

## Solitude: Living from Our Core

So many of us long for inner solitude and contentment. Yet, few of us are prepared to do what is required to live in this peaceful and contented state. Innocently, we are distracted by the real world, and most of the time, our hurried pace seems normal, constructive; even necessary. But in quieter moments, when we slow down, or at least slow down significantly, we see that beneath all the illusions, all the distractions, all the rationale for continuing the way we are; lies the longed-for contentment.

All of us have 'mental chatter'. To a large extent, our society values it, and indeed this chatter, this distraction, has its place. It just is, for the source of all our thinking is the same. Once we understand that, we are free to experience the possibility of inner solitude.

### What is solitude?

For some of us, there are negative images of solitude. We may equate it with simply being alone (not in itself a negative thing), or we may think of it as solitary confinement, isolation, being punished, or deprived of the familiar and safe, disconnected from other people or even ourselves... and so on. But there is a deeper, more profound meaning within solitude, and it is this deeper meaning I want to talk about...

When we look at the Latin root of the word, it is a combination of *solus* – meaning 'alone', and *tude* – meaning 'forming, giving shape to'. Similarly, in solitary we also find the Latin root *ary* – meaning 'belonging to, connected with, derived from, made of'. Now a different image is possible, because it is within a moment of aloneness or *solus* that a clear view is possible – a newness and connection is formed; the genesis of possibility. Thus, in an ordinary everyday experience such as sitting quietly with a cup of tea, and seeing something new about a situation that has been puzzling us; all that was disparate and divided within us is made clear. All confusion is gone and, as it were, we are whole again. This powerful moment of rejuvenation is the core within us, allowed to see at last.

### Being touched by the moment

We can all relate to this simple experience. In such moments, for most of us, it is a moment of luck. Even in the frenetic pace and noise of business life we can be touched by an inner moment of solitude – a moment of discernment and clarity - where once there was division and complexity. Being touched in this way is uplifting, solitary and at the same time profoundly universal.

These moments are not the preserve of sitting still with your favourite beverage! They can happen even during times of extreme activity and physical endurance... in my younger years I did a lot of cross-country running; often experiencing an inner connection – a wholeness that impelled me to run even more. I wanted to experience it more and had a hidden expectation that if only I could keep running; I would. Now, I appreciate the fact that it was not the running that created the experience. It was what was within, as I ran – simply a moment of clear and uncluttered thinking. It was a moment where I left expectations, judgements, opinions and aspirations aside and experienced myself; whole once again. I was once highly involved in and having fun with coaching and competition trampolining. My coach (a world champion for ten years and now retired) once said "Anyone can do a trick or two, but only champions can perform a routine. And routines are pure grace in motion." I wanted to live these words. I was not satisfied with tricks. I wanted pure grace in motion; a routine. Sometimes I experienced this grace, which had nothing to do with the tricks or the difficulty of the routine, but everything to do with opening myself up to, and experiencing; the inner solitude of grace in motion. For me life is like this. A life lived based on solitude, an inner seeing - a life lived with clarity from within. Life in motion.

### Living life from our core

A life of solitude requires us to LISTEN beyond the chatter of our mental world. In solitude we are invited to leave behind all the excuses not to be quiet within. In solitude we are invited to put aside all the reasons to believe that our disturbance, our anguish, comes from outside. It invites us to acknowledge that we are the authors of our own distress or inner peace, and that external factors have no meaning unless we invest them so. Inner solitude is a state of living and invites each of us to find grace in motion. To live a solitary life, with a clear view, in harmony from within, requires us to listen deeply, beyond the reasoning and the rationale. It requires us to be conscious and awake to our ability to obscure our view and create reasons for discord. Life – whether it is family and friends dying, loss of job or financial security, responsibilities that seem to overwhelm us, the fragile nature of world events or inter-personal relationships - they are all moments where we are invited to an inner stillness, a moment of grace and a solitude within. A life lived gracefully from our core. ■ ■