



The Art of Solitude

with Kenda Swanson



What it means to Be


We've heard it from motivational speakers and spiritual gurus, and we get it: no matter who you are, what you do, and how much time you have, it's important to spend time alone and "get comfortable with yourself." This is a skill that needs practice in today's world where there is a constant pull to be "on the go" and social connections are of paramount importance. Particularly during the Covid lockdown imposing social restrictions - many of us find ourselves physically alone, yet mentally full and emotionally overwhelmed.

Spending time alone will help you to empty out your mental-emotional basket by creating more spaciousness in your life. It is the gift that keeps on giving. With practice, and for some - almost immediately - you may feel more open, peaceful and grounded. This makes you a more present, peaceful and joyful friend, lover, and companion. Practicing this may seem easier for some than others; however, it doesn't necessarily mean taking a departure from your everyday life. You can practice solo time even in a house full of people. You need only the willingness to make it happen.

The intention of this article is to reinforce the idea that spending time alone is an all-important practice, by explaining what it really is and how to practice it, so that you can reap the benefits from some authentic, peaceful solitary experience. You can start today, wherever you are, even as you begin reading this. You can create the space to disconnect from others and the world and get to really experience yourself - your own energy and presence - without distraction.



Why spend time alone?



Spending time alone will help you to know who you really are (hint: you are not your thoughts). You may feel more peaceful, joyful, patient, less reactive. Although you won't be immune to life's challenges, stress will dissolve as you become in touch with your essence. Relationships will improve as you become a better listener and are able to "hold space" for another. You will feel more connected to all that is and more appreciative of the little things - like nature. You may also feel less attached to things in the physical world because you have a deeper understanding and acceptance of the impermanence of everything in life. You are unconditionally accepting. You can really "roll with the punches." You know what love is, and you live in your awareness of it, every fibre of your being. Sound alluring? It is possible for you to cultivate. Read on.

Alone time is inevitable. We often tell our friends and lovers that we are with them in spirit. While that may be true in another dimension, at the end of the day, you are always left with yourself. You are left with your own mind, your thoughts, your body, your presence. This can be uncomfortable and disturbing for some people - particularly those whose mental images are unfriendly. As much as you may try to distract yourself to avoid your thoughts and judgments by inviting others into your space, you will, inevitably, find that there are times when you are truly alone. Ask yourself whether you can accept this. Are you willing to surrender to being alone?

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Where do I start?

To begin, you must ask yourself some hard questions. Are you really, truly willing to abandon the attachment of always “needing” to be in company or on the go in order to accept your life?

Are you willing to explore being in solitude - that means - with and in the presence of only your own self, your body, and breath, in silence (preferably) and get to experience all truly are?

This may involve the arising of some uncomfortable and painful emotions. It means facing the possibility of being alone with honesty and compassion for yourself - whatever you might feel. Warning: you may find that the answer to this question is “no.” If the answer is no, and you can feel that you are NOT ready, congratulations for being honest with yourself. One day, you will be ready, and you will know it. To find peace in this moment, you must accept what is right now and carry on with your life. You’ll be ready when you’re ready. You cannot will yourself into readiness, so do not waste your energy striving for this.

Now, If the answer is yes - and you feel it in your bones- you ARE ready, then keep reading...

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I'm ready, so now what?

Tools for practice

Carve out some time and space for alone time. This means putting AWAY your phone, computer, tablet, and any other device that receives or transmits information to/from the outside world. This is space you are creating to get to come back to yourself. Honour that by removing all distractions and direct connection to the outside.

If possible, make effort to be in silence as you begin this practice. Sometimes this isn't possible, however, understand that it's easier to become distracted with audio in the background because this can pull you back into your own mind. Do your best to establish a still environment for your practice. This helps facilitate awareness of your thoughts, emotions and feeling of your physical body.

If you are outside, welcome the authentic sounds of nature. They can help you develop your alertness in the NOW. In fact, welcome all sounds you hear regardless of where you are. You can focus on what you hear all around you in each moment, or a few particular sounds (like the chirp of a type of bird). Whether it's the TV in the background or children crying, allow yourself to notice and accept what is. After all, whatever you resist, persists. You may find that as you accept your current environment, including the noise, you are less bothered by it. Acceptance of what is leads to freedom from the prison of your mind. Be present with the sounds you hear and aware of any thoughts that arise. Be equally diligent about letting go of anything that arises.

Establish a set amount of time you can routinely dedicate to this practice. This will be different depending on your life situation of course, and you may be able to do more some days than others. It doesn't need to be the same amount of time every day but keep the practice consistent. For example, establish a minimum amount of time you can dedicate daily so that you feel accountable and are more likely to keep it up. Pick a time of day that works best given your schedule (again can be different on different days). Even if it's 2 minutes of conscious breathing in the bathroom, that's enough. Carve out the time and be aware of any excuses that crop up – e.g., too busy, kids, work... as a general “rule” tell yourself the more excuses you have, the more you stand to gain from this practice :) add a minute for every excuse!



"It's hard..."

Harnessing your will to be still

Although the practice of spending time alone is simple, it isn't easy. Being in solitude, and most importantly, getting comfortable with it, is a skill that requires practice. It is an art. Don't be disheartened if it seems difficult in the beginning. If you've gotten accustomed to keeping company and being immersed in the hustle and bustle of life, it's going to feel a bit odd and awkward.

Use this as an opportunity to practice acceptance, and it will begin to feel more natural for you. See if you can harness the power of your will to consistently carve out that time and space to be with just you. But don't let that "you time" become the "same old." Routinely check in with yourself to see what YOU feel like doing. This could be journaling, a bath, a walk in nature... it could be painting, dancing, or just simply BEING. It may be different day to day, hour to hour, moment to moment... and that's perfectly acceptable.

Only you will really know how to experience YOU. You are your own mystery, your own treasure. You are a wonder to be explored, and a fascinating discovery. You can spend the rest of this lifetime getting to know yourself, and that would be a life well lived.



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Who am I?

Getting to know Kenda



Kenda has worked in the realm of physical, emotional, spiritual health and well-being since completing her Masters' degree in 2015. Kenda has taught spiritual education to youth at the Centres for Spiritual Living and served as a spiritual mentor for people seeking to release the barriers to love in their lives. She currently volunteers for the Foundation for Inner Peace and co-hosts a podcast called The Art of Living Podcast and lives in Calgary, Canada with her soulmate, Gavin, their young son Valera, and daughters Madi and Lexi. She is passionate about self-discovery, adventure and love, and continues to embrace learning through "this game called life."

Let's connect

Find me on social media

Facebook page: Kenda Swanson

Facebook: Kenda Charlotte Swanson

Instagram: @kenda_surprise

Kenda
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