

To Ponder:

by Henri Nouwen

Henri Nouwen is one of my favorite spiritual writers. I like his down to earth awareness that recognizes as humans we not only have flaws but it is in sharing those flaws that we create community. In his book, *Reaching Out: The Three Movements of the Spiritual Life*, his first segment addresses reaching out to ourselves, or within, and discovering who we are as human beings. Nouwen speaks of the overwhelming loneliness that exists in our society and the emphasis placed upon it by the media that surrounds us daily. He says, "Loneliness is one of the most universal sources of human suffering today... and that it is frequently expressed as the root [cause] not only of an increasing number of suicides but also of [addiction] and psychosomatic [illness]" Nouwen goes on to say that "our culture has become most sophisticated in the avoidance of pain; physical, emotional and mental. We have become so used to this state of anesthesia that we panic when there is nothing or nobody left to distract us."

"By running away from our loneliness and by trying to distract ourselves with people and special experiences, we do not realistically deal with our human predicament. We go on extended searches to keep from feeling our aloneness and often unrealistically expect others in our lives to take away our loneliness. No friend or lover, no husband or wife, no community or commune will be able to put to rest our deepest cravings for unity and wholeness.

Nouwen is saying to us that there is another option. It is to embrace our aloneness. "To live that spiritual life we must first find the courage to enter into the desert of our loneliness and to change it by gentle and persistent efforts into a garden of solitude. This requires not only courage but also a strong faith. The movement from loneliness to solitude, however, is the beginning of any spiritual life because it is the movement from the restless senses to the restful spirit, from the outward-reaching cravings to the inward-reaching search, from the fearful clinging to the fearless play."

From the perspective of a spiritual guide, "we are to see that pouring little bits of water on our dry land does not help. However, with patience, "we will find a living well if we reach deep enough under the surface of our complaints. If we listen carefully to our restless hearts, we may start to sense that in the midst of our sadness there is joy, that in the midst of our fears there is peace, that in the midst of our greediness there is a possibility of compassion and that indeed in the midst of our irking loneliness we can find the beginnings of quiet solitude."

Reading: Meditations and Mandalas

by Nan C Merrill

Blessed are you who listen to the indwelling
Divine Guest whispering
the Word that is etched upon every
open heart.

Blessed are you who create a sacred garden
within through
times spent in silence communing with
the Friend.

Blessed are you who cultivate your heart-soil
with prayer and kind actions.
For your contemplation will become blessing;
you will radiate peace and beauty as
you live and work in the world.

You will become a mirror reflecting the light
and love of the Beloved
to all you meet.

Sharing...

a word...

A phrase...

a reflection...