

Text for Audio “Alone not lonely”

I seem to be hearing about loneliness often these days. There are many different reasons for this. It's partly due to the social restrictions related to Covid 19 which mean we spend time with fewer people than usual. Some of us have had self-isolate, too. It's partly because the shorter days and less pleasant weather often makes us shelter in our own homes at this time of year. There are also some significant festivals in this period which usually are prompts to gather with family, friends and community members but this year, it's just not possible.

Spending more time alone, or with very few people, does not always need to equal loneliness, though. Here are some ideas that might help change your attitude towards being alone, even if only for some of those times. The author, Natasha Pulley, commented: “Being solitary isn't a disease that needs a cure.”

One of the *5 Ways to Wellbeing* encourages us to 'be connected'. There are different ways to be connected even if alone, such as planning in a regular telephone call with someone or writing and sending a postcard. Another way to feel connected is to pay attention to sights and sounds around you created by other beings or the weather, for example. The Chinese Buddhist monk, Sheng-yen, wrote about his long period on solitary retreat in a hut far away from others: “Even though I seemed to be alone in a small, enclosed room [...] there were many insects around the hut who created all kinds of sounds in the evening.”

The food writer, Nigella Lawson, has talked about cooking for one, after the death of her first husband: "I always think it's a pity when people say they don't cook anymore 'because it's just me' — I thoroughly believe it's important to cook for yourself. I cooked for myself for a long time [...] because symbolically it's important to say you'll take care of yourself." Even if she was just having bread and cheese, she would set it up on a nice plate. Giving attention to cooking or laying simple food out on a colourful plate can bring

some mindfulness or focussed awareness into our day which is another of the *5 Ways to Wellbeing*.



Time alone can give us a chance to explore being silly or creative, away from the gaze of other people. The writer, Julian Hawthorne, talked about memories that flood in when he is alone: "It may [...] plunge one into an environment compared with which New York or London would appear deserts. For we take memory and imagination with us. The seabirds that scream overhead or waddle along the margins of the surf; the [...] forms of twisted cedars; the rustle of sea-grass in the wind; the interminable percussion of the breakers." A 3rd *Way to Wellbeing* is to keep learning or have a go at something different. I try to learn a new word every week then often have a go writing a short poem just to use that word. You could put the radio on to a station that's not your usual choice and listen to a different type of music, presenter or programme every other day- learning something new that way.

Many religions encourage times of solitude and silence as a way to get to know yourself and your faith better. If you don't follow a religion, solitude and silence could help you explore becoming surer about yourself, your aspirations and your relationships with others. Some strong and compassionate characters had to spend a lot of time alone under strict prison restrictions: such as Nelson

Mandela and the suffragette, Alice Paul. From their writings and actions, these periods seemed to give them more determination to improve society for the benefit of all people, not just themselves.

I like the reminder by William Rounseville Alger that many animals regarded as powerful and admired by humans, are often alone: "The higher we look on the scale of strength and individuality, the more isolated we see that the nature and habits of creatures are. The eagle chooses her eyrie in the bleakest solitude; [...] the leopard prowls through the jungle by himself."

These are merely some suggestions to try to think a little differently about being alone.