

# From loneliness to aloneness

Ever felt like no one understands you? You're surrounded by people at work, on the streets, in the supermarket, even at your yoga class. Yet, no one knows you. It causes us to feel lonely, sad, even depressed. We all experience it. Loneliness is the next epidemic.

**L**oneliness as we know it is related to something being missing; we feel incomplete within. Whether it's an absence of a person, an object or an experience, when a need is not met for a long period of time, you feel lonely. It is an inevitable experience and we tend to suffer silently. Its impact is already significantly compounding and the more our society becomes urban and digital, at the expense of real-life connection with people, nature and ourselves, the more we feel isolated.

## WHAT CAUSES LONELINESS?

Loneliness is the effect of samsara, meaning 'worldly entanglement'. In other words, we become so tangled up in what's going on outside of ourselves that we lose touch with what's going on inside.

Loneliness is an emotion, not a physical state. And, like all emotions, that means we have the power to prevent and control it. If we don't, loneliness can evolve into depression.

Loneliness typically stems from emotional insecurity or a lack of self-belief. A prolonged period of not being true to yourself will also lead to loneliness.



**Specific causes of loneliness include:**

- 1 Death of a close one
- 2 Break up or break down of a relationship
- 3 Betrayal
- 4 Failure
- 5 Success (if you can't share it with loved ones)
- 6 Aging
- 7 Unresolved regrets
- 8 Communication gap with those close to you
- 9 Social loneliness - you may have hundreds of virtual friends but how many are true, loyal companions?

The path to loneliness starts with your inability to handle your unfulfilled needs. You are generally okay, as long as your needs are met. But when you face a denial or refusal of your needs, then, you end up being lonely. If this continues for a longer time, then the feeling of loneliness become worse within oneself. For example, your inability to handle the gap between the relationship you want and the relationship you have, highlights the extent to which you will feel lonely. Seeking attention is the first symptom that you are lonely.

**HOW TO PROTECT YOURSELF FROM LONELINESS**

No single person, event or experience has the right to sit in your head and continue to disturb your peace. You can choose to use your mind in two ways: either a vase to place flowers or a vessel to store acid. Acid can destroy the vessel, the same way that a person, event or experience that you allow to sit in your mind, disturbs you. It is like entertaining a thief in your home and complaining when your money is stolen. If indeed someone or something is at fault, let them exist outside - not in your precious mind. Place your peace well above anything else.

Whatever you invest time and effort in, grows stronger. That in which you deprive yourself of time and effort, diminishes. So, the less you allow your mind to remain focused on or consume energy towards a negative experience the less impact it can have on you. If you replay an experience over and over in your mind, you are giving far too much power and status to another person or object. Why would you give your energy and attention to someone or something that does not serve you?

To prevent loneliness, surround yourself with people who are not lonely, who are light-hearted and not superficial. Ensure you're with company that doesn't bother you; give your attention and quality time to the people who matter to you and to whom you matter. Make your presence felt and you will not experience loneliness.

Indulge in nature, soothing music, silence, books,

anything else that brings you peace and contentment. Gift yourself as many such experiences and you will not be lonely.

Most importantly, the more authentically you live your life the less likely you are to feel lonely. That means living according to your own values. Choosing your own career path, spending time with people who align with your values and goals and not wasting time with those who do not.

The need to be loved is stronger than the need to love others and so to fulfill this need we try to fit in, to feel wanted. But this usually takes us in a direction away from our true Selves. People pleasing is a curse that should be avoided. Learn to say 'no' gracefully, or you will end up in a state that is far from your true Self, leading to loneliness.

**HOW TO OVERCOME LONELINESS**

The only way to climb out of loneliness is to work on ourselves. We cannot expect nor wait for others to 'change'. We need to focus on what we can control - which is only ourselves. It's a harder road to take, but whether this is a stumbling block or a stepping stone, depends on how you use the road.

Firstly, let go of the past. The nature of the mind is to go to the past or future, but if you want to win over loneliness you must learn to consider the present in the right way. The experience has gone, why hang on to it? When you hold a glass for too long it starts to cause pain; the longer you hold it the more it hurts. Similarly, you're causing yourself pain when you hold onto emotions and memories.

Let go of guilt; forgive yourself. Letting go of the person or experience physically is not enough - let go at the mental level to stop the suffering, which grows into loneliness. Chinese philosopher Tao Che Ching says, "We believe it is difficult to let go but in truth it is much more difficult to hold and protect." Reflect on anything you have held on to - an opinion, a resentment, an unfulfilled fantasy - and sense the tightness, fear, defensiveness that surround the grasping. When you let go, you can discover peace and happiness.

Judgements and opinions distance you from others. When you judge, you don't have time to love. When there is no enemy within, the enemy outside can do no harm. Your entire life changes the very instant you change your mindset.

We all play multiple roles: parent, child, sibling, employee, friend, partner etc. We need to learn to switch from one role to another without carrying the burden of emotions. So, if we feel lonely in one role it won't affect others.

Ultimately, combatting loneliness requires self-sufficiency. The only way to develop this is through »



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spiritual wisdom. There is no other avenue. You can temporarily escape the gloom by going on a holiday, but it will be waiting when you return.

When you are self-sufficient, you take complete responsibility for your emotions and thoughts. No one else can make you dependent without you allowing yourself to become dependent. Blaming others for your loneliness only exacerbates the problem. All problems are internal, but so too is all happiness.

Finally, be compassionate to yourself. Let go of guilt and regrets and don't beat yourself up over a potential mistake. You can always take corrective measures.

**THE GRANDEUR OF ALONENESS**

While loneliness means something is missing, aloneness is when you feel satisfied and content by yourself - you don't need an external factor to be happy. That is the state achieved by spiritual masters. In a state of aloneness, you enjoy far more than anyone else. You enjoy silence, sound and noise. You are joyful whether you're in nature or a marketplace. It is incomparable bliss, but most people think it's impossible to reach this state.

Aloneness is our original state. We are born alone, we die alone.

But in between, we create this entanglement with the world that makes us feel lonely. We are born with body, mind and intellect, then we add relationships and acquire material things, which, if we are unable to associate with them properly, have the potential to lead to loneliness. One experience is enough to topple us.

Why are we dependent on the world for our joys and pleasures? Why are we allowing a single person or experience to enter and stay in our mind to disturb us? Why do we give this person or experience a far higher status than the peace and happiness that we deserve?

We believe it is normal and okay because nine out of 10 people are also stuck in loneliness. It is like a traffic jam. So much so, that when you meet a person happy with their life, you think something is wrong with them!

It seems difficult, even impossible, but it is possible to experience uninterrupted joy while living life.

To experience aloneness, you need to renew your perception of happiness. Most know that happiness is an internal phenomenon, but still we seek happiness externally. We are not designed to be dependent; our nature is to be free. Anything you do must be out of happiness, not for happiness. Live like this and you will not be lonely. ✨



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