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In the Midst of Life - Loneliness, 1946.

WRHS
IN THE MIDST OF LIFE --- LONELINESS
By
Dr. Abba Hillel Silver



At
The Temple

It is frequently very good to be alone. Periods of solitude are good for the soul. You can collect your thoughts better. You can think through a problem better when you are alone. You can take stock and check up on yourself. You can slow down the tempo and reduce the volume of sound which beat in upon your mind and your heart in the busy, crowded clamorous life of today. It is good to go into a retreat, as it were, for a period each day or each week when you shut out the world, when we become released, as it were, from the tentacles like those of an octopus, when we can become spiritually and mentally released in the gracious solitude of our own inviolate world.

A quiet hour with yourself is a tonic for your soul. It was a very wise man who said: "Solitude is the audience chamber of God." It is true, because if we do seek communion with the deeper realities of life, it is only in the solitude, in the quiet sanctuaries of our own unhurried and not disconcerted hearts that we can find it. God does not speak to us in crowds, because His still small voice is drowned out in a crowd.

There are, of course, people who are afraid to be left alone with themselves. They have no word of their own to which to retreat. Like children they are afraid to be left alone. They must always be with others. They must always be in groups, in crowds, parties. They must always attach themselves to other people. They have no independent self-sufficient lives of their own. They can't bear to be alone. They are so empty and so insecure. And for such people, a period of solitude is a period of isolation, of boredom, a vexation. You know such people.

Now, for a good life, we must train ourselves to enjoy and appreciate solitude just as we train ourselves to appreciate music, for solitude has a music of its own.

The Quakers, for example, that very interesting religious sect, begin their worship in a long silence, a deep, long encompassing silence. And out of that

vibrant and living silence during which they reach out for communion, comes to them the revelation of the inner light and the strong voice of confident faith.

Unfortunately the crashing din of our cities and the cataracts of noises and the impetuous demands which city life sends even to the privacy of our homes -- all that drowns out the quieter voice of life and nature and these vibrant living silences of meditation, of contemplation, of communion which are mightier than song.

We must train ourselves for the uses of solitude. Now those people who are not afraid to be alone will never be afraid to stand alone. To be worthy of one's humanity, one must be prepared when necessary, to fight alone. One must be prepared to be opposed, to be rejected, to be condemned, but still cling to one's own convictions and integrity to carry on alone. Now the man who is not too dependent upon others, upon the company of others or the good will and appreciation of other people, the good opinion of others -- I believe the man who is not too dependent upon these things, who can find strength in solitude is better equipped to fight the good fight.

The great liberators and the courageous pathfinders of humanity in all ages were isolated men as a rule, misunderstood and frequently hated and persecuted. But they could stand alone, for they were not afraid of solitude, of being with themselves, with their cause, of being alone with God.

He who is too eager to be with people at all times, to be welcomed by them, to be regarded well by them always -- such a man will soon lose heart when the struggle gets too bitter and the enmity of man grows too strong.

So in training yourself to be alone, you must also train yourself to stand alone when necessary. And then too, it is important to realize -- all people -- and the sooner they realize it, the better, that there are trials in the world that a man must endure alone. There are burdens that men must carry alone, problems

man must solve alone. That is life. You can't help it.

"It is good for man that he bear the yoke in his youth

"Let him sit alone and keep silence, because He hath laid it upon him."
God has a way ^{of} laying things upon us. And it is good to be alone, to be silent and labor with our problem alone.

Jacob, our forefather, who gave his name to the people of Israel, was not found worthy to become the Patriarch until he had repented alone through a long night with the angels of darkness, doubt, fear, repented and vaquished them.

There are things which we alone must do. We cannot and dare not unload on others these tasks, however we might wish it, and however eager they might be to take them on. For being alone is standing alone, is bearing the burden alone.

But all that is not loneliness. While it is frequently good to be alone, it is not good always to be alone. Man was not meant to be alone. Adam was created alone, one man, one being. But the stature of man in the world -- and soon God realized it is that "It is not good for man to be alone," that a man needs a helper, a mate for him. Man is a gregarious animal. Man's fulfillment and destiny is linked with other people. Man realizes himself in society.

You find a very fine and penetrating observation in the Book of Koheleth:

"Two are better than one, for if they fall, the one can lift up his companion, but if a solitary person falls, there is no companion to lift him up."

In this difficult road of life which we all have to travel, which is full of pitfalls, obstacles, often the climbing is very hard and often we fall. It requires companionship to make that road joyous for us, someone whom we can lift up. Two are better than one. "Either companionship or death" said the Rabbis. One of the admonitions which our sages gave to their disciples was "Do not separate yourself from the group." A man who separates himself from the group, who tries always to remain isolated, removed from contacts of men, cuts himself off like a branch from a tree. He is no longer part of a living organism.

A medieval Hebrew poet said: "Stay close to the group for the wolf snatches the sheep that wanders away from the flock." Living and working in a community with and for people, honorable and companionably is one of the best ways to escape loneliness. The best years of our lives, and the least lonely are those years when we are busiest, doing work of the world, doing our work, establishing ourselves in our businesses and professions, and actively participating in the life about us. These are our busiest years, the years of many responsibilities, when we are most needed -- our happiest years. Those are the best years of our lives, the happiest, not necessarily the easiest, but they are the happiest. When demands and pressures begin to ease, when we are no longer needed as much, then loneliness begins to creep in. When our fledglings spread their wings and fly away, our nest becomes empty and we begin to be lonely. When our children grow up, leave our homes and set up their own homes, we begin to feel: What are we going to do with our time, with our hands? Or when we reach a time of life when we have attained a satisfactory measure of success in business, in our calling, our profession, we no longer feel the goal of unattainment, when our days and our tasks and rounds of recreation become routine and repetitious -- it is then that men and women begin to experience long stretches of loneliness, an indefinable spiritual malaise, when lacking nothing of material needs, comforts one comes to feel empty, dissatisfied, dissociated, like being adrift with no port in sight. That is loneliness.

Greater still is the loneliness when one has lost some dear one, one with whose life one was inseparably linked. You come to feel bereft, solitary and desolate. It seems all of life falls away. Nothing but the aches remain. There is growing grief, and the utter, utter loneliness.

To all men and women, "when it is time to be old, to take in sail" said the poet, to all men and women comes this unwelcome loneliness to sit beside them. Friends we knew are gone. Gone are the old familiar people. Young people seek

companionship among people of their own generation. Customs and manners change. Life moves swiftly by. It carries away many cherished things, Memories take the place of hopes. People become so lonely they don't know what to do with themselves.

We must prepare ourselves against this inevitable loneliness. We must build barricades against it. It cannot be wholly over-come. ~~IX~~ That isn't the kind of life which God gave to man. But it can be greatly mitigated. I spoke just now of memories which come to take the place of hopes. Lonely hearts feed on memories. But see to it that these memories are proud and glowing memories which will be as marrow to our old age, not bitter memories, not memories of the things which we might have done, the kind of people we might have been. They are not memories. They are ghosts, ghosts of things thoughtless, shameless, blind, or the great and good things which we left undone. This kind of ghost memory devastates old age instead of ennobling it. Let there be clear fires when the embers of memories are stirred. They will warm our old age and they will lessen the bitterness of loneliness. Make sure during your active years that you will have many things to remember which you will never never want to forget. That is one way to build barricades against loneliness. You will have a peaceful, gracious lovely world to live in always regardless of what happens.

A well stocked mind is also a defense against loneliness. If you can lay up for yourself a granary, as it were, in your mind which will feed your days with interest which will ~~repx~~ refresh your life with alertness and awareness then it will keep us ^{posted} ~~hooked up~~ with what is happening in the world about us and will keep you in the very stream of life. Always your mind can remain young and you can dwell in the gracious companionship of great minds all the days of your life. We can retain, if we want to, our intellectual ~~curios~~ curiosity and our eager quest for knowledge to the very end. With a good book one is seldom alone. The trouble with people today is that they read so much trash that their minds are filled with

rubbish.

You can build a barricade against loneliness too by building up friendships -- not many acquaintances -- because these fall away, but a few true and loyal friends. Earn them and deserve them and you may be fortunate to have them with you for most if not for your whole life and these friends will stand guard with you against loneliness.

Build up in your life a great love which the years will deepen and sweeten and make increasingly more cherished. Blessed are the people who can walk down the years together in deepening love and devotion. Two hearts come to understand one another, cherish one another more and more as the years pass.

We all know that beautiful poem of Robert Burns, one of the sweetest poems about companionship in old age:

WRHS
"John Anderson my jo, John,
When we were first acquaint
Your locks were like the raven,
Your bonnie brow was brent;
But now your brow is bald, John,
Your locks are like the snow;
But blessing on your frosty pow,
John Anderson my jo."



"John Anderson my jo, John,
We clamb the hill thegither,
And mony a canty day, John,
We've had wi' ane anither:
Now we maun totter down, John,
But hand in hand we'll go,
And sleep thegither at the foot,
John Anderson my jo."

That kind of live is a citadel which shuts out loneliness.

Another way to build a barricade against loneliness is to have dreams, ideals and to have new dreams when the old fall away. Never reconcile yourself to the fact that the remaining days of your life are few. Undertake new things, new tasks, new dreams. I know a professor who once began to study Greek when he was 70. He knew that his days upon earth were limited. What did that matter?

He wasn't concerned with the end. He was concerned with the living.

The Rabbis told the story of an old man who was planting fruit trees which would bear fruit long after he was gone. He was asked, why should a man who is as well along in years as plant fruit ~~xxxxx~~ trees, the fruit of which you will never eat? What is that? I enjoy planting trees, said the old man. My grandfather planted trees whose fruit I enjoyed. My grandchildren will enjoy the fruit of the trees which I will plant. I love to plant fruit trees.

When you dream, have pleasant dreams. If it isn't dreams, perhaps you can find deep interest in some hobby to keep your mind and hand at work, busy, creative. Do something with your heart and mind and hands and there is the feeling that we are creating something, however modest, however small. "In the sight of God, really there is nothing small."

Do not sit and wait for the dropping of the curtain.

And finally, good friends, barricade yourself against loneliness in our faith in God. With God no one is ever alone. "In the days of my youth," the poet sang, "I remembered my God and He hath not forgotten my age." It is only when you lose your faith that the world becomes desolate - no altars, no sanctuaries, no long in the night. In the midst of life we need not be in loneliness. Never permit yourself to become useless. Never permit yourself to become idle. Never permit your world to become unnecessary. Never permit yourself to become driftwood. To the very end, carry on in pride with a brave heart in spite of all the vicissitudes of fortune. Carry on. Learn how to be alone. Learn how to stand alone. Learn how to solve your problems alone. Learn how to escape loneliness by building up barricades with a well-stocked mind, and friendships and loyalties, in deep unshaken faith in God and in yourself and finally -- work with people in the world, and for people. There are endless opportunities for that kind of work which nourish the heart and give one a sense of belonging, a sense of being needed, a sense of being part of the continuation of life.

The last verse of the poem which I read to you last week is a good verse with which to close a sermon on loneliness: "When I am asleep and when I am awake ... God is with me always.. I need not be lonely.



1) It is frequently good to be alone.

Periods of solitude are good for the soul.

You can collect your thoughts/better when you are alone.

You can think thru a problem better.

You can take stock and check up on yourself.

You can slow down the tempo and reduce the volume of sound which beats in upon your mind & heart in the busy, ~~noisy~~ crowded, clamorous life of today.

It is good to go into a retreat, as it were, for a period each day, or each week, when we shut out the world, and we are released from its tentacles, like those of an octopus, and we are mentally and spiritually relaxed in the precious solitude of our own ~~world~~ ^{isolate} ~~exclusive~~ world.

~~##~~ A quiet hour with yourself is a tonic to the soul.

It was a very wise man who declared: "A solitude is the audience-chamber of God."

If we seek communion with the deeper realities of life - it can only be in solitude, in the quiet sanctuary of an unhurried and ^{not} disconnected heart.

God does not speak to us in crowds where His still, small voice cannot be heard.

2) There are of course people who are afraid to be left alone with themselves.

They have no world, then, over to which to retreat.

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Like children they are afraid to be left alone.
They must always be with others—in groups—in crowds.
They must always attach themselves to other people.
~~Else they don't know what to do with themselves.~~
They cannot bear to be alone. They are so empty and
so insecure.

For them ~~solitude~~ a period of solitude, is a period of
isolation, a boredom and a ~~punishment~~ ^{torment}.

3/ We must train ourselves to enjoy and appreciate
solitude as we do for the enjoyment and appreciation
of music. For Solitude has a music of its own.

The Quakers begin their worship in a long silence deep
and encompassing, and out of that vibrant ^{living} silence
where they reach out for consciousness, comes the
revelation, the inner light and the strong voices
of confident faith.

The croaking din of the city, and the caterwaul of its waxes
and its importunate demands, which it sends even into
the privacy of our homes, have all but drowned out
the quieter voices of life and nature, and the vibrant silences
of meditation, mightier than any song.

4/ Those who are not afraid to be alone will not be afraid
to stand alone.

To be worthy of our humanity we must be prepared, when (3)
necessary, to fight alone - to be opposed - to be rejected -
to be condemned, and still, clinging to our convictions
and our integrity - to carry on alone!

He who is not too dependent on others, on the company
of others, on their good-will, or their good opinion, who
can find strength in solitude, ~~in his~~ better equipped
to fight the good fight.

The great liberators and pathfinders of mankind were
~~isolated~~ ^{isolated} men, as a rule, misunderstood and hated
and persecuted, but in them they could stand alone -
for they found strength in men not afraid of solitude
- or of being with themselves - their work, their conscience
and their cause.

He who is too eager to be with people all the time, to
be welcomed by them, to be regarded well by them al-
ways - will soon ~~lose~~ ^{lose} heart when the struggle
gets too bitter and the enemy of men too strong.

5. A man must also come to understand early in life
that there are trials which he must endure alone,
and problems which he must solve alone, and
burdens which he must carry alone. That is life!

"It is good for a man that he bear the yoke in his youth.
Let him sit alone and keep silence, because he hath

laid it upon him."

⑤ Jacob was not ready - Isaiah -

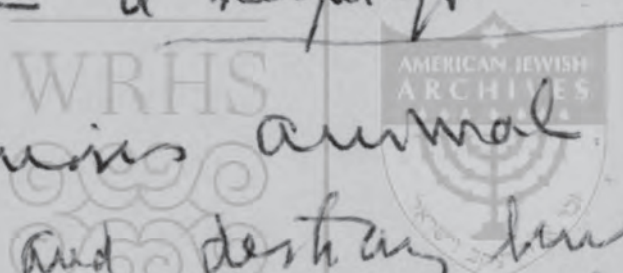
There are things which we alone must do. We cannot
and dare not unload upon others, however we want
it, & however eager they might be to accept them.

6. But, if it is frequently found to be alone - it is not
found ~~to~~ always to be alone.

Man was not meant to be alone.

Adam - / 321 p310 also 2/6 1/1 -

- / 321 250 - a helper for him - meet for him



- Man is a gregarious animal.
- His fulfillment and destiny linked with others -
- He realizes himself in society.
- Isaiah - "Two are better than one, for if they fall,
the one can lift up his companion, but if
a solitary person falls there is no companion
to lift him up."
- In his difficult road thru life, full of ups and
downs, man requires companionship -

- Isaiah 11 - Isaiah 11

- Isaiah 11 - Isaiah 11 - branch cut off
from a tree.

moose in Egra - - - - - Wolf snatches
the sheep - wanders away from flock -

7/ Living and working in a community with and for people,
honorably and companionably, is one, the best way's
to ~~prevent~~ escape loneliness - (Faust)

8/ The best years of our lives, and the best lonely ^{are those}
when we are busiest, doing the work, the world, ^{and} ^{our} ^{work}
as families, ^{establishing} as bus- as our ^{superiors}, -
and actively participating in the life about us.

When we have many challenges - and many responsibilities -
and ^{when we} are most needed - these are the best years of our
lives - and the happiest - but warning the
lonely!

When the demands and the pressures begin to
ease up - and we are not needed so much -
then loneliness begins to creep in -

When our fledglings spread their wings and fly
away - and the nest is empty -

When children set up houses of their own -
or when we reach a time, perhaps when we have

- attained a satisfactory measure, success, and no longer
feel the goad of unattainment -
- When days and tasks and rounds / sensations
become routine and ~~repetitions~~ repetitions -
- Then men & women come to experience long
stretches of loneliness - an indelible
sp. malaise - when lacking nothing & material
needs or comforts - one feels ~~for~~ ^{empty} ~~emptiness~~ -
disoriented, a ship adrift and no port
in sight -

9/ Greater still is the loneliness which comes with the
loss of some dear one. - one with whose life we were
inseparably linked. We feel bereft, ~~shattered~~
solitary and desolate. It seems as if the whole
of life ~~has~~ ^{has} fallen away - and nothing remains but the
aching bones, and the gnawing grief, and the
other, other loneliness.

10/ To all men and women, ~~as they advance in years~~
when "it is time to be old, to talk in sail" -
~~comes the~~ ^{comes the} ~~unwelcome~~ ^{unwelcome} ~~visitor~~ ^{companion}
loneliness. ~~It is not~~ ^{It is not} to be handled then.
Friends they keep as rare. Some are the old
familiar faces. ~~They~~ ^{They} ~~seem~~ ^{seem} ~~to~~ ^{to} ~~be~~ ^{be} ~~gone~~ ^{gone}
their own generations. Customs & manners change.

Life moves swiftly by and carries away many of
cherished things - and
Memories take the place of hopes, - ~~and~~ People can become
so lonely - I don't know what to do with us.

11). We must prepare ourselves against this inevitable loneliness
Build barricades against it.

It cannot be wholly overcome - It can be greatly mitigated

① I rely on Memories. Lonely hearts feed on them.
But let them be good, glowing memories, which
will be as narrow to ^{our} old age.

Not bitter memories - the things I regret have done -
the man I regret have been - shorts of cruel,
and blind and shameful things done - a
great good deed left undone -

Let them cheer fires when the embers are strewed

They will warm our old age - They will brace

the littleness, loneliness
Make sure that you will have many things to remember
which you will not wish to forget

12). A well-stocked mind is a defense against L.

There is a rich panoply to feed the our days
with interest, and reward them with abilities
and answers. It will keep us busy

up with the world about as, in its the very midst (8)
of the stream of life.

For our names can remain young - and dwell as
the gracious & unforgetting companions of great minds
and spirits the world over.

We can retain our intellect, curiosity, and our
eager quest for knowledge to the very end - with a good
book on a never lonely?

13/ Build up friendships for times of loneliness -

not many acquaintances. They fall away
But a few true & loyal friends - earn them and
deserve them - ~~and~~

You may be fortunate and ~~to~~ have them for most
of all of your life - They stand guard against loss

14/ Build for a love that defies the years - John Anderson (1229)

15/ Try to have new dreams for old - (p. 285) ^{song}

16/ Hobbes @ at 70 began to study French (b) 15' 15 - (c) ^{song} ~~work~~

17/ And hold on to your faith in God -

with God no one is ever alone.

"In the days of my youth I remembered my God

And He hath not forgotten my age"

When you lose faith - you are in a desolate world -

no altars - no sanctuaries - no song!

18/ have let journey become ① useless ② late (19
③ unnecessary to now are ④ driftwood

- To the very end carry on - in pride - like a raw seal



John Anderson my jo, John,
When we were first acquaint
Your locks were like the raven,
Your bonnie brow was brent;
But now your brow is bald, John,
Your locks are like the snow;
But blessing on your frosty pow,
John Anderson my jo.

John Anderson my jo, John,
We clamb the hill thegither,
And mony a canty day, John,
We've had wi' ane anither:
Now we maun totter down, John,
But hand in hand we'll go,
And sleep thegither at the foot,
John Anderson my jo.

NEW DREAMS FOR OLD

-- Cale Young Rice

Is there no voice in the world to come crying,
"New dreams for old!
New for old!"?
Many have long in my heart been lying,
Faded, weary, and cold.
All of them, all, would I give for a new one.
(Is there no seeker
Of dreams that were?)
Nor would I ask if the new were a true one:
Only for new dreams!
New for old!

For I am here, halfway of my journey,
Here with the old!
All so old!
And the best heart with death is at tourney,
If naught new it is told.
Will there no voice, then, come -- or a vision --
Come with the beauty
That ever blows
Out of the lands that are called Elysian?
I must have new dreams!
New for old!