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LONELINESS TO SOLITUDE Bond: Loneliness To Solitude
by Patrick Bond

People have been, and by all indications, will continue to be lonely at various times throughout their lives.

Volumes of books, numerous articles and even several songs have been directed at the subject of loneliness. The prevailing attitude toward loneliness is one of uneasiness.

Psychologists, psychiatrists, psychoanalysts and the like have been employed to aid us in alleviating this social ill.

Need this necessarily be the case? Loneliness is not a state of being which we should desperately attempt to avoid. Perhaps loneliness has a deeper function, one which is less painful and more optimistic for the human condition. In other words, loneliness should be viewed as an isolation for growth rather than one of pain.

Loneliness, unfortunately is rarely appreciated for the solitude which it provides. Afterall, isn't it difficult to understand your own feelings and become in tune with yourself unless afforded the time to be alone to do so? Only in solitude can this understanding come to be, a solitude which is necessary and beneficial for human development.

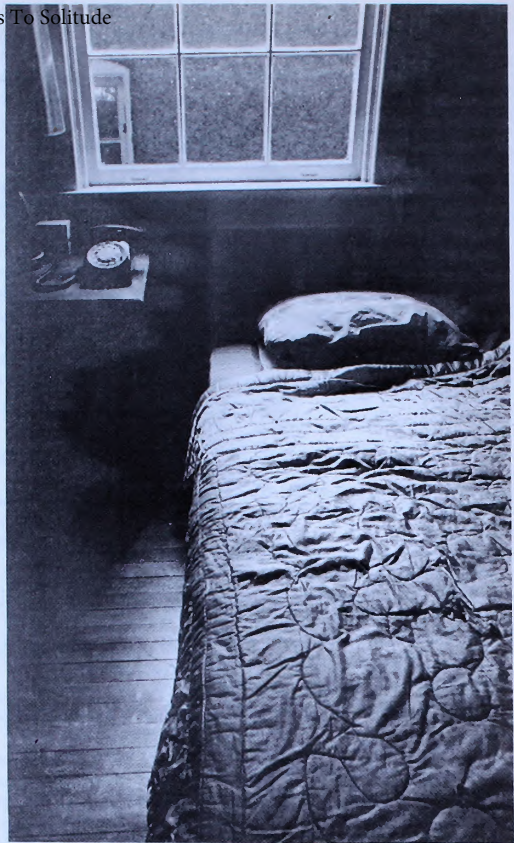
Loneliness, we know, is a reality of the human condition. It is a physical, emotional or psychological isolation. It is through this condition that we are compelled to transcend loneliness and achieve solitude — a space which we create in order to discover ourselves. In order to experience solitude of heart, we must stop running from our own loneliness and confess to ourselves that it is a limiting experience which is present in our lives. By converting our loneliness into solitude we are preparing ourselves for personal growth through achieving a closer contact with ourselves, with others, and ultimately with God.

Loneliness is the cause for much severe personal suffering in contemporary society. It is a threatening feeling of being alone. We attempt to eliminate this painful void in our lives by introducing constant distractions into our daily routine. Society eases our suffering by providing modern technological distractions such as the television, the radio, and the telephone. These distractions leave little time for us to "watch," "listen," and get in touch with our own feelings.

As a result of our fear to experience ourselves, we run away from our own loneliness and fail to honestly confess to ourselves that loneliness is present in our lives. In our attempts to avoid being lonely we desperately cling to others, thereby hoping to "heal" the silent void in our lives.

Many people falsely assume that sharing activities and interests with another person will alleviate their own loneliness. Often times this type of a relationship develops within a marriage. The two people depend on each other to fill the empty "space" in their lives. Although this relationship satisfies their need to belong, it actually does very little to eliminate the true loneliness which they experience in their lives. The mere company for another person is not a cure for loneliness. Often in a relationship, the two individuals need each other so desperately to eliminate their own loneliness that they fail to give each other adequate room to grow and achieve inner solitude. Loneliness is a universal human experience and not, as many believe, simply a problem of the single person.

It is, however, through the experience of loneliness which we foster a contemplative solitude that enables us to achieve a deep personal encounter with ourselves. This inner or self-reflection allows us to release ourselves from the distractions of this world. This solitude is not an escape from the realities of this world; on the contrary, the very function of solitude is to realize the world with a deeper awareness. Solitude allows us time to contemplate the issues in our ever changing world and formulate more enlightened responses. Although we withdraw from the world, we are actually able to come in closer contact with it due to the very fact that we are now able to dismiss the distractions of the world and concentrate more fully on the realities of life.



— Bob Rivoire

But we must first strive for a receptive solitude, one which is realized through the development of an inner sensitivity of the individual. Inner sensitivity stems from our individual ability to close ourselves off from the world and other human beings. It is only after a "closedness" is established in our own life that we are able to reach an openness with others. It is this closedness in solitude which allows us to become present to ourselves. We are thus better able to be present to others and through this, encounter and discover the other while expanding our own solitude.

Loneliness entails strictly a selfish gratification of our own needs. Solitude, on the other hand, makes us more compassionate and understanding toward the needs and desires of others while enabling us to better respond to the world in which we live.

Loneliness then is an essential experience for all people. Loneliness provides the means by which we are able to achieve a receptive solitude of heart, which in turn frees us to achieve an inner peace or union with ourselves. An inner peace which is a prerequisite for achieving a union and community with others and is paramount in establishing a relationship and ultimate union with God. It is a solitude which allows us to become detached from this world and attached to a more perfect entity — God.

Solitude, therefore, is a necessary experience in every individual's life if they are to personally grow toward establishing relationships with fellow human beings.

Solitude truly is a positive and essential experience for personal growth. It is a creative response to human loneliness — a response that challenges us to discard the illusions and distractions of this world and strive to reach out and discover ourselves, others, and the ultimate human fulfillment — God.