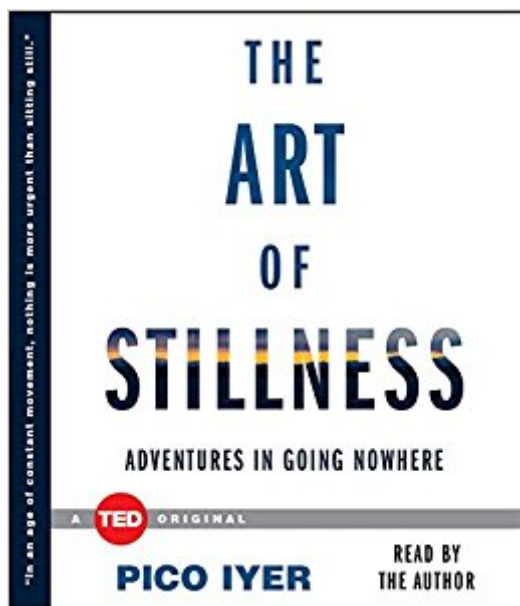


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# The Art Of Stillness: Adventures In Going Nowhere



## Synopsis

A follow up to Pico Iyer's essay "The Joy of Quiet," *The Art of Stillness* considers the unexpected adventure of staying put and reveals a counter-intuitive truth: The more ways we have to connect, the more we seem desperate to unplug. Why would a man who seems able to go everywhere and do anything "like the international heartthrob and Rock & Roll Hall of Famer Leonard Cohen" choose to spend years sitting still and going nowhere? What can Nowhere offer that no Anywhere can match? And why might a lifelong traveler like Pico Iyer, who has journeyed from Easter Island to Ethiopia, Cuba to Kathmandu, think that sitting quietly in a room and getting to know the seasons and landscapes of Nowhere might be the ultimate adventure? In *The Art of Stillness*, Iyer draws on the lives of well-known wanderer-monks like Cohen "as well as from his own experiences as a travel writer who chooses to spend most of his time in rural Japan" to explore why advances in technology are making us more likely to retreat. Iyer reflects that this is perhaps the reason why many people "even those with no religious commitment" seem to be turning to yoga, or meditation, or tai chi. These aren't New Age fads so much as ways to rediscover the wisdom of an earlier age. There is even a growing trend toward observing an "Internet sabbath" every week, turning off online connections from Friday night to Monday morning and reviving those ancient customs known as family meals and conversation. In this age of constant movement and connectedness, perhaps staying in one place is a more exciting prospect, and a greater necessity than ever before. *The Art of Stillness* paints a picture of why so many have found richness in stillness and what "from Marcel Proust to Blaise Pascal to Phillipe Starck" they "ve gained there.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

"This book isn't a meditation guide or a New-Age tract but rather a celebration of the age-old practice of sitting with no goal in mind and no destination in sight.... Rather than reading it quickly and filing it, readers will likely slow down to meet its pace and might continue carrying it around as a reminder." (Kirkus (starred))  
• (People)  
• (Brain Pickings)"A bustling paeon to the stationary life . . . Iyer's argument is an engaging amalgam of memoir, reportage, and literary essay . . . Iyer uses a fluid blend of argument and anecdote to make a persuasive and eloquent case that contemplating internal landscapes can be just as rich an experience as traveling through external ones. The fact that he has traveled to some of the world's most obscure corners only strengthens his credibility as a defender of stillness."  
• (Boston Globe)  
• A heartfelt manifesto to the benefits of ditching the cellphone and snipping up the frequent flier card, *The Art of Stillness* is anything but a self-help book or how-to guide for achieving inner peace.  
• (Associated Press)  
In lesser hands this tiny volume might be a throwaway of glib, a new age comfort-speak, but like Henry David Thoreau's equally brief classic on another seemingly mundane exercise â walking â Iyer's thoughtful nature leads him to peel back layer upon layer, nodding toward the infinite |. Plunging effortlessly beneath platitudes, this wafer-thin volume reminds us of what might just be the greatest paradox of travel â after all our road running, after all our flights of fancy to the farthest corners of the globe, after all our touring, our seeking and questing, perhaps, just perhaps, fellow travelers, there really is no place like home."  
• (New York Times Book Review)  
• beautiful little book. . . fills an important niche. . . Iyer wants to make the conscious practice of stillness palatable to everyone."  
• (Los Angeles Review of Books) --This text refers to an out of print or unavailable edition of this title.

Pico Iyer is a British-born essayist and novelist long based in both California and Japan. He is the author of numerous books about crossing cultures, among them *The Elephant Vanishes*, *The Long Goodbye*, and *The Art of Stillness*. An essayist for *The New Yorker* since 1986, he also publishes regularly in *The New York Times*, *The Guardian*, and many other publications across the globe. Pico Iyer is a British-born essayist and novelist long based in both California and Japan. He is the author of numerous books about crossing cultures, among them *The Elephant Vanishes*, *The Long Goodbye*, and *The Art of Stillness*. An essayist for *The New Yorker* since 1986, he also publishes regularly in *The New York Times*, *The Guardian*, and many other publications across the globe.

When I recount my trip to Corsica to others, I don't usually tell them about the one day that my husband and I literally didn't go anywhere and ate nothing more than a loaf of bread because we had used the day's budget to pay for an expensive cab fare the night before. This day was a significant turning point for me because it was when I realized that just being in my life at that moment was more important to seeing all the beauty that was around me. It was a private moment until now because reading Iyer's book "The Art of Stillness" did a beautiful job at celebrating the art of doing nothing. From an enviable globetrotter and travel writing, this made a big impression. While my husband has tried to teach me how to appreciate silence and slow down for years, it has been hard to rewire my busy over-achieving self to see value and not laziness or time wasted. Not to discredit my husband's efforts, but there is a real magic to Iyer's style of writing that got to me deeply. He is such a gifted writer that his book slows down your reading pace. I feel much more prepared to savor things like the zen poetry of *Rengetsu: Life and Poetry of Lotus Moon* or the art of calligraphy. While Iyer declines to consider himself a master of stillness, he brings in the stories of those that have inspired him most, like a French scientist who becomes a monk and Leonard Cohen who quieted his musical career to pursue silent meditation as a Zen monk for several years. If you are interested in slowing down... meditation... and told you just need to sit still and do nothing, this is a perfect book for you. It elevates the practice without exploiting or preaching it. By the end you will realize that this is a topic that this world Needs to hear!

I just finished reading the *Art of Stillness; Adventures in Going Nowhere* by Pico Iyer. What a stimulating yet calming and thoughtful book. The book is filled with insights both philosophical and scientific regarding the wisdom of taking time to slow down and celebrate one's own Sabbath. Iyer offers beautifully that not only will it be good for us but also we the reader will get more done, and done well, if we make time for stillness. The Book is filled with great characters and quotes. Dorothy in the *Wizard of Oz* offers: "If I ever go looking for my heart's desire again, I won't look any further than my own backyard. Because if it isn't there, I never really lost it to begin with." And the musician Leonard Cohen "Sitting still as a way of falling in love with the world and everything in it." And Iyer himself says "Talking about stillness is really a way of talking about clarity and sanity and the joys that endure." Accompanying this book and as a supplement to it is a Ted Talk, Here is link to Iyer's 15 minute Ted Talk

[http://www.ted.com/talks/pico\\_iyer\\_the\\_art\\_of\\_stillness?language=enl](http://www.ted.com/talks/pico_iyer_the_art_of_stillness?language=enl) heartily recommend feasting on this book about stillness, and unexpected pleasures and enjoy the advice of a travel

writer who provides an invitation to the adventure of going nowhere. In an age of distraction, nothing can feel more luxurious than paying attention. And in an age of constant movement, nothing is more urgent than sitting still. I give it 5 Stars. And heartily recommend it as a simple pleasure.

Pico Iyer is a travel writer, and a regular contributor to the New York Times, Harpers, Time, and other magazines. His is a lifestyle determined by deadlines and the rigours of travelling for work. I'm not a member of any church, and I don't subscribe to any creed; I've never been a member of any meditation or yoga group, he disclaims. The title of the book, *The Art of Stillness*, is a call to use stillness in a world he accurately describes as madly accelerating. If you have any doubts about this description, try recall when last you had nights off, or did no work at all on the weekend. (Reading business literature does qualify as work.) To get the most benefit from this book you should read it slowly and thoughtfully. It is a slim book on an important topic, best appreciated while unwinding on vacation. More and more of us feel like emergency-room physicians, permanently on call, says Iyer. We have mastered so many parts of our lives in the last half century, except how to enjoy living. Geography is fast coming under our control; we send messages around the world in seconds, parcels in hours and can talk to people anywhere easily and inexpensively. However, the clock seems to be exerting more and more tyranny over us. Iyer advocates regular periods of stillness, daily if possible. Times when we take a journey to Nothing. It is a short period when we retreat from our busy-ness, so that you can see the world more clearly and love it more deeply. In the second century, the Roman Emperor Marcus Aurelius pointed out that it is not our experiences that form us, but the way we understand them and respond to them. Being still puts distance between our present and our experience, so we can view experiences with clarity and sanity and reap the benefits that comes from that. The opportunity to distance ourselves helps experiences acquire the appropriate importance. All it involves is sitting still. Nothing more. Iyer reports that in his work world, Every time I take a trip, the experience acquires meaning and grows deeper only after I get back home and, sitting still, begin to convert the sights I've seen into lasting insights. When he attended retreat centres, he met bankers, teachers, real estate agents, people leading normal business lives who came the centres, just to be still for a few days. Kevin Kelly, the founding executive editor of *Wired* magazine is certainly one of the most articulate representatives for the technologies of our time. He wrote his latest book on the uses of technology to expand human potential while living without a smartphone, a laptop or a TV in his home. He explains that he keeps the cornucopia of technology at arm's

length so that I can more easily remember who I am. • Many in Silicon Valley observe what Iyer calls an "Internet Sabbath" – turning off their devices from Friday evening to Monday morning. It is telling that people who do so much to speed up the world see the benefit of slowing down regularly. At General Mills, a company with revenues of almost \$14b offered a seven-week programme to senior executive on "stillness." 80% reported a positive improvement in their ability to make decisions, and 89% that they were becoming better listeners. It is estimated that programmes like this save American businesses \$300b a year! The most telling report Iyer relays is a Stanford peer-reviewed study of the effect of stillness of military veterans. The author's husband, a Marine Corp Scout Sniper, undertook a 40-day personal trial to see if he has similar results. He reported that his hours of concentrated attention left unusually happy, and worrying him that he was softening. His adviser assured him that he was still hyper-alert only more selective about the "potential threats or targets to respond to." He reported his surprise that "something so soft could also make me so much harder as a Marine." On a flight from Frankfurt to Los Angeles Iyer was seated next to a woman who after a few pleasantries, sat in silence, doing nothing, for the next twelve hours. At the end of the journey, she explained that her job was exhausting, and she is beginning a five weeks of vacation in Hawaii. She was using the flight to get rid of the stress ready for her days of rest. Nothing for twelve hours. No reading, no watching movies, nothing. We are living in an age of constant movement that makes being still so much more urgent. The Art of Stillness is an important holiday read. Iyer offers the following summary advice: "Don't just do something. Sit there." Readability Light +--- Serious Insights High +--- Low Practical High +---+ Low \*Ian Mann of Gateways consults internationally on leadership and strategy and is the author of Strategy that Works. .

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