

Solitude Facilitates Self-realisation

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Solitude serves a dual purpose: To facilitate thinking and non-thinking. Hence, it is undertaken in two parts.

The Novice: As a new-comer trying to learn about spirituality, you will need to take in certain information that is both new and subtle. In order to imbibe this information, you are required to be free from all distractions. You will put in considerable effort to figure out how you should conduct yourself in this world. To understand and follow new concepts regarding this, you will have to apply yourself with the dedication of a diligent student. For this, you need to be alone.

You could take to solitude in small doses or big; either by joining an ashram to study for a few years or find some private space and time in your own home. But in either case you will necessarily need to remove yourself from external distractions so that you can pursue your studies. Otherwise, you will find it difficult to concentrate; even more importantly, you will also not be able to pursue spiritual exercises. The call of indulgences will become strong and the books will be put away. The young sapling of interest in spirituality needs to be protected from worldly excitements by the fence of solitude.

The Karmi (actor): Having understood the concepts clearly, as a spiritual practitioner you will go into the world and employ new understanding in an attempt to verify and sharpen it. Earlier, young boys would leave the gurukul and go out and pursue their individual vocations, for instance. This is not the stage of solitude but that of action, of contact with the world. Being in the thick of affairs is what is necessary for further development.

The Introvert: As you develop further, imbibing the concepts you had learned in and through life, you feel the need for further study and reflection. So, you withdraw from the world and start giving yourself more and more to solitude to apply yourself to thinking about life. It is not that you wish to be away from worldly contacts but you find solitude more conducive to

studies. Like the beginner you again withdraw to solitude in varying degrees. It is known as *vanaprasthashram*. The *Aryanakas* of the Vedas are written for such an individual. Slowly you take to the study of the Upanishads as your understanding matures. Contrary to popular belief, this stage has got nothing to do with age. It has to do with understanding and maturity. **The Meditator:** As you continue to study, you become more and more introvert. Desires and wants from the world drop. You become more objective. Not getting involved in any of the happenings. Your happiness is not dependent on things going a particular way. So you can take to silence. You start meditating to remove the last traces of desire and merge with the eternal Self. From thinking you have now moved to non-thinking. You seek solitude. In that solitude, you fix your mind in single-pointed concentration and through the practice of this meditation you realise the Self, reaching the goal of human existence. Premature practice of this will prove detrimental to a person's spiritual as well as material welfare. Solitude is required by the spiritual sadhak or practitioner in two distinct stages of the journey: The beginning and the end. In the vast periods of the middle, solitude would be counterproductive. It will suppress and frustrate the mind and obstruct spiritual progress. But taken judiciously, at the right time, in the right dose, it gives an impetus to the pursuit of the Self. It brings about Self-realisation.

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- Dr. Janki Santoke