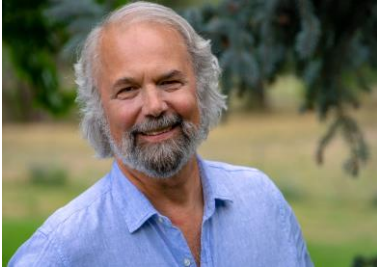


# THE END OF LONELINESS

PULSE OF SPIRIT

JANUARY 16, 2019



**DAVID KARCHERE** *is a speaker and workshop leader who assists people to renew their Primal Spirituality—an experience that virtually all human beings know at birth, and that ideally grows as they mature.*

Could it be that at the root of issues we face personally and as a culture is an unsuspected culprit, lurking in the shadows of the human experience—loneliness?

Around the world, governmental and non-profit leaders, researchers and journalists have identified a global epidemic of loneliness. Here are a few examples:

- In the United Kingdom, the Red Cross co-authored a study of loneliness which found that loneliness and social isolation are at a crisis level, causing misery and pressure on statutory services.
- In Japan, lonely people can hire actors to play the part of a family member they do not have.
- The Japanese government has surveyed *hikikomori*—a psychological condition that makes people shut themselves off from society, often staying in their houses for months on end.
- In July 2018, a study reported in the *American Journal of Preventative Medicine* found that “Young adults with high social media use seem to feel more socially isolated than their counterparts with lower social media use.” It also noted that perceived social isolation is associated with higher rates of disease and mortality.
- A study of older people in Anhui province in eastern China, published in 2011, found that 78% reported “moderate to severe levels of loneliness,” often as a result of younger relatives having moved. Similar trends are found in Eastern Europe, where younger people have left to find work elsewhere.
- In the United States, the opioid epidemic is hitting rural America particularly hard. Drug use

researcher Peter Cohen, Ph.D., of The Netherlands, argues that human beings have a deep need to bond and form connections. *It's how we get our satisfaction. If we can't connect with each other, we will connect with anything we can find—the whirr of a roulette wheel or the prick of a syringe.*

- Studies correlate loneliness and isolation with a range of health problems, including heart attacks, strokes, cancer, eating disorders, drug abuse, sleep deprivation, depression, alcoholism and anxiety.
- *The Wall Street Journal* identifies baby boomers in the United States as the loneliest generation, undermining health and leading to early mortality.

So just what is loneliness? And if it is at the root of profound issues that arise for us as individuals and in our culture, what causes it?

At one level, loneliness is a social phenomenon. A sociologist could measure the length, frequency and depth of human interactions for any individual. Research shows that this is significant. Face-to-face contact and intimate human connections engage biological responses that preserve our mental and physical well-being.

But the literature on loneliness also addresses *perceived* social isolation. John Cacioppo is a social psychologist and neuroscientist from the University of Chicago who studies the biological effects

of loneliness. According to Professor Cacioppo, it is the subjective sense of feeling lonely that is most disruptive to human well-being. And there are many people who live alone but who are not necessarily lonely.

So, while loneliness can be a physical reality, it is most importantly a state of the psyche. Here is how a male participant in the U.K. study on loneliness described it:

*It's like being in a bubble and you want to get out but you just can't, you try and you can't do it, you just can't get out.*

Physical reality—childhood experiences, and everything we encounter in life—can influence the psychic state of the individual. But clearly, if the state of the psyche does not shift out of a perceived social isolation, no amount of social contact will make up for it.

Before considering the deeper roots of perceived social isolation, perhaps it would be useful to consider the broader implications of the syndrome. Is it possible that what we call loneliness is only the inactive form of a sense of perceived social isolation? That it is the introvertish form, but that there is also a more active form of the syndrome? That a person might experience an extrovertish version of social isolation?

Consider the attitude and behavior of many world leaders. Consider the divisiveness that seems to be growing in Western culture, reflected in the fractional politics of Brexit and the

governmental shutdown of the United States. Is it possible that we are witnessing an active form of loneliness and isolation? That this is how we relate to other human beings when the ties that bind us together have broken?

If this is so, then perhaps loneliness—including both the active and inactive form of its manifestation—is the core issue for contemporary human culture.

To remedy the full range of loneliness that is afflicting us, we must understand the layers of human experience in which it manifests. There is the physical reality of a person's life that I have already made reference to, and the social reality that goes with it. There is the reality of the psychic state in which a person finds themselves. But if you were to seek to assist a person suffering from loneliness, while you might seek to assist with those outer layers of their experience, you would not be guaranteed success. If you were to seek to address your own loneliness, you might address those same levels. But what if underlying perceptions and beliefs did not shift?

The reality is that there is no foundational premise of oneness within the physical, social or even psychic experiences alone. Of themselves, they fall apart by their own fractional nature. They are pieces of a unified experience. But without the unifying reality, the other layers of our human reality break. That is what we are witnessing in the world today.

The problem is that the causative factors related to human loneliness and human connection are invisible. Even the social

context for a person's life is not entirely a visible reality. But beyond that, the layers of human experience that bring a deep sense of belonging are even more ephemeral. Here lies the challenge we face as a culture, and the challenge we each face as individuals—the necessity of surrendering to the layer of our human experiences that transcends the physical and social environment, and the human psyche itself.

It is the role of a true spirituality to connect us to that transcendent level of our human experience. All too often, the practice of human religion and spirituality doesn't elevate itself past the experience of loneliness that most of its leaders and practitioners are experiencing.

The truth is that we are helpless as human beings out of touch with the unifying reality that connects us. We are unable to overcome our divisiveness. That is the great lesson of this age. Towering over the most valiant of our human efforts, our experience of isolation seems to be winning, and world leaders babble on.

Loneliness ends when a person finds the beginning of belonging to what connects us all; when they know they belong to the universal reality from which the physical, social and psychological layers of experience are born. This is the unitary reality that is behind all people. My experience is that only as I surrender to that does my loneliness end. I believe that is true for anyone. Then we belong to the reality that connects all people.

You can't think yourself into this experience. There is no method to it other

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than the surrender itself. Simply surrender to the source of all oneness and all true belonging.

I embrace a reality of Universal Love and that reality embraces me. It becomes the foundational premise for my life. I infuse the physical, social and psychic layers of my experience with that embrace.

Like most people, I encounter feelings of loneliness at times. Don't you? What I know is that Universal Love is vastly greater than those feelings. And I belong to that reality. I know that the same is true for you and for anyone. This knowing is the end of loneliness.

Without this knowing, I see no way to create oneness in human culture. With this knowing, we weave the fabric of belonging around the globe. When you start from a premise of loneliness, you will create division. When belonging is your premise, you become a weaver of oneness with the golden strands of Universal Love. And when we share this premise, we together weave the culture of a new world.

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