

THE ART OF BEING ALONE

*Solitude is my home,
Loneliness was my cage*

RENUKA GAVRANI

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Introduction

Dr. Vivek Murthy, former Surgeon General of the United States, recently wrote, “*Loneliness and weak social connections are associated with a reduction in lifespan similar to that caused by smoking 15 cigarettes a day*”. In fact, there is a huge amount of evidence showing individuals who report feelings of loneliness are more likely to have health problems later in their life.

When the idea of writing this book came to my mind, I decided that I wouldn’t write a book that speaks data but rather a book that speaks from one heart to another heart. That’s what you need, right? You don’t care how many people in the world are lonely. You care about how you can deal with your loneliness.

Well, that’s the first problem. Why is loneliness considered such a taboo in our society? **Why do you hate the idea of being with yourself so much that ‘the time you spend with yourself is now considered as loneliness’** and there should be some instant hacks and techniques to deal with it? How can the idea of being with yourself make you feel scared?

Honestly, I have no authority to ask these questions. I wasn’t very nice to myself either. I used to think that there was something wrong with me and that was the reason people left me. And if I can fix that ‘wrong’ thing in me, perhaps, people will stay.

Though, after spending a long time on my own, figuring out my personality and thoughts, I realized that I am a pretty good person. I like being with myself. And I always did. I always loved spending time in my room, reading my books, and wandering to a distinct place that only I am aware of. That always felt luxurious to me.

I dug deeper into my past, studying why I hated the idea of being on my own, and why I tried to make friends when I never wanted a big group. I am an introvert and I like having only a few people around me. People who I truly love. I don’t like to hang out with people who I call friends and bitch about behind their backs.

But then, the question traveled back to ‘*why I wished for the same things that I always hated?*’

And the answer was ‘**acceptance in the society**

When I was still in high school, there was a girl in my class who was all alone in a class of 150 students. I cannot say why no one talked to her because:

- a) She was from a different section
- b) I was a new student

Yet, those same people became my friends. Even I had friends from her section. But she, who had been studying there forever, didn't have any friends. I used to see her eating alone, sitting alone in the last row of the class so that she was hidden, and even going to the washroom alone. *Fun fact; Girls would rather control their pee than go to the washroom alone.* But here she was, all alone.

And as much as people made fun of her, most students felt sorry for her as well. I remember I asked one of my friends about her. I didn't know her name so I said, '*Hey why does that girl from section A always seem to be alone?*'

And my friend said, '*I don't know. I never talked to her either but she has always been like this since I joined the school. Other students say she is a weirdo, you know like...you know'*

This conversation is the answer to why we fear loneliness. The fear of loneliness was injected into our minds since we were kids. We have learned that the kid who eats alone, sits alone, and has no friends is pathetic. In every book or movie, the kid who is eating alone, and has no friend is always featured as a weak character who needs to be saved. Pick any book or movie, and you will observe a common pattern around loneliness in all of them. These people were shown as easy targets or an object of your sympathy.

No one wants to be seen as a 'weirdo' hence, our dread of being alone. We don't want people to think of us as a weirdo, someone who needs to be saved or mocked. Someone who is unwanted or doesn't fit in with the cool kids.

I don't think I need to say a word about how much we give weight to others' opinions of us. It's our life but we live as per the rules of society. In fact, so many people don't take action on their goals because they are worried about what *people would think of them. What if people laugh at them? What if they fail and everyone sees them as a failure?*

Our lives have become a collection of others' thoughts and judgments. The fear of judgment is enrooted so deep within us that before anyone else, we start judging ourselves. David Foster Wallace says, "***You'll stop worrying what others think about you when you realize how seldom they do.***"