

Wonders in the Darkness:

A Conversation on Isolation and Solitude with Joy Ladin and Steve Greenberg

The Soul of the Stranger, Joy Ladin, p. 3.

I wasn't just my parents' child; I was supposed to be their son. I wasn't just a kid on the block; I was supposed to be one of the boys. I wasn't just a Jew; I was supposed to be a Jewish male. And so, even though I was surrounded by people who thought they knew me, I grew up feeling invisible, afraid, and alone.

But I was alone with God. All the things that cut me off from other people—my lack of a body that felt like mine, my inability to fit into gender categories, my sense of being utterly, unspeakably different—made me feel closer to God. God knew who and what I was. God had created me, fitting my mismatched body and soul together. God was always there, day and night, as I tried to live and sometimes tried to die. We were an odd couple, me struggling with a body that didn't feel like mine, God existing beyond all that is, was, and will be. But when it came to relating to human beings, God and I had something in common: neither of us could be seen or understood by those we dwelt among and loved.

Joy Ladin p. 147.

Few people identify as transgender, but most of us are aware of being different in ways that might be hard for other members of our communities to understand or accept. No one perfectly fits the roles our communities assign us, or the categories that define who is us and who is them. Each of us is made in the image of the God who does not fit human categories or roles. All of us, like God, dwell among and love those who cannot fully know or understand us. And even those of us who, right now, fit our roles and communities, know that we will change: that we, like God, are not only what we seem to be right now, but are also what we will be. God's assumption is right: because the sense of being different is part of being human, whether or not we have had the experience of being treated as gerim, we all know—and, whether or not we wish to admit it, we all have—the soul of the stranger.

Ibn Arabi, *Alone with the Alone* by Henry Corbin p. 95

“He who knows himself know *his* Lord. Knowing one's self, to know *one's* God; knowing one's Lord, to know one's self...**it is alone with him alone, in syzygic unity, that it is possible to say thou.**”

Leviticus 25:23

But the land must not be sold beyond reclaim, for the land is Mine; you are but strangers and residents with Me. **וְהָאָרֶץ לֹא תִמְכַּר לְצַמְחָת כִּי־לִי הָאָרֶץ כִּי־גֵרִים וְתוֹשְׁבִים אַתֶּם עִמָּדִי:**

Magid of Dubnow

[But] If strangers then not residents, if residents then not strangers — the simple meaning is: Me and you (אַתָּם עִמָּדִי – you with me). If you feel like strangers in this world...then I am a resident with you and my shechina dwells among you. If you behave like residents in this world...then I am a stranger among you.

R. Baruch of Medzybozh

Because you are strangers – To the degree that a person feels distanced, like an outsider or stranger in this world of falseness (בעולם השקר) to that degree will the person feel close (מקורב לשמים) to heaven.

The Lonely Man of Faith, Rabbi Joseph B. Soloveitchik

THE NATURE OF the dilemma can be stated in a three-word sentence. I am lonely. Let me emphasize, however, that by stating "I am lonely" I do not intend to convey to you the impression that I am alone. I, thank God, do enjoy the love and friendship of many. I meet people, talk, preach, argue, reason; I am surrounded by comrades and acquaintances. And yet, companionship and friendship do not alleviate the passional experience of loneliness which trails me constantly. I am lonely because at times I feel rejected and thrust away by everybody, not excluding my most intimate friends, and the words of the Psalmist, "My father and my mother have forsaken me," ring quite often in my ears like the plaintive cooing of the turtledove. It is a strange, alas, absurd experience engendering sharp, enervating pain as well as a stimulating, cathartic feeling. I despair because I am lonely and, hence, feel frustrated. On the other hand, I also feel invigorated because this very experience of loneliness presses everything in me into the service of God. In my "desolate, howling solitude" I experience a growing awareness that, to paraphrase Plotinus's apothegm about prayer, this service to which I, a lonely and solitary individual, am committed is wanted and gracefully accepted by God in His transcendental loneliness and numinous solitude.

Psalm 88: A song. A psalm of the Korahites. For the leader (for dancing and response) a talent of Heman the Ezrahite.

O LORD, God of my deliverance, when I cry out in the night before You,
let my prayer reach You; incline Your ear to my cry.

For I am sated with misfortune; I am at the brink of Sheol.

I am numbered with those who go down to the Pit; I am a helpless man
abandoned among the dead, like bodies lying in the grave of whom You are mindful no more,
and who are cut off from Your care.

You have put me at the bottom of the Pit, in the darkest places, in the depths.

Your fury lies heavy upon me; You afflict me with all Your breakers.Selah.

You make my companions shun me; You make me abhorrent to them; I am shut in and do not
go out.

My eyes pine away from affliction; I call to You, O LORD, each day; I stretch out my hands to
You.

Do You work wonders for the dead? Do the shades rise to praise You?Selah.

Is Your faithful care recounted in the grave, Your constancy in the place of perdition?

Are Your wonders made known in the netherworld, Your beneficent deeds in the land of
oblivion?

As for me, I cry out to You, O LORD; each morning my prayer greets You.

Why, O LORD, do You reject me, do You hide Your face from me?

From my youth I have been afflicted and near death; I suffer Your terrors wherever I turn.

Your fury overwhelms me; Your terrors destroy me.

They swirl about me like water all day long; they encircle me on every side.

You have put friend and neighbor far from me and my companions out of my sight.

תהילים פ"ח: שִׁיר מִזְמוֹר לְבִנְיָ קָרַח לְמִנְצַח עַל־מַחֲלַת לְעֲנֹת מְשֻׁפִּיל לְהִימָן הָאֲזַרְקִי:
יְהוָה אֱלֹהֵי יְשׁוּעָתִי יוֹם־צַעֲקוֹתִי בַלַּיְלָה נִגְדָה:
תָּבוֹא לִפְנֵי תִפְלֹתֵי הַטֶּה־אֲזַנְךָ לְרִנָּתִי:
כִּי־שָׁבְעָה בְרָעוֹת נִפְשִׁי וְחַיִּי לְשֹׂאֵל הַגִּיעוּ:
נִחַשְׁבֹתִי עִם־יֹרְדֵי בּוֹר הָיִיתִי כְּגֹבֵר אִין־אֵיל:
בַּיַמִּים חָפְצִי כְמוֹ חֲלָלִים | שְׁכַבְי קֹבֵר אֲשֶׁר לֹא זָכַרְתָּם עוֹד וְהִמָּה מִיָּדָךְ נִגְזְרוּ:
שְׁתַּנִּי בְּבוֹר תַּחֲתִיּוֹת כְּמַחְשָׁפִים בְּמַצְלוֹת:
עָלִי סְמִכָה חֲמַתְךָ וְכַל־מְשַׁבְּרֵי עֲנִית סְלָה:
הֲרַחֲמֵנִי מִיַּדְעֵי מִמֶּנִּי שְׁתַּנִּי תוֹעֵבוֹת לָמוּ כָּלֵא וְלֹא אֲצֵא:
עֵינֵי דָאֲבָה מִיָּי עֲנִי קְרֹאתֶיךָ יְהוָה בְּכָל־יוֹם שִׁטְחֹתִי אֵלֶיךָ כַּפִּי:
הַלַּמְתִּים תַּעֲשֶׂה־פֶלֶא אִם־רָפְאִים יִקְוֹמוּ | יוֹדוּךָ סְלָה:
הִי־סִפֵּר בְּקֹבֵר חֲסִדְךָ אֲמוֹנֹתְךָ בְּאֲבָדוֹן:
הִינִדַּע בַּחֲשׂוֹךְ פֶּלֶאךָ וְצִדְקֹתְךָ בְּאֶרֶץ נִשְׁיָה:
וְאֲנִי | אֵלֶיךָ יְהוָה שִׁנְעַתִּי וּבִבְקָר תִּפְלֹתִי תִקְדָּמְךָ:
לָמָּה יְהוָה תִּזְנַח נִפְשִׁי תִסְתִּיר פָּנֶיךָ מִמֶּנִּי:
עֲנֵי אֲנִי וְגִנַּע מִנְעַר נִשְׁאֲתִי אֲמִיךָ אֶפְוֹנָה:
עָלִי עֲבְרוּ חַרוֹגֶיךָ כְּעוֹתֶיךָ צְמַתוֹתַי:
סְבוּנֵי כַּמִּים כָּל־הַיּוֹם הִקִּיפוּ עָלַי יָחַד:
הֲרַחֲמֵנִי אֱהָב גִּרַע מִיַּדְעֵי מַחֲשָׁה: