

Loneliness

Farmington rabbi tries to help

EDITOR'S NOTE: Observer & Eccentric reporter Sue Averill is attending a series of talks in Birmingham Temple in Farmington Hills, featuring Rabbi Sherwin Wine. Ms. Averill, who attended Jewish services for the first time, responds to Rabbi Wine's sermon.

By SUSAN AVERILL.
Here I am, sitting in this big temple, and I don't know anybody. Not only do I not know anybody, I'm not even Jewish.
It's Rosh Hashona (Jewish New Year), a High Holiday, and I am a stranger here. I don't have any Jewish friends here and I'm all alone. I'm lonely, but I'm mostly scared.
"Being lonely means no one recognizes you," Rabbi Sherwin Wine says, scanning his familiar congregation at Birmingham Temple in Farmington Hills.

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So? That's my problem; I want to sit in the crowd and become recognizable. If someone notices me, they'll see "shkash" (Gentile girl) written across my forehead and then I'll really be out. I am afraid.

"You're lonely, why do we have loneliness, you say? Eric Fromm says it's part of the human condition. We are born with a mind that can say 'I,' says Wine.

"No matter how close you are to someone else, your thoughts are your thoughts and their thoughts are their thoughts. They can only perceive superficially what you are thinking. They don't know your history."
[Amen. There are thoughts I wouldn't want to share with anyone.]

"THERE WAS A couple, married 25 years, who never left each other's sides. When the husband died, his wife was first angry, then depressed.

She came to me and said she couldn't go on... she had done everything with him, and now that he was gone, the loneliness was unbearable."

What follows are case histories, victims of loneliness, people who couldn't cope with the scars left when someone kicked their supports from under them.

"A 26-year-old woman, who couldn't speak with her husband, had a good friend whom she called everyday and talked to for 45 minutes.
"Then her friend moved to Cincinnati. She began to realize what her friend meant to her. She came to me and said, 'I'm very lonely. I need my friend.'"

"A man came to me and said, 'I've been married for 18 years and I'm very lonely. I can't use any other word. Sure, my wife and I talk, we talk all the time. We talk about trips and travel and money and money and trips and friends, and we are always talking. But she doesn't recognize who I am. If I have any real feelings on something, we never talk about them."

Parents came to him, he said, dragging along their college-aged son who had just found Jesus.

"THEY HYPNOTIZED him," the parents said. But the boy said, "I was very lonely and now I have a friend wherever I am. My friend is Jesus. The he looks at me patronizingly and says, 'I wish you had a friend like mine."

It must be a subject close to home, because the congregation sounds like a parent's wise and knowing laugh.

The rabbi says in order to cope with loneliness, you must affirm certain things as realities for you. Like what? Like saying to yourself, "I am a whole person."

"A whole person, not a quarter, or a part, or three-quarters. A widow came to me and said she wanted to take a vacation, but didn't look like she could go because no one would go with her.

"So I said, 'If you're half of a couple, you are dead, you are now gone. You're a whole person, aren't you? You go and take that trip to Florida by yourself.' I guess she did."

Two 18-year-olds, who had been going steady since the eighth grade, came to him and said they wanted to get married.

"I don't want to marry people who have no sense of themselves as a whole person. For four years, they'd never been apart. So I recommended they take six months to a year off and not be with each other or see each other."

Because of parental pressure, they did, saw each other on weekends, and later went off to college, at separate universities.

YOU MUST ALSO affirm that you are a sophisticated person, and his analogy for that was interesting... it resulted in his condoning an extramarital affair, at least in this case.

As the story goes, a woman with two children complained that her life was empty.

"My husband and I have a business which is doing very well. We have two kids, an eleven- and a twelve-year-old, who love us very much and we love them. But I'm very lonely. My husband and I can't communicate with each other. We both have friends, and the other knows it, so there's no deception," Rabbi Wine recalled the woman's words.

He told her she had three alternatives. She could divorce, the business could probably collapse, the children would be damaged. They could stay together and persevere in their mutual loneliness. Or they could keep their friends, their business, their marriage and their children.

"I told them to with the third decision, which was unsatisfactory, but the best of all three alternatives," he said.

Other ways to cope include affirming that you are an attractive person, being and a useful person.

"If a woman comes to me and says, 'I am going to be married,' I say, 'Fine, that's marvelous, that's wonderful. Do you have an employable skill?'"

"IF SHE DOESN'T," then I tell her she's not ready to get married. She needs that independence."

He says that without feeling of self-reliance, one will probably look to her husband for her identity. Her husband will be afraid to become intimate, to give up that much of himself to another person.

"It's not true that people who are each other a lot are more honest about their feelings than people who don't see each other that much."

"If I have a choice between being with a person I can't stand and reading a book, then I'll take the book," he said.

For imagination, Rabbi Wine says the moment you can't longer yourself in an alternative situation, job or relationship or whatever, then you will feel trapped, desperate, despairing and unable to communicate openly.

AND LASTLY, I AM a positive human being. Sure, I may be lonely, but my loneliness may be part of a transition and something I need.

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