

Loneliness & the Torah of Solitude

Tikkun Erev Shavuot

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| 1. Genesis 2:18 18 And the Lord God said, "It is not good that the man is alone; I shall make him a helpmate opposite him." | בראשית פרשת בראשית פרק ב (יח) וַיֹּאמֶר יְקֻקֹּק אֱלֹהִים לֹא טוֹב הָיִית הָאָדָם לְבַדּוֹ אֶעֱשֶׂה לוֹ עֶזְרָא כְּגִדְדִי: |
| 2. Leviticus 13:45-46 45 And the person with <i>tzara'ath</i> [leprosy], in whom there is the lesion, his garments shall be torn, his head shall be unshorn, he shall cover himself down to his mustache and call out, "Unclean! Unclean!" 46 All the days the lesion is upon him, he shall remain unclean. He is unclean; he shall dwell isolated; his dwelling shall be outside the camp. | ויקרא פרשת תזריע פרק יג (מה) וְהִצְרוּעַ אֲשֶׁר בּוֹ הִנֵּגַע בְּגָדָיו יִהְיוּ פְרָמִים וְרֹאשׁוֹ יִהְיֶה פְרוּעַ וְעַל שָׂפָם יַעֲטֶה וְטָמֵא טָמֵא יִקְרָא: (מו) כָּל יְמֵי אֲשֶׁר הִנֵּגַע בּוֹ יִטָּמֵא טָמֵא הוּא בְּדָד יֵשֵׁב מִחוּץ לַמַּחֲנֶה מוֹשְׁבֵוֹ: ס |
| 3. Rashi, Leviticus 13:46 He shall dwell isolated: ...Our Sages said: "Why is he different from other unclean people, that he must remain isolated? Since, with his slander, he caused a separation [i.e., a rift] between man and wife or between man and his fellow, he too, shall be separated [from society]."- [Arachin 16b] | רש"י, ויקרא פרשת תזריע פרק יג בדד ישב :...ואמרו רבותינו מה נשתנה משאר טמאים לישוב בדד, הואיל והוא הבדיל בלשון הרע בין איש לאשתו ובין איש לרעהו, אף הוא יבדל: |
| 4. Genesis 32:25 25 And Jacob was left alone, and a man wrestled with him until the break of dawn. | בראשית לב (כה) וַיִּזְוֶר יַעֲקֹב לְבַדּוֹ וַיֵּאבֶּק אִישׁ עִמּוֹ עַד עֲלוֹת הַשָּׁחַר: |
| 5. Deuteronomy 33:28-29 28 And Israel dwelled safely and alone as Jacob [blessed them], in a land of grain and wine; also, their heavens will drip dew. | דברים לג (ח) וַיִּשְׁכֵּן יִשְׂרָאֵל בְּטַח בְּדָד עַיִן יַעֲקֹב אֶל-אֶרֶץ דָּגָן וְתִירוֹשׁ אֶף-שָׁמַיִם יַעֲרֹפוּ טֹל: |
| 6. Rashi, Deuteronomy 33:28 Safely and alone: Every single individual [will dwell safely]-each man under his own vine and his own fig tree. [And their security will be so sound, that] they will have no need to live together in one group, because of the enemy. | רש"י דברים פרק לג בטח בדד: כל יחיד ויחיד איש תחת גפנו ותחת תאנתו מפוזרין ואין צריכים להתאסף ולישב יחד מפני האויב: |
| 7. Psalms 4:9 9 In peace together, I would lie down and sleep, for You, O Lord, would make me dwell alone in safety. | תהלים פרק ד (ט) בְּשָׁלוֹם יִחַדּוּ אֲנִשְׁכָּחָה וְאִישׁן כִּי אַתָּה יְקֻקֹּק לְבַדּוֹ לְבַטַח תּוֹשִׁיבֵנִי: |
| 8. Rashi, Psalm 4:9 | רש"י תהלים פרק ד |

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| <p>alone in safety: As (in Deut. 33:28): "secure and alone, the fountain of Jacob." It is an expression of safety and tranquility, that he need not station troops with him.</p> | <p>לבדד לבטח - כמו (דברים לג) בטח בודד עין יעקב לשון מבטח ושקט הוא שאינו צריך להושיב גייסות עמו:</p> |
| <p>9. Numbers 23:9</p> <p>9 For from their beginning, I see them as mountain peaks, and I behold them as hills; it is a nation that will dwell alone, and will not be reckoned among the nations.</p> | <p>במדבר פרשת בלק פרק כג</p> <p>(ט) כִּי מֵרֵאשִׁית צִרִים אֶרְאֶנּוּ וּמִגְּבוּעוֹת אֲשׁוּרֵינוּ הֵן עִם לְכַדָּד יִשְׁכֵן וּבְגוֹיִם לֹא יִתְחַשֵּׁב:</p> |
| <p>10. Midrash Tanayim, Deuteronomy 33</p> <p>It is not like the <i>badad</i> (alone) that Bilam said – "They are a nation that dwells alone" (Numbers 23:9) and not like the <i>badad</i> that Jeremiah said – "Alone I sat" (Jeremiah 15:17), but like that which Moshe said – "The Lord will lead them alone" (Deut. 32:12).</p> | <p>מדרש תנאים לדברים פרק לג</p> <p>בודד לא כבודד שאמ' בלעם (במד' כג ט) הן עם לבדד ישכון ולא כבודד שאמ' ירמיה איכה ישבה בודד (איכה א א) אלא כבודד שאמ' משה ה' בודד ינחנו (לב יב):</p> |
| <p>11. Paul Tillich, <i>The Eternal Now</i></p> <p><u>II Our language has wisely sensed these two sides of man's being alone. It has created the word "loneliness" to express the pain of being alone. And it has created the word "solitude" to express the glory of being alone. Although, in daily life, we do not always distinguish these words, we should do so consistently and thus deepen our understanding of our human predicament.</u></p> <p>In the twenty-fifth Psalm we read -- "Turn thou to me and be gracious; for I am lonely and afflicted." The psalmist feels the pain of loneliness. We do not know the character of his particular loneliness, but we know the many faces that loneliness can have.</p> <p><u>We have all experienced some of them. Most widespread is our loneliness after those who helped us to forget that we are alone have left us, either through separation or death. I refer not only to those nearest to us, but also to those human beings who give us the feeling of communion, groups with which we have worked, with which we have had social contact, with which we have had spiritual communication. For many people such loneliness becomes a permanent state and a continuous source of profound melancholy. The sighing of innumerable lonely people, all around us and over the world, fills the ears that are opened by love. But let us also consider those among us who are surrounded by friends and neighbors, by co-workers and countrymen, who live in family groups and enjoy the communion of the sexes -- everything that those others do not have. And let us ask -- are they without the pain of loneliness? Is their aloneness covered up by the crowd in which they move? If we can number ourselves among these people, we might answer the question as follows: I never felt so lonely as in that particular hour when I was surrounded by people but suddenly realized my ultimate isolation. I became silent and retired from the group in order to be alone with my loneliness. I wanted my external predicament to match my internal one. [...]</u></p> <p>But again, there are those whose real treasures are great enough to find expression, to be understood and received, and yet who have this terrifying experience of ultimate loneliness. In such moments they break through the surface of their average Life into the depth of man's predicament. [...]</p> <p>Then, there is that ultimate loneliness of having to die. In the anticipation of our death we remain alone. No communication with others can remove it, as no other's presence in the actual hour of our dying can conceal the fact that it is our death, and our death alone. In the hour of death we are cut off from the whole universe and everything in it. We are deprived of all the things and beings that made us forget our being alone. Who can endure this loneliness?</p> <p><u>III Loneliness can be conquered only by those who can bear solitude. We have a natural desire for solitude because we are men. We want to feel what we are -- namely, alone -- not in pain and horror, but with joy and courage. There are many ways</u></p> | |

in which solitude can be sought and experienced. And each way can be called "religious," if it is true, as one philosopher said, that "religion is what a man does with his solitariness." One of these ways is the desire towards the silence of nature. We can speak without voice to the trees and the clouds and the waves of the sea. Without words they respond through the rustling of leaves and the moving of clouds and the murmuring of the sea. This solitude we can have, but only for a brief time. For we realize that the voices of nature cannot ultimately answer the questions in our mind. Our solitude in nature can easily become loneliness, and so we return to the world of man.

Solitude can also be found in the reading of poetry, in listening to music, in looking at pictures, and in sincere thoughtfulness. We are alone, perhaps in the midst of multitudes, but we are not lonely. Solitude protects us without isolating us. But life calls us back to its empty talk and the unavoidable demands of daily routine. It calls us back to its loneliness and the cover that it, in turn, spreads over our loneliness. Without a doubt, this last describes not only man's general predicament, but also, and emphatically, our time. Today, more intensely than in preceding periods, man is so lonely that he cannot bear solitude. And he tries desperately to become a part of the crowd. Everything in our world supports him. It is a symptom of our disease that teachers and parents and the managers of public communication do everything possible to deprive us of the external conditions for solitude, the simplest aids to privacy. Even our houses, instead of protecting the solitude of each member of the family or group, are constructed to exclude privacy almost completely. The same holds true of the forms of communal life, the school, college, office and factory. An unceasing pressure attempts to destroy even our desire for solitude. But sometimes God thrusts us out of the crowd into a solitude we did not desire, but which nonetheless takes hold of us. The prophet Jeremiah says -- "I sit alone, because thy hand was upon me." God sometimes lays hands upon us. He wants us to ask the question of truth that may isolate us from most men, and that can be asked only in solitude. He wants us to ask the question of justice that may bring us suffering and death, and that can grow in us only in solitude. He wants us to break through the ordinary ways of man that may bring disrepute and hatred upon us, a breakthrough that can happen only in solitude. He wants us to penetrate to the boundaries of our being, where the mystery of life appears, and it can only appear in moments of solitude. There may be some among you who long to become creative in some realm of life. But you cannot become or remain creative without solitude. One hour of conscious solitude will enrich your creativity far more than hours of trying to learn the creative process.

12. Exodus 24:1-7

1 And to Moses He said, "Come up to the Lord, you and Aaron, Nadab and Abihu, and seventy of the elders of Israel, and prostrate yourselves from afar.
 2 And Moses alone shall approach the Lord but they shall not approach, and the people shall not ascend with him."
 3 So Moses came and told the people all the words of the Lord and all the ordinances, and all the people answered in unison and said, "All the words that the Lord has spoken we will do."
 4 And Moses wrote all the words of the Lord, and he arose early in the morning and built an altar at the foot of the mountain and twelve monuments for the twelve tribes of Israel.
 5 And he sent the youths of the children of Israel, and they offered up burnt offerings, and they slaughtered peace offerings to the Lord, bulls.
 6 And Moses took half the blood and put it into the basins, and half the blood he cast onto the altar.
 7 And he took the Book of the Covenant and read it within the hearing of the people, and they said, "All that the Lord spoke we will do and we will hear."

שמות פרשת משפטים פרק כד

(א) וְאֶל מֹשֶׁה אָמַר עֲלֵה אֵלַי יְקֹוֹק אֹתָהּ וְאֶהְרֵן נֹדֵב וְאַבְיָהוּא וְשִׁבְעִים מִזְקְנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל וְהִשְׁתַּחֲוִיתֶם מֵרָחֹק: (ב) וַיִּגַּשׁ מֹשֶׁה לְבַדּוֹ אֶל יְקֹוֹק וְהֵם לֹא יָגִשׁוּ וְהָעַם לֹא יַעֲלוּ עִמּוֹ: (ג) וַיָּבֵא מֹשֶׁה וַיְסַפֵּר לָעַם אֵת כָּל דְּבָרֵי יְקֹוֹק וְאֵת כָּל הַמִּשְׁפָּטִים וַיַּעַן כָּל הָעַם קוֹל אֶחָד וַיֹּאמְרוּ כָּל הַדְּבָרִים אֲשֶׁר דִּבֶּר יְקֹוֹק נַעֲשֶׂה: (ד) וַיִּכְתֹּב מֹשֶׁה אֵת כָּל דְּבָרֵי יְקֹוֹק וַיִּשְׁכֹּם בַּבֹּקֶר וַיִּבֶן מִזְבֵּחַ תַּחַת הָהָר וַשְּׁתִים עָשָׂר מִצְבֵּה לְשֵׁנַיִם עָשָׂר שִׁבְטֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל: (ה) וַיִּשְׁלַח אֶת נְעָרָיו בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל וַיַּעֲלוּ עֹלֹת וַיִּזְבְּחוּ זִבְחֵי שְׁלָמִים לַיְקֹוֹק פָּרִים: (ו) וַיִּקַּח מֹשֶׁה חֲצִי הַדָּם וַיִּשֶׂם בְּאֵגוֹת וְחֲצִי הַדָּם זָרַק עַל הַמִּזְבֵּחַ: (ז) וַיִּקַּח סֵפֶר הַבְּרִית וַיִּקְרָא בְּאָזְנֵי הָעַם וַיֹּאמְרוּ כָּל אֲשֶׁר דִּבֶּר יְקֹוֹק נַעֲשֶׂה וְנִשְׁמָע:

13. Mishnah 3:2

R. Hananiah ben Teradion said: if two sit together and there are no words of Torah [spoken] between them, then this is a session of scorners, as it is said: "nor sat he in the

משנה מסכת אבות פרק ג

רבי חנינא בן תרדיון אומר שנים שיושבין ואין ביניהן דברי תורה הרי

seat of the scornful...[rather, the teaching of the Lord is his delight]" (Psalms 1:1); but if two sit together and there are words of Torah [spoken] between them, then the Shekhinah abides among them, as it is said: "then they that feared the Lord spoke one with another; and the Lord hearkened and heard, and a book of remembrance was written before Him, for them that feared the Lord and that thought upon His name" (Malachi 3:16). Now I have no [scriptural proof for the presence of the Shekhinah] except [among] two, how [do we know] that even one who sits and studies Torah the Holy One, blessed be He, fixes his reward? As it is said: "though he sits alone and [meditates] in stillness, yet he takes [a reward] unto himself" (Lamentations 3:28).

זה מושב לצים שנאמר (תהלים א') ובמושב לצים לא ישב אבל שנים שיושבין ויש ביניהם דברי תורה שכינה ביניהם שנאמר (מלאכי ג') אז נדברו יראי ה' איש אל רעהו ויקשב ה' וישמע ויכתב ספר זכרון לפניו ליראי ה' ולחושבי שמו אין לי אלא שנים מנין שאפילו אחד שיושב ועוסק בתורה שהקדוש ברוך הוא קובע לו שכר שנאמר (איכה ג') ישב בדד וידום כי נטל עליו:

14. Avot de-Rabbi Natan A 8

Someone who sits and studies Torah alone – his reward is collected in heaven, as is said, let him sit alone and be patient, for God has laid it upon him." They offered a parable: to what is this similar? To a person who had a small child. He left the child and went to the market. The child rose, took a scroll, placed it between his knees, and sat and studied it. When his father returned from the market, he said, "Look at my young son whom I left when I went to the market! What did he do? All on his own, he learned [what to do]: he took the scroll, placed it between his knees, and sat and studied it!" Thus, you have learned that even the individual who sits and studies torah alone – his reward is collected in heaven.

אבות דרבי נתן נוסחא א פרק ח

יחיד יושב ועוסק בתורה שכרו מתקבל במרום שנאמר ישב בדד וידום כי נטל עליו (איכה ג' כ"ח) משלו משל למה הדבר דומה לאחד שהיה לו בן קטן הניחו ויצא לשוק עמד ונטל את המגילה והניחה בין ברכיו והיה יושב והוגה בה. כיון שבא אביו מן השוק אמר ראו בני קטן שהנחתיו ויצאתי לשוק מה עשה מעצמו למד ונטל את המגילה והניחה בין ברכיו והיה יושב והוגה בה. הא למדת שאף יחיד שיושב ועוסק בתורה שכרו מתקבל במרום: