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Solitude

Enjoy this excerpt from my book, *This New Day: Self Creation—The Wisdom of an Idiot*.

There is a place in your mind between "you and yourself," between the you who is here reading, and the you who is. The you who is, knows no one time, and feels everything always exactly as you do. When you are still, open and quiet you can hear yourself. The you in the present can hear its other self, know itself in full, and become complete and untroubled, but such large ears take time to grow and the luxury of a life which lets one listen. Often enough survival demands all our attention be in the here and now, so the door is closed and we no longer listen, lest we become distracted and lose the most important game of all. Many things other than survival can occupy us, fill this space between you and yourself and provoke inner deafness. In fact that is why many of those things are sought. We seek to avoid ourselves and call it "diversion," "entertainment" or perhaps even "study." Like a student who has not studied and skips class to become more behind, and skip again, we no longer wish to hear ourselves. We don't want to hear what we have to say to our absent student: that we no longer trust him to listen.

There is a place in your mind between "you and yourself," and many things fit there. A host of products and pursuits fit there which can serve our addiction to inner fear and deafness. Every book, every video game, neurosis, duty, obsession, TV show, argument, meeting, phone call, friend, worry, piece of art or music can fill this space and remove us from ourselves. The thing which fits the space best is our attention. We pay attention to something in the most literal sense. Attention costs. When we dig in and focus our mind on an object or idea we exclude all else and pay a terrible price. We contribute a sacrifice of great value to accomplish this deed. We can no longer hear ourselves, we sacrifice ourselves so we can attend our attention!

Solitude is the answer, the antidote to this condition which has befallen or addicted us. We busy people have become poor students in our industry, we are often playing hooky, skipping class, the only class taught by a teacher whose opinion and grade matters, the only teacher who is always worth listening to: you! It is time to get caught up and grant ourselves the greatest and most necessary self-indulgence which might clarify direction, point and purpose. Solitude is selfish because it does not lie. It hears and so indulges self. It sees each wretched sacrifice which betrayed self, made self inaudible. Now the swimmer releases to the undertow and is carried to a horizonless sea, gray and black, the blue has sunken too far to recognize, this deaf sea from your ugly weather gathers black clouds which would not hear until now; you call the rain and find it withheld. No longer afraid of a cloud or gentle black rain, I see the clouds have held me out to the sea to swallow, and a whirlpool spins empty and furious, raging scorned and ignored, the sea twists angrily emptying the air of every reason, until I hear the voice of the sea. No brown undertow is this, but a whirlpool which must be funneled through your depths until you know what you have spent in your sacrifice. Then you may hear, and be grateful to the sea for what cost it had to bear, silent in sacrifice to attention. I surrender to the whirlpool and listen

silently, gladly, for I am grateful to the sea for not having abandoned me, and I know why she is angry, so I beg she forgive my absence and show her I wish only to repay her, soothe her, and listen to her angry scolding. How could I not be angry with myself? It is after all my sea I have spurned, sacrificed, forced to live silent and submerged. The sea has heard my prayer and the hungry whirlpool collapses, expanding inside out, now a fountain, and I am tossed into a welcoming cloudless tropical sky, and received warmly by a new, kind sea. In solitude we hear the cost of creation and gladly listen to pay the bill. The sea holds no grudge and wants only for you to know and love her again, listen again. Solitude is our gift to her as our attention was hers to us. Not to indulge her selfish nature is to be condemned to carry your unmended heart slung clumsily over your shoulder, and feel life as a weight and a burden. How sad and tired is a man who has not found his undertow and followed it, to discover it is the sure current of his happiness.

What creates such an undertow? What makes a mysterious sea of fear and delight of what we ourselves have done? Why should such a thing be a mystery? Man has learned to hide in plain sight. To hide, of all people, from himself! Each compromise, each lie to oneself to ease rather than change, each ordinary work-a-day swallowing of a speck of poison seems well within our ability to survive, even enjoy, but here we hide. A small pain is easily forgotten and can be withstood for a time, and then some more, but eventually it will display a cumulative effect which will decrease the "spiritual buoyancy" of the person who bears it. By the time this strange brown weight has taken hold years later, the habit of destruction has become invisible, unnoticed, counted on and familiar. It is now well-hidden in broad daylight, accepted and beyond reproach. This is how we become a mystery to ourselves; we learn to tolerate the origins of our misery, we make them ordinary.

Once this trap is set we soon have reason to avoid ourselves as the poison accumulates and work, obsession, recreation, drugs, duty or more sacrifice, which now furthers both emotional debt and denial, fill the space between "you and yourself" and the mystery deepens, along with its attendant sickness. Sickness, weight and the stifling despair of inner deadness and ill-defined anxiety, accompany any long period where we live without hearing ourselves. However slowly, pain will emerge in an attempt to sharpen our hearing.

Solitude is an environment which is conducive to ending this, and a thousand other ways and reasons we have found to ignore ourselves. Fear unravels its mechanism, injuries and mistakes begin to speak, reveal themselves, with our mind unresisting and judgment openly silent we are embraced by our unrelenting solitude. Every demon and its god crawl quietly, stealthily up beside your ear to confess. Soon you will cry their tears, since they feel as but one too pitiful to accept until now. A welcome silence which does not judge, but listens, is characteristic of the most perfect solitude. No forgiveness, which is only judgment concealed, is needed, only listening. See why, change and never return unless sacrifice demands and pays double in her gratitude! Hear and be well! This is the promise solitude bestows upon those who serve her. We are eager for her gifts, and treat her with reverence and silence which does not judge. So can we best attend her.

One who is distant from themselves will find solitude, true solitude without fantasy or diversion, to be an unbearable bed of anxiety, and each moment in solitude will seem a cruel laceration. This is as it should be and it is the anxiety which our inattention to self has made for us, which serves to carry us out to sea so we may learn why. In less poetic language it is the anxiety which comes of being truly,

uninterruptedly in touch with ourselves that is our compass, our directional indicator. Ask why you are anxious about this thing your mind continues to present, and follow the trail. You will soon see what inattention to your needs has brought the irritation about, and seek to remedy it. Once again pain shows us what changes are in order to better follow ourselves and remove its source.

Solitude aids self-improvement, which often begins with seeing what must be improved, a topic we are apt to ignore. Solitude is a state of mind and a fragile thing, which holds our hope and promise. Solitude is hearing yourself. Being alone helps but is not required. Be naked before yourself, still and listening. Nothing brings your feelings closer or as brightly before your pained eyes. Nothing is as uncluttered by other people's truths and duties. Nothing makes your own voice stronger, or your emptiness, your goal and answer clearer, and so in creation there is no better ally than our sweet solitude.