

Being in Silence

Many who come to Rivendell are drawn to enter into a time of silence. In particular, Rivendell's Hermitage is a space dedicated to silence and solitude. In this world of distractions there are few places where you can come away and enter into your own spiritual journey without distractions. Here are a few considerations and suggestions.

For Your Individual Journey:

The intention of the silence and solitude is to deepen your spiritual journey. It is helpful as you begin to name for yourself what is your longing for your retreat or in other words what is your particular intention at this time in your life and for this retreat. In many ways silence is not so much about not talking, as providing the space to listen to what you hear within. If you think of wading through a pond and continually stubbing your toe against something, a retreat allows the time and space for the silt to settle, the water to clear to allow you to pick up and look at the stone, debris or treasure on the bottom of the pond.

Silence isn't about the absence of noise since sounds surround us all the time – planes overhead, bird calls, or the sound of water flowing in the stream. In the journey to the place of stillness, we have the opportunity to notice what our inner responses are to the noise and pray through them to a greater place of freedom.

Here are a few suggestions as you enter into the silence:

You are encouraged first of all to listen to your body. We often arrive from a busy schedule and from the city's energy. It takes a little while to slow down both the mind and the body. Take the time to get rested. Listen to your body and sleep as much as you need as you begin your stay here. A rested body is much more available to listen.

To slow the mind, it is helpful to use your senses. We generally live in our heads – and neglect paying attention to our 5 senses. Take time to walk in nature, look at the trees, smell the earth, the air, savour your food as you eat, touch the moss or the cold stream water, and listen to the birds or the wind in the trees. When you find yourself perseverating about something, just be gentle with yourself and bring your attention back to the present moment using one of your senses.

You are encouraged to trust how you are being led. Your retreat journey will open up for you as you listen for what is inviting your attention. A time in silence is not a time to read all the books you have been wanting to read but rather to ponder what you are drawn to read. Many spiritual books are about another person's experiences and this is an opportunity to have your own encounter with the Divine. Listen within as to whether you are being drawn to read a certain book or whether it would be a distraction from what you need to be pondering.

You may find it helpful to journal following an experience you have had or to express yourself creatively. You will find some art supplies in the lower floor of the house in the laundry room that may support that expression.

How to be with Others in the Silence:

You are not only gifting yourself this precious time but also gifting the space to others who will be on retreat at the same time. This is a rare opportunity when you are freed from social graces. We ask you not to speak to the others on retreat unless absolutely necessary. If a need arises, please first seek out the host. If they are not available, it is just better to ask for permission to speak and briefly say what you need and not to try sign language.

It can be helpful to also avoid eye contact.

You are sharing the kitchen with other retreatants so please give the others space that they need and take turns using the sink and stove. There are several stations set up that should facilitate a few people using the kitchen at the same time.

It is helpful to slow down your walking and your doing. That includes closing the doors to the house quietly or being gentle in your kitchen preparation so that you don't unnecessarily intrude on the others. At the Hermitage, if you choose not to attend the 8:00 centering prayer or 5:00 time in the upper room, please do not use the kitchen and be especially quiet on the main floor during these times.

If you see someone crying, please leave them alone. They may have been waiting years to shed those tears and your reaching out to them or giving them tissue draws them out of their inner space to give you attention. Also, if you are excited about seeing something such as an eagle, take the time to enjoy with no need to draw attention of the others. They may be just as enthralled watching a spider spin a web.

This is a precious gift of spaciousness, silence and solitude that you offer to yourself and to the others here with you.

Blessings on your journey into the solitude and silence in this sacred place.

Further Suggested Reading

Laird, Martin. *Into the Silent Land: A Guide Christian Practice of Contemplation*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006.