

Solitude

Solitude is not a state of withdrawal or of simply being alone; solitude, spiritually, is never only negative in character, a mere turning away, a denial of the social; rather it is—or aspires to be—an enhanced state of being, an achieved state of wholeness, one which makes possible a liberation of consciousness and the attainment of love.

There is a preliminary solitude, an inwardness, which calls for a re-collecting of oneself, a bringing home, as it were, of one's thoughts and memories, one's wayward emotionality and unresolved tensions. Gathering these up, letting them be heard and then re-integrating oneself anew with them is the task of this initial solitude.

There follows the need to "make an island of oneself," a spiritual enclave, but one that is fundamentally different in quality and intensity from that holding back of something of oneself which characterizes so frequently one's relationships with others, however otherwise close or intimate they might be. This need for privacy, in sharp contrast to that which informs spiritual isolation, arises from a fear of self-disclosure and thereby shows a concern for preserving something of oneself that can stand apart from judgement by others. Privacy is a means of self-protection; solitude of self-

formation—the attaining to a central integrity of one's being that is free from fear.

This stage of solitude renders one invulnerable to any threat from others, for here one no longer has any little interests of one's own to be challenged. At the same time, however, it renders one completely vulnerable to failure, for if one does not succeed in going beyond this isolation one may very well lose both one's relations with others and oneself.

But why, then, this aloneness with its terrible risk of loss and annihilation? Why not be entirely with others spiritually, say, as a member of a congregation?

The answer: a member of a congregation can relate only to a divinity made personal; warm and comforting as this religious embrace might be, it cannot—indeed does not even aspire to—attain the One.

And so solitude: now become the ground for that “flight of the alone to the alone,” one's highest spiritual aspiration.