

Going it Alone

BY RABBI DAVID WOLPE

How much time do you spend with yourself? All the time, obviously, from one perspective. From another, less and less. What were once interludes of solitude — at home alone, in a restaurant, in a store, walking, driving — are now filled with other voices: screens, radios, ipods and cellphones. The Greek philosopher Anitsthenes said that what he had derived from philosophy was the ability to converse with himself. And perhaps Pascal was not far off in saying that society's problems derived from people not being able to endure sitting alone in a room.

The Rabbis tell us that Moses got the Torah "from Sinai." Abarbanel comments that we give the mountain credit because Moses needed the solitude — the forty days alone — to be spiritually prepared to receive the Torah.

When one sits alone to write, marvels are fetched from the deep of an uninterrupted consciousness. When one sits alone to think, a fortification takes hold that prepares us to meet again in society. The voices in our head are too often stilled by the clamor of the world. Yeats taught that we make rhetoric out of our quarrel with others, but "of the quarrel with ourselves, poetry." Who can quarrel alone if life is screened, Skyped, Facebooked and muzaked? Find a silent corner. You may be astonished whom you will discover waiting there for you.