



The topic of loneliness has come up recently quite frequently around me. With it the question: how do loneliness and that lonely feeling differ?

Some examples that spring to mind are:

- **Famous people;** just like Elton John in his earlier life (very visible in his recent film) feeling like this despite all the success and his entourage.
- **Retired population** for not really feel valued as a contributing member of society
- **Leaders** of all ranks in all sorts of positions (Steve Jobs, Theresa May, CEOs of multinational companies) as they move up through the ranks, the world is gets quite fast-paced and competitive. That sense of being alone to “carry the torch” without being able to trust and really find an open space to be, reflect and share views.
- **Marriage** or any long term relationships, when we assume (as we human do) we have to protect members of the family or the relationship by not sharing information, when holding back has a big impact: something going on at work, with oneself (health or worry) or with a friend, something that has affected them which might open up vulnerability.
- **Parents and children** when we are challenged with relating to each other in everyday life (see Philippa Perry “The Book You Wish Your Parents Had Read”)
- **Anyone** in any life situation when we experience a loss, feel misunderstood, different or isolated. This is often triggered through cultural differences and might create a lack of trust, fear and anxiety (more in Bréne Browns book “Braving the Wilderness. The Quest for True Belonging and the Courage to Stand Alone)

These are just some examples and the reason why I wanted to pick this up in this newsletter this time around is because it seems such a paradox to have people feel like this in this world, when we are now so incredibly well connected. By the way, the origin of the word paradox gives it away: it comes from the Latin word paradoxum and means “seemingly absurd but really true”.

The Joys of that Lonely Feeling

This shows up in surveys undertaken by mental health authorities across the world from which we see that mental health challenges essentially caused by feeling alone. Whatever the problem might be that causes our resilience to crumble. What are we in the process of losing? Or are we not losing anything and it is a matter of relearning to harness some kind of a lonely feeling?

Bréne Brown sees Loneliness as a “missing of true belonging – from the core of your own heart and not through external negotiations.” She goes on to say that “true belonging doesn’t require you to change who you are; it requires you to **BE who you are.**” This definition makes sense to me if I think about it.

Often people in these situations then turn to coaching to provide this sacred space of reflection, which allow us to re-establish a sense of connection in line with who we truly are.

However, the **pain** that loneliness causes in people is upsetting to watch. Over the last months I lost a very dear friend of mine as a result of her immense loneliness. It was exactly this loneliness that stole her sense of belonging from the core of her heart, which she lost and was unable to regain. So much so that in the end she retreated totally within herself, unable to embrace her social connections and impossible for her to find a purpose for being.

Yet if you knew her, you would never in a million years have believed how lonely she really felt. Those who knew her saw her as the most bubbly, intelligent, resourceful, kind-hearted and strong woman you could ever imagine. Mastering her life with incredible courage and passion for many years despite her very challenging and upsetting personal family history. As a result, the other side of her was struggling for years to come to terms with her **sense of belonging**, her own identity and true sense of belonging. Her need to have a successful personal partnership, career and life, while fitting in and being a worthy part of society was so overwhelming that it eventually wore her out, leaving her desperate and hopeless. So much so that she decided to take her own life and give up on her battle.

So if we stand back a little and look back at what caused this loneliness then we find a good mix of **FEAR**. Fear of being vulnerable, losing face, getting hurt, of criticism, of being wrong, of being a failure, making mistakes, not measuring up, losing a job; the list goes on and on. I am sure you get the idea and probably can think of a few more. Being in this state of loneliness can be a dangerous condition since our brains go into survival mode, which causes us to flee, fight or freeze in response. Belonging is an innate need that is as critical to our well being as food and water.

Social media, the internet, mobile phones, accessible travel opportunities and video tools are meant to bring us closer and make us feel more connected, yet it seems the opposite is happening. Amidst all of this 24 hr availability and busyness **people are left feeling lonelier than ever.**

Scientists Timothy Smith, J. Bradley Layton and Julianne Holt Lundstad did a study where they assessed what increases our odds of dying. They found in their study the following result: 30% excessive drinking, 20% obesity, 5% air pollution and **45% loneliness!**

Staggering, don't you think?

Standing back we can look at life and say that we arrive in this world alone, naked, and we will leave this world alone, naked. Under the microscope we might find that all that remains is the memory of beautiful heartfelt moments.

The Joys of that Lonely Feeling

However, every single one of us is **part of a wider universe** and therefore has a part to play to keep our world moving and evolving. It is our **greater purpose** and what could be more rewarding than supporting each other to grow and along the way to build loving, strong relationships? Creation is truly magical and we are a part of it.



By Jill Willington pixabay

So going back to my original question at the beginning of this article about the **difference between feeling lonely and loneliness**. Leaving loneliness to one side and focussing on feeling lonely, it appears to me like a choice is opening up for us here! Can you see it?

Think of a situation that you can remember, where all that you wanted was to be alone and not see or hear from a soul? I am thinking of situations following on from a frantically busy period at work or in life? That desire to retreat and recharge yourself? At times like this we might go and create that kind of space by either taking a day out walking by the sea or on a mountain, or we decide to hide in the woods, potter in the garden, go on a yoga retreat or simply take a few hours meditating in whichever way this shows up in your world. I am talking about this **sense of feeling alone that in itself is very replenishing and quite wonderful**. Allowing us to collect our strength for our next project of contribution, whatever shape or form this might become.

With that sentiment in mind: let's make the most of it and **start building and nurturing those connections today**.

