



Not Loneliness, But Aloneness, by Craig Childs

Alone is a state of being. Not loneliness, but aloneness. It is something sought rather than avoided. You can find it in just a moment, a breath: in Central Park, or early morning on the street, sitting on a stoop, or leaning against the window of a bus or subway car, alone in a throng of commuters. Sometimes in a grocery store, I'll turn into an aisle and find the row to myself, and I'll pause to relish the emptiness before the next shopping cart rounds the corner.

On the river, there is no cell signal. Satellite phones have a hard time getting out; the canyon walls limit the range of the sky. The breaths you take are your own, not those of everyone else in the room, the plane, the car. The experience is becoming rarer than ever. With phones buzzing and beeping like pinball machines, constant inquiries that require constant replies, solitude is an antiquated commodity.

Alone, every breath and movement becomes conversation. Every spin of the water, every slow step of cliffs, has something to say. I grunt more when I'm alone: one tone for satisfaction, another for dismay or frustration. There is a grunt for surprise, one for amazement, and one for small joys like a damselfly landing on my paddle blade or the jaden carapace of a beetle floating by.

We do need others, just not all the time. The tincture of solitude is worth a thousand conversations.

Speaking out loud to a river or a breeze suggests we are somehow bound together, as if we understand each other. Being alone is socializing with something more than yourself and those like you. It is a way of looking up from the day's shuffle and talking to the larger world.