

InPresence 0064: Solitude

with Jeffrey Mishlove

Video Transcript - *New Thinking Allowed* with Jeffrey Mishlove
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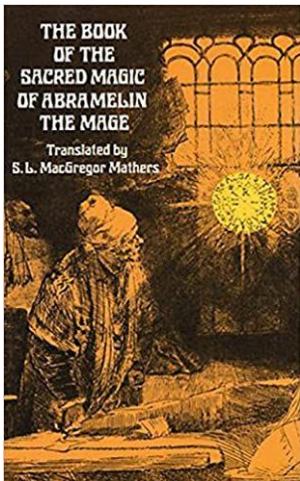


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(00:20) Hello, I'm Jeffrey Mishlove and today my topic is solitude. You know, it's been very important to me since I was in my early twenties. I think it was for this reason: I was probably a discontent and somewhat tense and unhappy young man at that point in time. Like a lot of young people in their

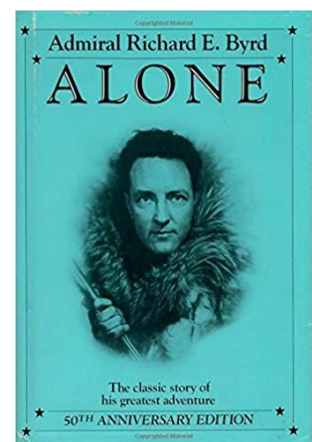


twenties I longed for romance, I longed for a sense of adventure in my life and, yet, I think instinctively I knew that I couldn't really love another person anymore than I could love myself. I was at odds with myself, as I think about it. But, I became captivated with the idea of solitude. Somehow I seemed to know instinctively that having time and solitude was going to be very important for me.

(01:18) So, when I first encountered the magical grimoire that I discussed briefly in the "In Presence" segment on playing with magic, *The Book of the Sacred Magic of Abramelin the Mage*, well, that book required that the aspirant spend six months in solitude, in purification, in order to prepare for this great magical ritual of encountering one's own holy guardian angel. That just captured my imagination. At the time, as I recall, I was a graduate student in criminology and maybe even I spent a year before entering graduate school just hanging out at Berkeley, so it might have been around that time.

(02:07) In any case, the idea of spending six months in solitude really fascinated me. According to this magical grimoire, it had to be done between the ages of 25 and 50. As I recall, I was younger than 25 at the time. But, I had sort of resolved I would try to do this. I was going to do it. Well, it seemed like a wonderful ambition. I can say looking back now, I never did it. Six months in solitude would have been too much for me.

(02:42) But, I made a study of it. In fact there's a wonderful book by Admiral Richard Byrd. He's now pretty much forgotten figure but he was a great international hero at one time - the first person to fly over the North Pole and over the South Pole. He was known as a great adventurer and he also longed



for solitude. He had the opportunity in 1934 to spend an entire season, the winter season, at the South Pole all by himself manning a weather station. He did that and wrote about it in his book, *Alone*, which became an international bestseller. He described having mystical experiences alone at the South Pole in the winter season where you can imagine it was quite extraordinary. Although in his case, he nearly died because there was a carbon monoxide leak from a gas stove in the tiny little shack in which he was living, so it became a life-and-death struggle for him.

(03:54) Now, in my own life I have had some experiences of solitude. They were minor, really minor compared to Richard Byrd's experience. But, on one occasion I decided I'm going to go into a closet and I had a friend who let me stay in his closet for three days. I came out to use the bathroom and maybe to have a bowl of cereal or something in the morning and that was it. The rest of the time I just stayed in the closet. I was being with myself, just getting comfortable with myself. Looking back on it now it seems like a small thing, a very trivial thing, but I actually think it was very important in my own character development.

(04:43) On another occasion, also when I was in my early twenties, I spent a week in solitude on Mount Shasta. I actually climbed Mount Shasta, which is one of the highest mountains in the United States, over 14,000 ft. I climbed it by myself without any special equipment and certainly with no other people and it was a wonderful time for me. Although, as I think about it now, I had experienced a great sense of foreboding when I climbed down that mountain. Well, maybe I got in touch with something intuitively because that was right before I had another episode that I've described in the "In Presence" segment on playing with magic where I encountered people who eventually walked into my room in the middle of the night, throwing a knife at me and threatening to kill me. Well, I think when I came down from the mountain I had a premonition that something like that was about to occur, although certainly nothing specific in my mind, just a sense of foreboding.

(05:59) So, I guess I could say from that, that spending time by oneself is a way to get in touch with the depths of one's own psyche and to become comfortable with oneself, to learn how to love oneself and to love others. Now I can look back and say I'm about to celebrate my 40th wedding anniversary this year, so I think that time spent in solitude when I was a very young man was quite important. So, let me leave you with these thoughts. How much time have you ever spent in solitude? Would it be good for you to do that at this phase in your life where you are right now? Or, are there ways in which you can experience solitude without having to go off by yourself for 3 days or for a week? I mean, aren't you experiencing a certain measure of solitude if you meditate for 20 minutes? It's about being comfortable with who you are. Thank you for being with me. (07:11)

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