



East Lyn River, Lynmouth, Exmoor, Devon

Photograph by DJ Taylor / shutterstock

## By the East Lyn River

Peter Reason listens to Nature's message

**T**he river tumbles from the high moor down to the sea. I spend hours sitting on the banks, searching for words. What is the sound of the river?

It is not a roar, nor a babble, nor a rush. Like minimalist music, like a piece by Brian Eno, what appears simple opens its subtlety. It is both tuneful and percussive. For a moment a single note dominates, soon overwhelmed by overtones and undertones. A beat emerges, only to be drawn back into a plethora of rhythms. And as an orchestra fills a concert hall, so the sound of the river fills the steep wooded valley and in some strange way defines it.

After a while I stop looking for words and just attend to the river as a living being. Now it commands a different attention. "Listen," it says. "Stay and listen. Or, if you must move, walk along my banks and experience my voice."

So I listen.

Why do I try so hard to find words for the sound of the river?

It has no name; its quality is elusive. It is the sound of water pouring off the moor, tumbling over rocks, flowing past muddy banks, running down to the sea. It is the percussive explosion of a billion billion tiny waves. It is an enormous presence, a gift of grace that has me sitting here this cool morning filling the pages of my notebook with my response. I write because of this presence, as an act of confirmation, of homage, of love.

The sound of the river draws me to a pause. I no longer worry about who I am or what I am doing. I sit, writing the river, letting it flow directly through to the tip of my pencil. Like Siddhartha's river, it is teaching me to listen to the completeness and perfection of the world.

Be astonished, the poet Mary Oliver insists. I am astonished. R

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Peter Reason is a writer and teacher. His book *In Search of Grace: An Ecological Pilgrimage* will be published by Earth Books later this year.