

# Stories about Stilling

When we become still, we begin to see more clearly. We see ourselves and our thoughts and fears more clearly, we see our relationships with others, our communities and our world more clearly, and, if we are open to him, we begin to see God more clearly.

1. The first story is from the Bible (1 Kings 19 v 9 -13) and is well known to many. It is about the prophet Elijah. He has just challenged the evil King Ahab and Queen Jezebel's 450 prophets

*And the word of the Lord came to him: "What are you doing here, Elijah?"*

*10 He replied, "I have been very zealous for the Lord God Almighty. The Israelites have rejected your covenant, torn down your altars, and put your prophets to death with the sword. I am the only one left, and now they are trying to kill me too."*

*11 The Lord said, "Go out and stand on the mountain in the presence of the Lord, for the Lord is about to pass by."*

of Baal to a show down and won the day, but he is now in flight for his life and is overwhelmed by the scale of what has happened and by the hostility that he faces. He hides in a cave and waits on God.

Elijah does not hear God in the 'earthquake, wind or fire' as a famous hymn describes, but in the 'still small voice of calm', a gentle whisper, or as the NRSV bible translates a "sound of sheer silence".

*Then a great and powerful wind tore the mountains apart and shattered the rocks before the Lord, but the Lord was not in the wind. After the wind there was an earthquake, but the Lord was not in the earthquake.12 After the earthquake came a fire, but the Lord was not in the fire. And after the fire came a gentle whisper. 13 When Elijah heard it, he pulled his cloak over his face and went out and stood at the mouth of the cave.*

2. The second story relates to the way in which engaging in silence and stillness is also about confronting our inner, hidden and often unacknowledged fears. It is incredibly powerful both personally and professionally in helping young people to embrace silence and stilling as a powerful weapon against fear.

Once upon a time, in a land far away, there lived a very bright and trustworthy young woman. Having learned all that she could in her own village, she set out to explore the neighbouring lands.

After a time, she came upon a great city surrounded by a huge castle wall. "Surely I can learn something new from the people here," she thought to herself. But after entering the city, she found its people too frightened and depressed to share any wisdom. "Why is everyone here so sad?" she asked.

One trembling citizen answered, "Today is the day the giant comes."

"Giant?" she scoffed in disbelief. "There's no such thing as giants!"

"Oh, but there is," came a response. "He stands over 10 feet tall! So tall, he can't rightly be called a man at all."

Sceptical, but intrigued, the young woman pleaded, "Tell me more of this giant."

So, the frightened citizen nervously explained to her, "Every year, on the same day, and at the same hour, he comes down from the mountain where he lives. He stands at the edge of the clearing and yells, 'Send out your bravest man for me to fight, or I will knock down these walls and kill everyone inside!' Each year, one poor courageous soul steps out to face the giant, and there he stands, mesmerized by the giant's enormity and the impossible task ahead. And every year, the giant slays the poor warrior where he stands before he even has a chance to draw his sword. The warrior doesn't even move. It's as if he is hypnotised."

Eyes wide with fascination, the woman begs, "Can I see this giant?"

"The only way to see the giant, is to face him in battle." the citizen explained.

Still in disbelief but eager to learn, the woman responded, "Then that is what I will do! I will face your giant today."

Shortly thereafter, at the appointed hour, the giant's distant but powerful voice was heard over the castle walls, "Send out your bravest man for me to fight, or I will knock down these walls and kill everyone inside!" Unshaken, the young

woman stepped out through the castle gate to face her opponent.

She looked out across the clearing to the edge of the forest at the foothills of the mountain. Sure enough, there stood an enormous giant! For a moment, she just stood and stared at him from a distance. There was a gentle rise in the ground separating the two, so she could only see him from the waist up. It was difficult to tell exactly how big he was, but he was clearly taller than any man she had ever seen or heard of. She was struck with the same awe and terror all her predecessors surely felt at that moment. The giant was real. And facing him today, she would surely die. She considered running back inside the castle walls. But she had given her word to the good people inside to face their giant. So, with all the bravery she could muster, she began to walk tentatively toward the giant. And the giant began to walk toward her.

After a few paces up the gentle incline, she gained full line of sight to the giant, and could see his whole form. With this better angle, she could tell he was not nearly the 10 feet in height she first believed, perhaps only 7 feet tall. He was still massive, but at least now in human proportions. She was still no match for him, but at least she would meet her defeat at the hands of something recognisable.

With that element of the unknown removed, she was able to walk at a normal pace. And after a few more steps, the giant appeared to be smaller still. Was this some strange optical illusion? The giant appeared to be not much bigger than she was now. She might have a fighting chance! With this new hope, her pace quickened and with every step, she could tell it was no illusion. The giant was actually shrinking before her very eyes, and the faster she ran, the faster the giant shrank.

Her terror had turned to hope, and now that hope had turned to confidence. Certain of her victory, she was now in an all-out sprint toward the giant. As she reached the middle of the clearing she stopped and stood toe to toe with the giant, who was now only 12 inches tall and still shrinking quickly. She reached down and picked him up in the palm of her hand. She only had time to ask him one question before he shrank down to the size of a grain of sand and blew away in the next gust of wind.

"Who are you?" she asked earnestly.

The giant responded in a tiny and dwindling voice, "I am known by many names. To the Chinese, I am kǒngjù, to the Greeks, I am phobos, but to your people, brave one, I am known simply as...fear."