Loneliness

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Loneliness is difficult to write about because when people say, “I’m lonely,” they do not always mean the same thing. One person is saying, “I feel emotionally cutoff from people.” Another individual implies, “No one appreciates my ideas, my perceptions.” A third person simply means, “I’m afraid when I’m by myself.”

Whatever people mean by saying, “I’m lonely,” loneliness is usually considered a cause of suffering. For those who have a chronic illness such as MS, loneliness can also be the consequence of suffering. The muscle spasms, loss of balance, vision problems, pain, numbness, bladder unpredictability, all make spending time in the company of others difficult. When symptomatic, being alone can be a relief and burden simultaneously.

Cause or consequence, what is seldom acknowledged about loneliness is its relation to grief. We sense a loss of connection, understanding, comfort, or sense of safety. We long to have what is missing restored but feel powerless to accomplish that. When something important is lost and not easily returned, or is un-returnable, it is normal for us to grieve.

For those with MS, loneliness is often related to three experiences. One is that the illness is often not understood or is misunderstood by others. The second is being unable to participate in activities because of symptom interference. The third Is having to face a shifting self-image or a lost sense of self, which can be terrifying. Loneliness is a natural response to these experiences, especially when coupled with the physical toll of MS symptoms.

The Unasked For Gifts of Loneliness

All feelings and emotions are meant to be felt, even the uncomfortable ones. Loneliness is difficult company but is not an enemy. It is never a punishment, or a statement about who we are. Loneliness, like other unwanted feelings, only becomes stronger if we resist it. When its presence is accepted, loneliness lets us know we are missing something so we can either let go of what cannot be restored, create the connections we need, or both.

Fortunately for humanity, feelings such as loneliness and loss not only trigger our despair, but spark our courage, and creativity. They can bring out the warrior spirit in individuals diagnosed with MS, and in those who care about them. They inspired Dave Sackett, a firefighter who has MS,

to tattoo the words “persevere, believe, and overcome” on his arm. Dave’s attitude toward MS is, “It is what it is, keep pushin’ on!”

The loneliness generated by illness not only creates warriors but stretches our compassion. Isolation causes emotional pain but also brings people together. When lost in our unique aloneness, we are strangely with others who are lost in theirs. This means that everyone who has lived through loneliness caused by limitation understands the disconnection involved with having symptoms of an illness. While only people with MS can completely understand the MS experience, countless human beings know what it is to feel stuck and alone.

Loneliness also invites us to be still and know ourselves more deeply. The presence of other people can never surpass the strength and comfort of being content and nourished by our own company. Sitting quietly in our own presence, we eventually accept those things about ourself and circumstances that we would rather not. To be at peace we must acknowledge what is true about our internal and external world, even if those things piss us off.

One More Gift

One final gift of loneliness is its nudge, or shove, to act. Humans are social beings, and thrive when they have meaningful connections with others. Whether in person or via the Internet, being in touch with people who understand our experiences or share our interests is vital for well being. Sometimes, we require the strength of others, and they, ours.

“In everyone’s life, at some time,our inner fire goes out. It is then burst into flame by an encounter with another human being. We should all be thankful for those people who rekindle the inner spirit.” ~ Albert Schweitzer

This post written by our friends at Healthline

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