

QUESTION: *What in our psyches needs to be understood, healed and integrated in order to make that "CONNECTION TO OUR INTUITION & NATURAL RHYTHM" (individual and collective rhythm)?*

ANSWER: **THE PRACTICE OF INTENTIONAL SOLITUDE**

Chapter 9 ~ Homing: Returning to OneSelf

The Practice of Intentional Solitude

Excerpt from: *Women Who Run With the Wolves*

by Clarissa Pinkola-Estes

In the gray mists of morning, the now-grown child kneels on a rock in the sea and converses with none other than the seal woman. This intentional and daily practice of solitude and communing allows him to be near home in a critical way, not only by diving down to the soul-place for more sustained periods of time, but just as important, by being able to call the soul back up to the topside world for brief periods.

In order to converse with the wild feminine, a woman must temporarily leave the world and inhabit a state of aloneness in the oldest sense of the word. Long ago the word ALONE was treated as two words, ALL ONE. To be ALL ONE meant to be wholly one, to be in oneness, either essentially or temporarily. That is precisely the goal of solitude, to be all one. It is the cure for the frazzled state so common to modern women, the one that makes her, as the old saying goes, "leap onto her horse and ride off in all directions."

Solitude is not an absence of energy or action, as some believe, but is rather a boon of wild provisions transmitted to us from the soul. In ancient times, as recorded by physician-healers, religious and mystics, purposeful solitude was both palliative and preventative. It was used to heal fatigue and to prevent weariness. It was also used as an oracle, as a way of listening to the inner self to solicit advice and guidance otherwise impossible to hear in the din of daily life.

Women from ancient times as well as modern aboriginal women often set a sacred place aside for this communion and inquiry. Traditionally it is said to have been set aside during women's menses, for during that time a woman lives much closer to self-knowing than usual; the membrane between the unconscious and the conscious minds thins considerably. Feelings, memories, sensations that are normally blocked from consciousness pass over into cognizance without resistance. When a woman takes solitude during this time, she has more material to sift through.

However, in my exchanges with tribal women from North, Central, and South America, as well as females of some of the Slavic tribes, I find that the "women's places" were used ANYTIME, not just during menses, and more so, that each woman often had her own "women's place," consisting of a certain tree, place at the water's edge, or some natural forest or desert room or ocean cave.

My experience in analyzing women leads me to believe that much of modern woman's premenstrual crankiness is not just a physical syndrome but is equally attributable to her being thwarted in her need to take enough time away to revivify and renew herself. I always laugh when I hear someone quoting early anthropologists who claimed that menstruating women of various tribes were considered "unclean" and forced to leave the village until they were "over it." All women know that even if there were such a forced ritual exile, every single woman would, when her time came, leave the village hanging her head mournfully, at least till she was out of sight, and then suddenly break into a jig down the path, cackling all the way.

As in the tale, if we establish a regular practice of intentional solitude, we invite a conversation between ourselves and the wild soul that comes near to our shore. We do this not only just to "be near" the wild and soulful nature, but as in the mystical tradition since time out of mind, the purpose of this union is for us to ask questions, and for the soul to advise.

How does one call up the soul? There are many ways: through meditation, or in the rhythms of running, drumming, singing, writing, painting, music making, visions of great beauty, prayer, contemplation, rite and ritual, standing still, even entrancing moods and ideas. All are psychic summonses that call the soul up from its dwelling place.

However, I advocate using those methods that require no props, no special location, and that can be accomplished as easily in a minute as in a day. This means using one's mind to summon the soul-self. Everyone has at least one familiar state of mind in which to effect this kind of solitude. For myself, solitude is rather like a folded-up forest that I carry with me everywhere and unfurl around myself when I have need. I sit at the feet of the great old trees of my childhood. From that vantage point, I ask my questions, receive my answers, then coalesce my woodland back down to the size of a love note till next time. The experience is immediate, brief, informative.

Truly the only thing one needs for intentional solitude is the ability to tune out distractions. A woman can learn to detach from other people, noise, and chatter, no matter if she is in the midst of a contentious board meeting, no matter if she is being stalked by a house that needs to be cleaned by a bulldozer, no matter if she is surrounded by eighty loquacious relatives, fighting, singing, and dancing their way through a three-day wake. If you have ever been a teenager, you definitely know how to tune out. If you have ever been the mother of an insomniac two-year old, you know how to take intentional solitude. It is not hard to do, just hard to remember to do.

Though we all might prefer to have the kind of sojourn to home that is much more sustained, wherein we depart and no one knows where we are and we return much later, it is also very good to practice taking solitude in a room full of a thousand persons. It may sound odd at first, but frankly, people converse with the soul all the time. But rather than entering the state consciously, many fall in to it suddenly, through a reverie, or all at once "snap to" and "find" themselves in it.

Because it is considered such an untoward thing, we have learned to camouflage this interval of soulful communication by naming it in very mundane terms. So, it has been named thusly: "talking to oneself," being "lost in thought," staring off into space," or "day-dreaming." This euphemistic language is inculcated by many segments of our culture, for unfortunately, we are taught from childhood onward to feel embarrassment if found communing with soul, and especially in pedestrian environments such as work or school.

Somehow, the educational and business world has felt that such time spent at being "all one," is unproductive, when in fact it is the most productive thing you can do. It is the wild soul who channels ideas into our imagination, whereupon we sort through these to find which we will implement, which are most applicable and productive. It is commingling with soul that causes us to glow bright with spirit, willing to assert our talents, whatever they might be. It is that brief, even momentary, but intentional union that supports us to live out our inner lives so that instead of burying them in the self-inversion of shame, fear of reprisal, rejection or attack, lethargy, complacency, or other limiting reasonings and excuses, we let our inner lives wave, flare, blaze on the outside for all to see.

So, in addition to gaining information about whatever we wish to see into, the taking of solitude can be used to assess how we ourselves are doing in any sphere we choose. Earlier in the tale, we saw the child stay under the sea for seven days and nights, this being a learning of one of the oldest cycles of nature. Seven is oft considered a woman's number, a mystical number synonymous with the division of the moon cycle into four parts and equal to menses: waxing, half, full, and waning. It has been usual in the old ethnic women's traditions that at the full moon cycle an inquiry should be made into the state of one's being; the state of one's friendships, one's home life, one's mate, one's children.

In such a state of solitude we can do this, for it is during that time that we bring all aspects of self to bear at one point in time, and we poll them, inquire of them, finding out what they/we/soul wishes right now, and then gaining it if possible. In this way we take vital soundings of our current conditions. There are many aspects of our lives for us to assess on a continuing basis: habitat, work, creative life, family, mate, children, mother/father, sexuality, spiritual life, and so on.

The measurement used in assessment is simple: What needs less? And: What needs more? We are asking from the instinctive self, not in stilted logic, not ego-wise, but Wild Woman-wise, what work, adjustments, loosening, or emphasizing needs to take place. Are we still on proper course in spirit and soul? Is one's inner life showing on the outside? What needs battening, protection, ballast, or weights? What needs be disposed of, moved or changed?

After a period of practice, the cumulative effect of intentional solitude begins to act like a vital respiratory system, a natural rhythm of adding knowledge, making minute adjustments, and deleting the unusable over and over again. It is not only potent but pragmatic, for solitude lives low on the food chain; though it costs something in intention and follow-through, it can be done at any time, in any place. Over time, as you practice, you will find yourself designing your own queries to soul. Sometimes you may have only one question. Other times you may have none whatsoever and just wish to rest on the rock near the soul, breathing together.