour from my route between home, work and my kids' school. I have allowed myself a short break to just sit and listen to the waves. I have no time pressure, have nothing I need to do right after so I can sit, and let my mind go quiet. My everyday problems and challenges are around the corner, but right there in that moment on the beach, a strong feeling of being content and at ease embraces me .*

Everyone wants to be happy, we strive for happiness, maybe even chase happiness. We are happy when we reach a goal, get a tax refund, get a promotion or receive praise. We often link happiness to external events, but what if it's more important to just be content and at ease? Perhaps the feeling of being content can be described as a low-key sustainable kind of inner happiness. A form of happiness without any particular cause. This feeling of being at ease and content can help fears and concerns to languish and is directly connected to our center of stillness surrounded by silence.



**Content.** How can we cultivate the low-key inner happiness of being content? Maybe it's most about seeing it, appreciating it and taking advantage of it - the occasional moment when everything just feels good for no reason. Just as we need to be attentive to use all our senses, and hear the small sounds of nature, we need to pay attention to see the small insignificant moment when we are content. The ability to be content with this moment, with this life, with the weather and the place where you are is an ability worth cultivating.

## 12. Habits of silence in nature



*I walk down the small path through the woods almost every day. In the steep turn, I take hold of the tree and feel the rough bark. I pass the rock covered in moss and the mix of aspen, birches and pine trees provide shade along the way. The slope buffers the traffic noise and I always hear the birds, in the winter just a few, in spring an entire symphony. It's a very short walk that only takes a minute and represents just a small portion of my daily commute. Yet this tiny daily dose of nature is pleasant and soothing.*

Habits, our lives are filled with them from the moment we wake up until we go to bed. Some habits are mainly practical, we get up, get dressed and have breakfast. Other habits have some kind of small reward built in, from brushing our teeth which leaves us with a fresh feeling in our mouth to the lunch break that provides us with new energy. There are also habits that provide more powerful rewards, that we can become addicted to. This includes everything from coffee, Facebook and Twitter to Internet games and physical training. Some of these addictive habits can be beneficial in moderation but become destructive if they are exaggerated. There is a lot of focus and well-developed science, focused on how to influence habits, including how to get us stuck in a habit of consumption. The most important attributes of establishing new habits seem to be accessibility, simplicity, instant rewards and the feeling of winning or at least the belief/hope that I could win something.

Does the habit of going outside and being in nature follow the same rules as other habits? There is of course a world of difference if we compare being in nature with the habit of playing fast smartphone games that directly reward you with more lives or points. The reward for a moment of silence in

nature is inner stillness and contentment. But this reward is not guaranteed every time. Some days I walk through the forest with my head filled with everything I have-to-do and even if I stop, take a deep breath and observe nature, the feeling of inner stillness is nowhere to be found. Other days a brief visit to the park is enough for me to get a deep feeling contentment.

Creating a habit of spending daily silent moments in nature can be challenging. Finding time for it is one challenge and finding places that are close enough and easy to visit is another big challenge. My experience is that the short glimpses, the brief moments of inner stillness and contentment will help us develop and build a long-term habit. Maybe we slowly establish the habit by choosing to walk through the small park, steer our run further into the forest, or pause by the water a little bit longer. Maybe the habit grows stronger by starting to listen to the city, seeking out the quiet back streets and small hidden parks.

Also, when we start visiting calm places in nature, our need for silence in everyday life might increase. The habit of turning on the radio as soon as you get into your car might disappear. At home, you might increasingly enjoy moments of silence and stillness

without doing anything, just being is enough. We might also, in a new way, be able to observe and appreciate the patches of nature we hopefully see through our windows, even if it is just a single tree. Likewise, the plants we have inside will get more of our attention and a new meaning.

Perhaps the key to establishing the habit of being in nature more often is a combination of taking advantage of whatever patch of nature you have access to in your everyday life and to add a little longer visits when you have time off, for example on weekends. Walk through a park on the way to work, sit under a tree on your lunch break, walk down to the water in the evening. When you have time off, explore your nearby nature and allocate part of your weekend to discover new nature areas. Try to find as much external silence as possible, stay there for a while, listen, smell, feel and experience the place with all your senses.

*The forest is dense, the ground covered with moss and in front of me a wetland with intense birdlife. I had never been there before, the whole area was completely new to me, but I loved this place immediately. The dark forest's transition to an open wetland. The meandering path that took me from the deciduous forest to the dense dark pine forest and to*





*this place. I sat down and listened, it felt like sitting in a room in the middle of the forest. A quiet room, filled with birdsong. The city seemed far away, and the place was very peaceful.*

The community or city we live in is defined by the places and areas we visit often. Home, school, work, shopping centers, shops, sports facilities and parks. If you visit a large city, it is often described by the most well-known sites and areas. City hall, castles, churches, major shopping centers, beautiful bridges, parks and prospects. A strange effect of my efforts to seek quiet places in Stockholm's nature areas, was that I began to see the city in a whole new way. I got to know all the nature reserves, parks and other green spaces available in the city

and my perspective was turned around. The city became defined by all the beautiful green, more or less peaceful areas. This shift of perspective from describing the city as mainly traffic, congestion, noise and concrete to see all the parks, trees, water views, birdsong and the silence gave the city a much friendlier face.



**Establish silent habits.** We need a similar shift of perspective if we want to establish the habit of going out into nature to just be. We need to realise that busyness, plenty to think about, internal and external "noise" needs to be balanced with moments of calm, peace, tranquility and doing nothing. When we change perspective and realise that the blurred nature we previously only rushed by can offer great experiences and a dose of the silence we all need. For most people it is a challenge to find time and a place for daily moments of stillness in nature. But the reward in terms of inner stillness and contentment can be more than enough to create a need for nature and stillness and help us step by step establish the habit.

## 13. Finding Silence



*Sitting on the rocks by the water, staring at the numbers on my noise level meter and noting that on this day it is relatively quiet here. I can hear the main road behind the trees, but it's not intrusive. After a while I put down and ignore my measuring equipment, I sit completely still and take in the whole experience of the site. The calm water, the empty cliff, the view of the forest in the background without the city in sight. When I stop staring at the numbers, when I give up analysing and instead for a moment manage to be fully present in silence, then stillness grows inside.*

A place can be called silent and peaceful, even without being measured by noise levels. In fact we don't really need any measurements at all. Instead we can use our senses. However, we humans inhabiting this high-tech world are bad at utilising all the amazing senses we have. Our thinking, which usually is busy with planning and/or worrying, interferes. Additionally, in a world where we measure, analyse, evaluate and collect more and more data about everything, we often put more trust into numbers than in our own experience.

*I once worked with a nature photographer who was famous for his amazing bear movies. He had spent many hours alone in the wildest of wilderness, waiting for the right picture, the right time. But when we discussed experiences in nature, presence and inner stillness, he told me that he often missed it. Capturing the perfect image and the perfect sound meant so much technical thinking and planning that he could not be fully in the experience. The finished film became a stronger experience of nature for him than his time when filming in reality.*

We can experience something similar ourselves if we go out into nature in search of the perfect, spectacular image or sound to post on social media

or share with friends. It's then easy that the goal of capturing the image or the fantastic bird song makes us miss out on being present and experience nature fully. When we go out into nature without letting phones, cameras or other technology disturb us, we will have a better chance of being fully present and finding silence.

Simplify. Do not compare and analyse when trying to find your own peaceful places, instead trust your senses and turn off your restless mind. It's not important if it's the absolute quietest or most beautiful place you'll find in your area. Also bring a large dose of acceptance when you go out. If your nature area is near a city then you must accept that there may be disturbances. Try to find a place where the disturbances are as low-key and as few as possible and then listen to the silence between the noise. Accept the disturbances and do not let them spoil the experience. If a place will be perceived as peaceful is also influenced by visual impressions. Try to find a place where you see none or as little as possible of the city and human constructions, preferably no houses or power lines in sight. Find a place where you are surrounded by nature. We also have to accept that the experience of peace and stillness in nature is never guaranteed. Once you've found a place, you can't be sure to get the same

experience every time you visit. If the location is close to the city, the wind might change direction and bring in more traffic noise next time you visit. No matter where you are, wind, weather, bird song and seasonality will affect the experience.



When we walk out into nature and are observant and present, we also notice the differences. There are places where nature surrounds us, almost like a room in the middle the forest. There are places that offer wide views. There are wild, hard-to-find places. There are border zones where different habitats meet. A deciduous forest differs significantly from a coniferous forest. The experience of looking out over meadows differs

from looking out over the sea. When we open our senses we see the amazing variety of nature. Even in natural areas near the city you can find this variation.

The sound of nature even in the midst of the noise. When I'm sitting at a train station, the sound of the city is apparent, sometimes disturbing, but now and then I can hear the low-key rush of the wind in the trees or some birds nearby. There is something special about nature's own sound. When we become aware of the sounds around us and just listen without analysing, a different dimension opens up and we might get out of our mind bubble, if only for a moment.



**Find your own quiet place in nature.** Start in the nature area closest to where you live or work. Look for places where you see as little as possible of human constructions, preferably no houses, roads or power lines. Look for places that feel pleasant and quiet. Stop and sit there for a while. Listen to hear nature's own sounds. Listen to hear other sounds. If you are close to the city, be prepared to accept some disturbances. Are there too many disturbances or does it feel like a restful place? Go back to the place several times, different times of the day and different weekdays.



# 14. Inner Stillness



*Nature is wondrous. It is spring, the buds on the tree are bursting and the forest is exploding with life. As I sit watching nature around me, stillness grows inside.*

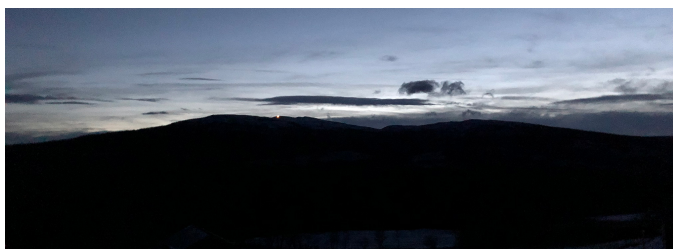
*Sometimes the silence, presence and fascination remain for a long time, but today it disappears after a short while when my restless mind ignites and I start thinking about what I should do.*

A core of stillness surrounded by silence. An inner stillness that gives us a starting point to see the world in a pure and undisturbed way. To see without comparing, analysing or trying to explain. An inner stillness from which we can observe life around us, ourselves and our own life situation, including our feelings and thoughts. Silence that makes us feel connected with everything around us. An inner stillness surrounded by silence.



Dag Hammarskjöld wrote: *"We all have within us a center of stillness surrounded by silence."* We all have. Do we? In the midst of our hectic life the stillness may feel deeply tucked away. But it's there. We can try to explain this stillness and silence. We can analyse and build theories about how to access

it. But does stillness and silence really need to be explained? It's there, behind all our thinking. Stillness and silence are stillness and silence. There is no need to try to analyse and explain, though our restless mind wants to "talk" about it. There are countless methods, programs, and exercises that promise to lead us to inner stillness. Just look at the rituals of religions and the advice in self-help books. Sometimes it might be necessary to have concrete steps to follow, ways to sit or techniques for relaxation to get out of our stressful everyday life. But maybe we don't need this. Maybe it just complicates everything and just perpetuates our need to explain and understand everything. Maybe you can get in touch with your inner stillness directly, right here and now, just like that. What if it's immediately available, the stillness that provides a starting point for looking at my own "doing-thinking-feeling" ? This inner stillness that helps me see the magic that is life.



Now, as I'm writing this, it hit me. Can I "walk my talk" and get in touch with my inner core of silence - right now? I live in a fantastic place and go out on my porch to try to answer the question. It's late November and already dark outside. I'm standing in the dark, my feet are freezing. I'm taking some deep breaths and looking at the amazing view. It's very quiet around me and I don't have to stay there for long to feel the stillness grow inside. In addition, a big smile inside me bubbles, a low-key happiness based on just being.

If we keep up our frequent visits to quiet nature areas, the habit of being still can be established and we can transfer this ability to find the inner silence to louder and more chaotic environments.



**Paths to inner stillness.** I can find stillness by going out into nature and being silent or by meditating or just by taking some deep breaths. I can find my inner stillness by myself or with support from a guide or a group. It doesn't matter which path I take or which method I use. The important thing is to find a way, a habit that works and can become a part of my everyday life.



# 15. From Stillness to Flow to Wonder



*A morning with plenty of time to spare, no reason to rush, nowhere to go. I eat my breakfast, sit for a long time and just consider the beautiful view. The hotel breakfast room in this small remote alpine village is almost empty, it's peaceful and quiet.*

*I have another cup of coffee. I am walking through the Swiss Alps and have on the previous day given up my ambitious plan to walk almost straight through this mountainous country. I exhausted myself, there was neither energy nor motivation or desire left. Now all my ambitious plans are laid aside. I have had a good nights sleep and a deep sense of freedom rests over the morning. The day is beautiful. I enjoy my breakfast and decide which way to go. It turns out to be a fantastic day. I walk up the mountains, at a slow pace, some of the climbs are tough and I have to work hard but it is still easy. A feeling of total presence, of flow permeates the entire day's walk. Several times I stop to admire the amazing view. The vast views gives me a strong sense of wonder in the face of nature and life.*



Days that provide us with stillness, flow and wonder might be all too rare. What if every day could give us all this? It might not be necessary to be on a holiday, in a fantastic landscape, without have-to-dos and with the freedom to do exactly what we want. It may even be possible to experience all this - stillness, flow and wonder - during ordinary work days. Most days we focus on being effective and getting a lot done. Long work days, constant availability, quick answers and fast results. This has been the norm for success for a long time. But the side effects of this efficiency approach in the form of sleep deprivation, stress, and too little recovery has been shown to undermine productivity as well as health. Our culture is too one-sided in its future and goal-orientation. The future rewards in the form of the holiday trip, the increase in pay, the relaxed Friday dinner is supposed to make us squeeze through our gray everyday life. The plan for my Swiss hike completely followed this goal oriented norm. I had studied the map and set up a detailed plan, but without experience and at least some focus on enjoying the trip, it was doomed to fail. I had to get up early and walk fast to complete my ambitious daily goals. The breaks had to be short and the map and the clock were in focus. As a result I didn't have the time to enjoy the beautiful landscape.

Of course we should have plans, goals and dreams, and we also have a need for structure in our everyday life. But perhaps we need a new form of structure. A structure where activities and “inactivities” that promote stillness, flow and wonder are included.

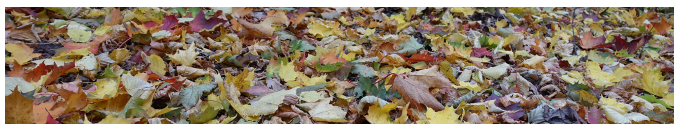


To marvel at nature is to me something completely different than to be impressed or fascinated. The amazing building, the pyramid, the bridge, the tower can impress, but this is often linked to an analysis and evaluation of how it was constructed. Sports performance can be both impressive and fascinating, but is also linked to results and evaluation. To marvel at nature is something else.

My moments of stillness in nature are in many cases directly linked to wonder. When I listen to the wind and the birds, see the light beyond the mountain I smile inside and out, I'm full of wonder. Wonder is to not know and have all the answers but to realise that beyond our human activities there is so much we know very little about. Wonder is to feel small facing the greatness of nature but at the same time feel like a part of something bigger than the little me. Sometimes the activity, such as the hike up the mountain when I have to focus on the task and am forced into complete presence, flow is needed for me to experience wonder. It is when I stop, calm down, take a deep breath and fully take in the view of the mountains, the hills or the sea that a deep sense of wonder evolves.

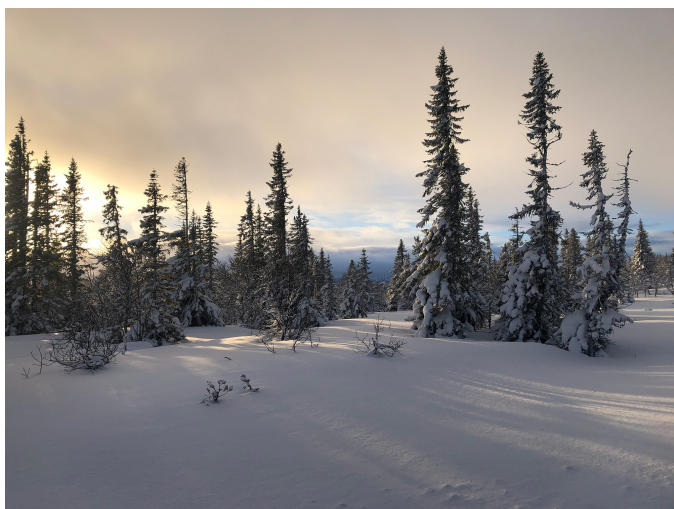
Wonder is often connected to silence. Most people will, at least for a moment, be completely silent when they face nature's beautiful scenery. The experience of wonder can be stronger when we are alone. If we are out and about in a group and have a beautiful scenery in front of us, somebody will soon break the silence and the feeling of wonder, for example with a question about what the mountain in the distance is called. But even in solitude, the feeling of wonder is often broken after a while by

the fact that our restless mind turns on and planning or analysing takes over.



**Stillness, flow and wonder every day.** There are days when everything is right, everything works we have a lot of energy, have time to do what we want and get a lot done. Maybe these are days that include all the ingredients, stillness, flow and wonder? Have you had days that provide you with all this? Has this day, today, provided this? Or can you still be able to find stillness, flow and wonder in what's left of this day? If more people had moments of stillness, flow and wonder every day maybe we would be a little more humble and better care for ourselves, each other and our blue-green planet?

## 16. Being lost and not knowing



*I have no idea where I am or which way is the right way to go. The forest is close to my home and I have often walked these trails; I think I know the area well. It's in the middle of winter, I am on skis and initially followed the normal route, but the trail was covered with deep snow and difficult to follow. On the way back I try to find an alternative route.*

*The forest is dense and brushy, it is hard to navigate and I finally realise that I am completely lost. I have no idea where I am and don't know the way out. I could follow my ski tracks back but it would be a long trek and I would have to go uphill. I also know that there should be a small forest road somewhere nearby. It's late in the afternoon and getting dark. I have nothing left to eat and anxiety grows inside. It's frightening to be completely lost. I take some deep breaths, calm down, manage to set my anxiety aside and observe the spot I am in. I note that a little further away there is an opening between the trees, a small creek runs there. The water is frozen and winds through dense forest. I follow the creek and it leads me out to the forest road.*

Being lost in nature can be really scary. When fear comes, stress hormones peak and thoughts run wild. We might start accusing ourselves of taking the wrong turn and think about everything that can happen if we don't find our way out. If we panic and start to run around, we only make the situation worse. The solution is to try to find inner stillness in the middle of our anxiety. From our center of stillness, we can be fully present and observe. Look, maybe there are some openings in the forest. Listen, maybe you can hear a road further away. However, it's not so often we get lost in nature, we often follow well known trails and move in areas near roads and houses. The risk of getting lost in nature can also be reduced by the fact that most people have a smartphone with GPS in their pocket. On the other hand, the smartphone can also make us rely too much on technology. If we, instead of being fully present, focus too much on the phone we might get even more lost. Even if we don't get lost in nature often, there is sometimes the feeling of being lost and not knowing in other situations. Some feel lost in all the everyday choices we face, lost in their career or lost in the whole drama that our life situation poses. Our normal strategy for handling the feeling of being lost and not knowing is to acquire new knowledge or talk to someone who can listen and give advice. These can be good

strategies, especially if we have someone who can really listen. A good listener who really listens, and isn't too quick to give advice can be invaluable. But just as important is to get in touch with your center of inner stillness. A moment in silence, a few minutes of stillness in nature can increase our presence, help us see what is right here, right now and provide us with some distance to our everyday drama and our own thoughts. Moments of silence in nature don't automatically provide new knowledge or the answers to our questions. But the inner stillness, silence and presence might give us a touch of wisdom.



Moments of stillness in nature also provide us with opportunities to see how everything is connected.



The trees, the birds, the wind and the clouds moving across the sky. All of these elements of nature that are not designed by us humans, they just work in this great interplay. The daily weather changes that give nature such different frames. The seasonal changes that create a balance between rest and exuberant growth.



We know a lot today about how nature and our planet has evolved. Science has come a long way in understanding both the smallest parts and the major context of our universe. But there is still much we don't know about nature's ingenious structure. No wonder our hunter-gatherer ancestors, who most likely had many moments of stillness in nature, began to think about how everything is connected and who or what was responsible for this amazing

world. They developed explanations including gods, beings and spirits of the earth, trees, mountains and clouds. Later, as cultures evolved, these explanations have been refined and form part of the foundation for our religious explanations of how the world is structured. Today, it is the scientific explanation of how the earth has evolved and how everything in nature is connected that is generally accepted. But many questions remain. Questions about why and how everything is connected. Thoughts on the amazing cycle that is birth, life and death? Questions about our own consciousness and ability or inability to look at our own behaviours, emotions and thoughts. We lack many answers, but instead of constantly searching for these answers let us give ourselves moments when we fully accept that we do not know everything and let nature and life inspire and fill us with awe.

Some call experiences connected to stillness in nature magical or spiritual or meditative or just difficult to explain. The words we use to explain our experiences in nature are unimportant. It may be the amazing full moon that overwhelms, silences our thoughts and for a moment provides us with inner stillness, wonder and insight into how amazing life is. It may be the simple joy of feeling the wind against our skin. Or the joy of just being fully

present and part of nature and life. Not all of my moments of stillness in nature provide strong experiences. Sometimes my head is too full of everyday have-to-do's and should-have-done's.

But if we continue, if we establish the habit of stillness in nature, we get more and more moments of awe, wonder and the joy of being. We create a need for stillness and silence. We train our ability to just be and to just be fully present. We give ourselves the opportunity to find joy in the little things, like listening to the wind. We get daily doses of wonder facing this magic thing we call life.



**OK not to know.** I do not know why nature is constructed as it is. I don't know how everything is related. I don't know what will happen tomorrow. Many know more than me and experts in various fields know lots. But it is ok not to know. It is nice to admit that I know very little. Sometimes I want to know and learn, sometimes knowledge is needed. But perhaps we should admit a little more often that we are lost, accept that we do not know, and instead let ourselves be am amazed by life.

# 17. The wind and the breath



*I am in a "dark place" and at the same time in a wonderfully beautiful place. The darkness is inside my head, which is full of the big questions about meaning, purpose and goals. We can call it being low or having a bad day or being depressed. Most of us have been there, maybe many times. This early summer morning I happen to be stuck in my dark inner space while in an immensely beautiful place. It's the cool breeze that wakes me.*

*The wind in my face and the rattling of leaves is the little push I need to look around and step out of my "dark thoughts". A few minutes in silence, some deep breaths and the inner stillness grows.*

No, it's not every time that going out into the forest is enough to get us out of a "dark place". But my less serious visits in the "dark mind space" can usually be remedied with a moment in nature. However sometimes I need to walk or run to get farther away, clear my head and get perspective. When I then stop, notice nature around me and breathe for a few minutes, the stillness grows inside and life looks brighter. I don't know why but often it's the wind that wake me up. It's as if I need to awaken other senses to silence my mind. Feeling the wind in my face and listening to the rattle of leaves give me a sense of aliveness. The wind has a great influence on how we experience nature from one day to another. On a stormy autumn day the wind completely dominates. If we're in a forest with aspen trees, it's often the rattling sound of the leaves that we are paying attention to and by the water it's the wind and the waves. In the middle of winter the wind can be biting cold and we must protect ourselves.



*It's a cold winter day in a remote and beautiful mountain area. The sun is shining but at the same time it's storming, the snow is howling around our feet. We are skiing directly into the wind and have to struggle to move forward at all. We're out on a week long mountain trip and this day we follow our planned route, but the wind makes it difficult. The sense of presence is strong, the snow, the icy cold conditions, the sun and the headwind. The wind makes any form of communication impossible. We bend our heads down and keep mowing forward in silence, slowly, very slowly. Finally, we have to give up, scrap our plan, turn around and instead let the wind take us to the nearest mountain hut where we seek shelter. On that day we had to accept that the wind was stronger than our plans. Although we had to change our plans and missed the destination, the*

*experience was amazing. The sun and the good visibility made it manageable despite the wind. We had to work hard and were forced into a strong sense of presence and flow.*

The opposite, that is to say, being out in nature on day when it's still, no wind at all, is also a special experience. It's as if nature is holding its breath. Inside a city we do not notice whether it's still, a breeze or slightly stronger wind, the traffic and the buildings often obscure the small nuances of the wind.

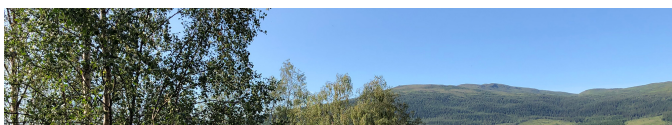
If we establish the habit of going out daily and getting a moment of stillness in nature, we will become aware of the wind in a new way. When standing and feeling the wind, I also start listening to my own breath. If we can hear our own breathing our surroundings are relatively quiet. A deep breath is also the classic way to calm down and focus. We take this deep breath even unconsciously. It's fascinating that something as simple as a slow deep breath of air can affect our entire body.

*Wherever you are when reading this, take a deep breath and listen to it. Can you hear when you breathe in, pause and breathe out?*



Breathing is also an important part of relaxation, meditation and yoga practices. Wherever you are, on a train, in a house or in your car - a deep breath can be a way to lower stress levels and get in touch with your inner stillness. I need to be still to really notice nature and feel the wind. Stillness is also needed, if only for a moment to become aware of how I breathe. But luckily we don't constantly need to think about our breathing, it's one of those fantastic processes in the body that keeps us alive, keeps us healthy.

As long as the body works, we take it for granted and almost consider it as a machine. A machine we, in many cases, do not take good care of when we rush through everyday life. We are part of nature, our whole body is an interaction not only between our own cells but also with the air we breathe, the food we eat and all the bacteria that are necessary for our skin and intestines to work well. We are just as much an ecological system as the forest and the sea. Our moments of silence in nature with the touch of the wind and some deep breaths, can perhaps give us a greater ability to appreciate nature and life.



**Wind, breath and inner darkness.** Most of us end up there from time to time - in a dark mind space, where everything feels difficult and more or less meaningless. We call it being low, gloomy or depressed. Sometimes it's bodily ailments that put us down. Sometimes external causes such as gray and dark weather can contribute to our darkness, but sometimes even the sunniest days can't keep away a dark mind space. Often, it is our spinning thoughts, our fears and desires that contribute to the inner gloom. To go out into nature, take a break from thinking, be still, listen, breathe and feel the wind - it can help. Nature can be a cure or at least help us see a ray of brightness in our dark moments.

## 18. Being busy or being present



*You're crazy, she said. I was hiking through a beautiful mountain area and passed one of the open mountain huts. It was the hut warden that deemed me to be crazy. In two days I had walked a distance that most others needed four days to cover. I had been walking fast, the days had been long and the stops short. Moreover, I hadn't seen much since it had rained and the clouds had been low during much of the journey.*

*I was young and considered the hike to be a workout and an achievement. Of course I also got some great nature experiences and moments of stillness. But the stillness was obscured by the constant movement and planning and worries for the next stage. I found a big part of the hike boring and tried to get to the end as soon as possible. The goal was more important than the journey.*

Life often follows a daily routine. We move between places we know well. We meet and talk to people we know, more or less well. We fill our time, are constantly busy doing something. We long for the evening, for the TV couch, for the weekend, for the holiday. We live in a culture where busyness is expected and lack of attention a part of our everyday life. Just like my hike where the goal was more important than the experience, everyday life tends to be a constant movement forward. Our everyday routine is dominated by spinning thoughts and constant activities. At the same time we hardly notice our surroundings and we have few, if any, moments of silence and stillness. If we get some time to spare or lose our concentration on the task at hand, we quickly fill the time with surfing on a mobile phone/computer or looking in a newspaper.

Information or pleasure fills the smallest gap. We get bored and worried when nothing happens. But our biggest shortcomings are attention and presence. Moments of stillness in nature, meditation or mindfulness exercises are ways to train or you might say resurrect our attention. You notice the beautiful leaves on your way to the bus, you hear the laughing kids, you can really taste the orange and notice the scent of the flowers.

To break our routine and step out of this constant busyness is a challenge for me as much as for most people. My moments of stillness in nature help and have given me a greater appreciation for silence in general. I don't turn on the radio when I step into a car, I take advantage of the quiet time. This "radio silence" makes me more observant, I discover things I have never seen before, though I traveled on the same roads so many times. I can be fascinated by the shapes of the trees, the movement of the water or colors of the mountains, even when I only see them through the windshield of my car.

Similarly, short silent breaks when I look out the window can give new energy. Though preferably best if this can be done quietly while observing without analysing. While looking out the window

is always enjoyable it's the silent observation I find most restorative.



In the midst of our everyday drama, concerns and fears are often ever-present components. Am I doing the right thing? What happens if? How will they react? Can it be misunderstood? Our daily drama is full of questions that we struggle to find answers to. Moments of silence in nature, when we observe and get that wonderful insight that everything is connected and everything is as it should be, has a side effect. Fear loses the grip on us. I don't suddenly know the answers to all questions but I know that the answers are there. I often eventually find the answers when I take a step aside and get some distance to my problems. The

silence and the inner stillness allow me, if only for a moment, to look at my own thoughts and feelings. From my core of stillness I can see my own busyness and my own life drama. I can see without analysing or evaluating, I am a silent observer. Getting this distance to your own life drama is a fantastic discovery. After such a moment of silent observation, I can step back into my own busy drama and focus on what I should do without taking myself too seriously.



**Breaking busyness and increasing presence.** It becomes an addiction - to be busy, to have something going on all the time, to have a lot to do. Of course, most people sometimes complain that it is too much, that they need a vacation or a break. But at the same time the constant busyness gives rewards and positive kicks. Being attentive, seeing the world around you, seeing your own behaviour and being able to consider your own thoughts - it is a challenge. However, presence can grow and develop into a natural part of our way of being, our way of relating to the world. For most people, it takes a while to break our established routines of busyness. If we give it time, the moments of stillness in nature can give us the opportunity to go from being busy to being present.



# 19. Guests in a world where you lower your voice so as not to disturb



*We move quietly through the forest, every step taken with the utmost care. We are about 20 people who move silently forward, give way to bushes, feel how and where each footstep is lowered.*

*The silence is almost total and the group continues very very slowly forward. At first it feels strange but then a pleasant feeling of presence and stillness takes over. We participate in a “tracking course” where we partly learn to track animals but mainly learn to meet nature with respect and humility. One of the leaders is an American Indian and he shares his peoples’ approach to nature. The place is very remote, the wilderness wide in all directions and the silence overwhelming.*

Most of us rarely move quietly, nor do we walk slowly. Rather, we have a tendency to rush or take a brisk walk through our everyday lives. As a reflection on hiking in the wilderness and how the view from a mountain affects us, Dag Hammarskjöld wrote. “It forces us to be aware of the proportions and to feel our smallness and temporary existence. We are guests in a world where you lower your voice so as not to interfere”. The world would look different if we humans realised that we are guests in a world where you lower your voice so as not to interfere. If we moved quietly with care instead of going around the world like a shattering bulldozer. If we took into account and interacted with everything living on our planet.

If we realised our smallness and temporary existence.

But, isn't it important to do things and raise your voice in order to change the world? We live in a culture where being seen and heard has become more important than listening. Maybe we have to act loudly to change and save our world. We may have to scream to overthrow the noisy dream of eternal growth that dominates the world. Or, maybe not. Maybe it is our ability to stop, walk slowly and listen that is needed now more than ever.

There are low-profile protests that seem to be able to initiate change. Children's school strikes for the climate, silent non-violent protests or people's minor or major changes of habits and lifestyle. More and more people are discovering that we can consume less and have the power to control our consumption instead of being led by advertising. What we choose to buy or not buy, how we travel and how we eat all has an impact. The first step in our endeavour to change/save the world could be: Stop listening to the loud messages and instead slow down, listen to nature, get a daily dose of inner stillness and maybe get in touch with something we can call inner wisdom. Listen a little less to the news and little more to the birds.



Accept, observe and act. Daily moments of stillness in nature will teach us to accept the situation.

Accept the weather as well as your own state of mind. Just accept and observe. Some days the sky is blue other days the fog surrounds us. Some days your mood is on top, some days it's beyond gloomy. It might not be possible to fully enjoy it, but if we accept and not even label the weather as bad or good we can at least see some beauty even in the worst weather. Just accept the outer circumstances and adjust to it (more clothes). Our own mood is mostly based on which story about our life situation that is playing in our head on this day. Is it the successful everything-is-great story or the why-am-I-doing-this story? Sometimes our story is out of sync with the reality and that can be difficult to

accept. We want to be somewhere else than where we are, we want to do something different than what we do. There is a tension, a stress between where we are and where we want to be. But even if we want to be somewhere else or have another goal, we must begin by fully accepting the present moment and the situation we are in. When we fully accept the present moment, we relax, look at the situation with fresh eyes and can find new solutions.



A major dilemma in the culture we live in is fatigue, mainly caused by lack of sleep. We extend our day, sit in front of screens late into the night and believe that we should be available almost 24 hours a day. The solution is clear but not so simple - sleep more. In many cases, it is our spinning mind activity that

hinders sleep. Moments of stillness in nature when we step out of our virtual world of thoughts can contribute to better sleep. There are also a number of tricks and good advice for improving sleep, for example not to sit in front of monitors late at night, to have a moment to unwind before bedtime and to have a cool room. You can prioritise sleep and get new energy. But when we anyway have a tired day for one reason or another, it can make an incredible difference if we fully accept our tiredness. When we are tired we usually become more annoyed, have more difficulty coping with adversity and become a little worse and slower at performing our daily chores, whatever they are. If we accept our tiredness, we can take a step back and see our own bad mood, get some distance and become less reactive. If we accept the fatigue, we can also, in some cases, control what we do, take on a little less required tasks and give ourselves an extra break. The normal thing to do, instead of accepting, is trying to counteract tiredness, mainly with more coffee or a higher tempo. Some say that it is not possible to accept the fatigue, you have to fight it, you always have to perform at the top. When you are stuck in the middle of stress and fatigue, it is hard to see how it drains and erodes. We never perform at the top when we are tired, we make more mistakes and we affect our environment negatively.



Accepting tiredness is the first step to change. **Tread gently and be humble.** “It (the view from a mountain) forces us to be aware of the proportions and to feel our smallness and temporary existence. We are guests in a world where you lower your voice so as not to interfere”. Dag Hammarskjöld's words again. Feel our smallness and temporary existence. Feel the connection with everything on this planet. Be humble. We are guests in a world where you lower your voice so as not to disturb. The exact opposite of the ego-centered message of being the best and earning the most that dominates our world. Accept our smallness and coincidence. Observe the world and our own life situation. Act to promote and protect this magic thing we call life.





## 20. Alive



*It was a beautiful summer day, blue sky, no wind. I was on top of the world, yes it felt that way. I was standing on a high mountain peak on the border between Norway and Sweden. Around me I saw mountains, glaciers and a vast wilderness. Early in the morning I had started from my little mountain hut, where I was working as a hut warden.*

*The last bit up the mountain had been steep and rocky and on one side was a cliff with a glacier at the bottom. Just like everyone else who climb a summit, I stood for a long time and admired the view before I started my journey back. But after just a little ways down on the steepest part of the mountain I stumbled and fell. The fall turned into a full airborne somersault and I landed on my backpack. The backpack took the hit, stopped me and I just sat there completely unharmed among the rocks. It was as if the whole world stopped; as if life took a break. I was shocked and remained sitting for a long time. The insight of how fragile life is struck me. I had no cell phone coverage and the nearest inhabited place was many many miles away. Had I been injured in the fall, the situation could have been dire. But now I was completely unharmed and just sat there.*

“What should I do with my life?” “Life is good or great or bad or horrible”. We talk and think and worry a lot about our own life. But it’s not really life we mean instead it’s our own ongoing story we are referring to. Life is something else. Life is the magical thing that happens in and around us. Life is the mystery of how everything in nature including our own body works. Life is the heartbeats and the breathing that just keeps going. Life is the insects and the birds and the grass and the trees that do their thing all around us. Life is the wind and the rain and the sun. Life is life.

"What should I do with my story, my own drama?"  
"My story is fantastic or good or bad or horrible". If we use the word story or drama or life situation instead of the word life, we change the tone, it sounds a little bit less dramatic. It might only seem to be a play with words - but whatever word we choose, we can feel equally positive or negative about our own story. We can experience our own story, our drama, our life situation as very restricted or full of possibilities. The important difference in the choice of words lies in the realisation that there is something more than our own story. The insight that life is bigger than our egocentric dramas.



Back to reality, back to real life - those are the expressions we use. The holiday is over and now we have to go back to real life. The lunch walk in the park is completed and now it's back to reality. But it's rather back to the usual story, back to the normal drama we mean. We have detached ourselves from life and instead we are stuck in past and future stories and dramas. Our own story is getting most of our attention and then we add all the stories that we get from the news, social media and entertainment. Yes, stories are important parts of our existence. We convey knowledge through stories, gain insights and can become more compassionate and increase our understanding of other people through hearing their stories. Yes, it is also important how we deal with our own story, how we learn and act in relation

to what is happening in the world and how we interact with other people. But maybe it's even more important to balance the overload of stories with frequent connection to this magic thing that is life - right here, right now. We need moments of stillness, of just being, We need full contact with life.

Aliveness. Sometimes we feel alive in a special way. The air feels fresher, the colors clearer, the scents stronger. For me this usually happens in nature, both in stillness and on a walk. My alternative way to feel extra alive is through physical activity. Swimming, running or cycling can also give me a strong feeling of presence and of being fully alive. In the middle of the physical activity I can sometimes, but not always, find inner stillness. It seems to be when we awaken our dormant senses, feel the wind, smell the scents of nature and hear the birds that the feeling of being alive becomes especially strong. Alternatively the strong sense of aliveness can emerge when we awaken our body, for example by focusing on our breath or by being physically active.



**Alive.** This feeling of being alive of being content with life is like a low-key expression of joy. Joy of being. Moments of stillness in nature are a way to cultivate presence, this low-key joy and the feeling of being alive. Hopefully we can bring the experience from moments of stillness in nature into everyday life and find inner stillness even in our more or less loud surroundings. Feel fully present and alive in everyday tasks.

## 21 . Low-key bubbling joy



*Today. A gray fall day, cold, wet, some snow on the ground, the fog is dense and the rain hangs in the air. Before starting my workday I follow my almost daily routine, visit a nearby green place and just stand still, quiet and observe. I see the last trembling leaves and listen to the few birds still left. A few deep breaths and stillness grows inside while a low-key joy makes me feel fully alive.*

*This low-key bubbling joy stays with me as I later sit at my desk, notice some birds on the window sill and follow the leaves that sway in the wind. This joy gives me focus on my tasks and fills me with energy.*

One of the aims of the Guide to Silence project is to help those who plan and design our cities to preserve, protect and develop green quiet areas that are easily accessible in and around our cities. We also want politicians and community planners to realise that quiet green spaces make the city more attractive for residents and visitors alike. Another aim is to motivate you as a reader to go out and just be in nature. To inspire you to establish the habit of visiting a nature area daily and for a moment just be still. To entice you to listen to nature, the city and other people. To convince you to move a little slower, to observe and to balance your day with moments of just being.

But the real goal of the Guide to Silence book and project can be said to be more than creating opportunities, finding places and establishing a habit of nature and silence. The goal is the inner stillness and low-key bubbling joy that is linked to being fully present in nature. (This joy is hard to describe and put into words, but low-key and



bubbly are the words that emerged). This inner stillness and joy that is available here and now, right now, as I look out the window and see the leaves waving in the wind. I am not going anywhere, the goal is not somewhere in the future, the goal is right in front of my nose and it's my moments of being in nature that has given me this insight. This inner stillness and low-key joy makes me feel fully alive in the midst of this magic thing we call life with the wind, the seasons, the birds, the heartbeat and breath. When we realise that this inner stillness and low-key bubbly joy is available, we get a new relationship to our daily drama, this story we have mistaken for our life. We can handle our own drama, set goals and take on challenges with a little more distance.

You could say that we don't have to take our own drama as seriously. Real life, the inner stillness, the low-key joy are always accessible. Normally it is desire, fear and anxiety that govern our actions and shape our drama. We are chasing happiness and success in the future or we have a constant nagging worry about how to manage everything. We reward or comfort ourselves in different ways and labor through our more or less gray everyday life. When I realise that I, here and now, have access to inner stillness and low-key bubbling joy, fear loses the

grip on me and my desires don't have the same magnetic force any more. My daily drama is driven by deeper motivations; it's feels like freedom.



Change. We humans have over the last century radically changed our planet. We have affected the climate, eradicated lots of species, devastated forests, filled the seas with microplastics and built enormous cities. Almost no part of our planet has been left untouched. We have been and still are totally out of balance with the resources our world provides us with and everything we leave behind. Our driving force with constant growth is unsustainable. At the same time, we have invented great things and in many ways improved the living conditions for most people. No one really knows if we are happier than our ancestors were. What we do

know is that we live longer and are in many ways healthier, but that we are also now in greater imbalance with nature than ever before. Most of us need to change our lifestyle. These changes can feel like big sacrifices, even as a deterioration of the so-called quality of life we have today. We need to travel less, eat less meat, bike more and buy fewer gadgets. Most people oppose removing things and benefits, and that's a normal reaction if we believe that our drama, our story, is all that exists. We are going to resist change if we live under the illusion that our consumption, our status and our group affiliation define who we are. But my resistance to change drops as I step outside my ego and realize that I here and now have access to the stillness and the low-key joy of being alive. I do not need all the new things, the perfect job, likes on facebook or holiday trips to feel good, feel successful or be happy. Access to the feeling of joy, of being content and alive that is linked to stillness in nature changes everything.



**The insight - my life and my drama are two different things.** Life and being a part of everything living is one, my drama, my story the other. My moments of stillness in nature have allowed this insight to slowly grow and become clear. Of course it's a little strange that I can sit, listen to the wind, see the leaves slowly waving, be completely and fully satisfied and filled with this low-key bubbling joy. It seems so silly and simple. But I believe in simplicity. The Guide to Silence is mainly about one thing, the habit of being in silence and stillness in nature. This habit of going out often, preferably daily, listening and observing nature with all your senses. Yes, the world would most likely look different if we all could establish this habit. Five, ten or fifteen minutes of daily silence in nature. Can it be that simple?