

“Screens and Solitude”

By Rabbi David Wolpe

Since we have destroyed the experience of solitude — the television hums, and you can chat with a hundred people online and believe you have a community — we are making it far too easy to be alone. It is now harder to risk the real friction of closeness and relationship. Why trouble yourself when you can have a smooth, deleteable friendship online with someone you need never really know?

To save oneself from loneliness through Facebook rather than through faces is like saving oneself from drowning by grabbing a life raft rather than swimming ashore. The solution is at hand, but it is temporary, and interferes with the lasting cure. We are built for one another.

When Moses was about to die he told the Israelites, “I am one hundred and twenty years old and can no longer go out and in,” (Deut. 31:2) which is a biblical phrase meaning ‘be active.’ But one midrash teaches that ‘out and in’ means Moses went to the tent of every family to say goodbye. When he had gone into all the tents, and therefore would no longer go out and in, he was done. To the last, Moses understood that being alone with God is vital but insufficient. Your community needs you. Even more, you need them.