



# Loneliness as a Spiritual Crisis

*Rabbi Mychal Springer*

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Mychal received her BA in Judaic Studies and Religious Studies from Yale College *magna cum laude*. She was ordained a Conservative rabbi and received her Master's in Judaic Studies and a Doctor of Divinity at JTS. Mychal is a certified Jewish chaplain in *Neshama: Association of Jewish Chaplains*.









## Do I Belong?

Alienation - Lonely

Abandoned - Isolated

### Genesis 2:18-25

(18) God ה' said, "It is not good for the Human to be alone; I will make a fitting counterpart for him." (19) And God ה' formed out of the earth all the wild beasts and all the birds of the sky, and brought them to the Human to see what he would call them; and whatever the Human called each living creature, that would be its name. (20) And the Human gave names to all the cattle and to the birds of the sky and to all the wild beasts; but no fitting counterpart for a human being was found. (21) So God ה' cast a deep sleep upon the Human; and, while he slept, [God] took one of his sides and closed up the flesh at that site. (22) And God ה' fashioned the side that had been taken from the Human into a woman, bringing her to the Human. (23) Then the Human said, "This one at last  
Is bone of my bones  
And flesh of my flesh.  
This one shall be called Woman,  
For from a Human was she taken." (24)  
Hence a man leaves his father and mother and clings to his wife, so that they become one flesh. (25) The two of them were naked, the Human and his wife, yet they felt no shame.

### בראשית ב' י"ח-כ"ה

(יח) וַיֹּאמֶר ה' אֱלֹהִים לֹא טוֹב  
הָיִית הָאָדָם לְבַדּוֹ אֶעֱשֶׂה-לוֹ עֶזְרָה  
כְּנַגְדּוֹ: (יט) וַיִּצַּר ה' אֱלֹהִים מִן-  
הָאָדָמָה כָּל-חַיֵּי הַשָּׁמַיִם וְאֵת  
כָּל-עוֹף הַשָּׁמַיִם וַיִּבֹא אֶל-הָאָדָם  
לְרֹאוֹת מֵה-יִקְרָא-לוֹ וְכָל־אִשֶּׁר  
יִקְרָא-לוֹ הָאָדָם נִפְשׁ חַיָּה הוּא  
שְׁמוֹ: (כ) וַיִּקְרָא הָאָדָם שְׁמוֹת  
לְכָל-הַבְּהֵמָה וְלַעוֹף הַשָּׁמַיִם  
וְלִכָּל חַיֵּי הַשָּׁדֶה וְלֹא־הָיָה  
מִצָּא עֶזְרָה כְּנַגְדּוֹ: (כא) וַיִּפַּל ה'  
אֱלֹהִים | תַּרְדֵּמָה עַל-הָאָדָם וַיִּישָׁן  
וַיִּקַּח אֶחָת מִצַּלְעָתָיו וַיִּסְגֵּר בָּשָׂר  
תַּחַתְּנָה: (כב) וַיִּבֶן ה'  
אֱלֹהִים | אֶת-הַצֶּלַע אִשָּׁר-לָקַח  
מִן-הָאָדָם לְאִשָּׁה וַיִּבְאֶהָ אֶל-  
הָאָדָם: (כג) וַיֹּאמֶר הָאָדָם זֹאת  
הַפֶּעַם עָצָם מֵעַצְמִי וּבָשָׂר  
מִבְּשָׂרִי לְזֹאת יִקְרָא אִשָּׁה כִּי  
מֵאִישׁ לָקַחָהּ זֹאת: (כד) עַל-כֵּן  
יַעֲזֹב־אִישׁ אֶת־אָבִיו וְאֶת־אִמּוֹ  
וְדָבַק בְּאִשְׁתּוֹ וְהָיוּ לְבָשָׂר אֶחָד:  
(כה) וַיְהִיו שְׁנֵיהֶם עָרוּמִים  
הָאָדָם וְאִשְׁתּוֹ וְלֹא יִתְבַּשְׁשׁוּ:

### Ecclesiastes 4:7-12

(7) And I have noted this further futility under the sun: (8) the case of the man who is alone, with no companion, who has neither son nor brother; yet he amasses wealth without limit, and his eye is never sated with riches. For whom, now, is he amassing it while denying himself<sup>c</sup> enjoyment? That too is a futility and an unhappy business. (9) Two are better off than one, in that they have greater benefit from<sup>e</sup> their earnings. (10) For should they fall, one can raise the other; but woe betide him who is alone and falls with no companion to raise him! (11) Further, when two lie together they are warm; but how can he who is alone get warm? (12) Also, if one attacks, two can stand up to him. A threefold cord is not readily broken!

### Psalms 71:9

(9) Do not cast me off in old age; when my strength fails, do not forsake me!

### קהלת ד'ז'-י"ב

(ז) וְשָׁבַתִּי אֲנִי וְאָרְאָה הַבֶּל תַּחַת  
הַשָּׁמֶשׁ: (ח) יֵשׁ אֶחָד וְאֵין שְׁנֵי גַם  
בֶּן וְאָח אֵין-לוֹ וְאֵין קֵץ לְכָל-עֲמָלוֹ  
גַם- [עֵינָיו] (עֵינָיו) לֹא-תִשְׂבַּע עֵשֶׂר  
וְלִמִּי | אֲנִי עֹמֵל וּמְחַסֵּר אֶת-נַפְשִׁי  
מִטּוֹבָה גַם-זֶה הַבֶּל וְעַנְיָן רָע  
הוּא: (ט) טוֹבִים הַשְּׁנָיִם מִן-  
הָאֶחָד אֲשֶׁר יִשְׁ-לָהֶם שֶׁכָּר טוֹב  
בְּעֲמָלָם: (י) כִּי אִם-יִפְּלוּ הָאֶחָד  
יִקִּים אֶת-חֲבֵרוֹ וְאֵילוֹ הָאֶחָד  
שִׁיפֹל וְאֵין שְׁנֵי לְהַקִּימוֹ: (יא) גַם  
אִם-יִשְׁכְּבוּ שְׁנָיִם וְחָם לָהֶם  
וְלֶאֱחָד אֵין יָחָם: (יב) וְאִם-יִתְקַפּוּ  
הָאֶחָד הַשְּׁנָיִם יַעֲמִדוּ נִגְדָּו וְהַחוּט  
הַמִּשְׁלֵשׁ לֹא בְּמַהֲרָה יִנָּתֵק:

### תהילים ע"א:ט'

(ט) אֵל-תִּשְׁלִיכֵנִי לְעֵת זְקֻנָּה  
כְּכֹלֹת כָּחִי אֵל-תַּעֲזָבֵנִי:

**Zelda (Shneurson Mishkowsky), "Cast Me Not Away" (Zelda was born in 1914 in Chernigoff, the Ukraine, and died at the age of 70 in Jerusalem.)**

**Cast Me Not Away**

She leaned toward my soul  
to touch the cry in my throat,  
ever-dwelling-

Her touch tears me to pieces.  
Darknesses and words  
are difficult  
for the heart that is lost-

*Cast me not away from Your presence.*

And when I wake from my dream,  
surrounded by darkness,  
the old furniture making  
its thin creaking sounds-

אל תשליכיני מלפניך

היא גחנה אל נפשי  
לנגע בבכי שבגרוני,  
שוכן עד-

נגיעתה עושה בי  
קרעים קרעים.  
קשה ללב אובד  
עם חשכות  
ועם מלים-

אל תשליכיני מלפניך

וכאשר אקיץ מחלומי  
וחשך יהיה סביבי  
ורחיטי הישנים ישמיעו  
קולות נפץ דקים-

אל תסתיר פניך ממני.

וכאשר אקיץ להרהר  
המתקו כל-כך הספורים



*Do not hide Your face from me.*

When I wake, wondering  
if the stories of my senses  
are really so sweet to my soul-  
(Are stories my fortress?)  
Oh, at a mournful, smoldering hour  
even the tender beauty of a flower  
has touched me with the harshness of  
flattery.

When I wake, weeping-  
if only I might know  
where heaven is leading  
my life.

from The Spectacular Difference:  
Selected Poems of Zelda, translated by  
Marcia Falk

### **Lamentations 3:25-33**

(25) The LORD is good to those who trust  
in Him,  
To the one who seeks Him; (26) It is  
good to wait patiently  
Till rescue comes from the LORD. (27) It  
is good for a man, when young,  
To bear a yoke; (28) Let him sit alone

שמספרים החושים  
לנשמת-

(האם ספורים מבצרי?)  
הלא בשעה אבלה עשנה  
בי נגע בקשיחות של מליצה  
אף יפיו הרך של פרח.

וכאשר אקיץ בוכיה  
לו אדע  
לאן מובילים את חיי  
השמים.

איכה ג':כ"ה-ל"ג

(כה) טוֹב ה' לְקוֹן לְנַפְשׁ  
תְּדַרְשֵׁנוּ: {ס}  
(כו) טוֹב וַיַּחֲלֵ וְדוּמָם לְתַשׁוּעַת  
ה': {ס} (כז) טוֹב לְגֶבֶר  
כִּי-יִשָּׂא עַל בְּנֵעוּרָיו: {ס}  
(כח) יֵשֵׁב בְּדָד וַיִּדְּם כִּי נָטַל

and be patient,  
When He has laid it upon him. (29) Let  
him put his mouth to the dust—  
There may yet be hope. (30) Let him  
offer his cheek to the smiter;  
Let him be surfeited with mockery. (31)  
For the Lord does not  
Reject forever, (32) But first afflicts, then  
pardons  
In His abundant kindness. (33) For He  
does not willfully bring grief  
Or affliction to man,

עֲלִיוֹ: {ס}  
(כט) יִתֵּן בְּעַפְרֹ פִּיהוּ אוֹלֵי יֵשׁ  
תִּקְוָה: {ס}  
(ל) יִתֵּן לְמַכֶּהוּ לְחִי יִשְׁבַּע  
בְּחִרְפָּה: {ס}  
(לא) כִּי לֹא יִזְנַח לְעוֹלָם  
אֲדוּשָׁם: {ס}  
(לב) כִּי אִם־הוֹגֶה וְרַחֵם כְּרַב  
חֲסָדָיו: {ס} (לג) כִּי לֹא  
עֲנָה מִלְּבָבוֹ וַיִּגֶה בְּנִי־  
אִישׁ: {ס}

### "Loneliness," by Mary Oliver (1935-2019)

I too have known loneliness.  
I too have known what it is to feel  
misunderstood,  
rejected, and suddenly  
not at all beautiful.  
Oh, mother earth,  
your comfort is great, your arms never  
withhold.  
It has saved my life to know this.  
Your rivers flowing, your roses opening in  
the morning.  
Oh, motions of tenderness!

## Psalms 30

(1) A psalm of David. A song for the dedication of the House.  
(2) I extol You, O LORD, for You have lifted me up, and not let my enemies rejoice over me. (3) O LORD, my God, I cried out to You, and You healed me. (4) O LORD, You brought me up from Sheol, preserved me from going down into the Pit.  
(5) O you faithful of the LORD, sing to Him, and praise His holy name. (6) For He is angry but a moment, and when He is pleased there is life. One may lie down weeping at nightfall;<sup>b</sup> but at dawn there are shouts of joy.  
(7) When I was untroubled, I thought, "I shall never be shaken," (8) for You, O LORD, when You were pleased, made [me] firm as a mighty mountain. When You hid Your face, I was terrified. (9) I called to You, O LORD; to my Lord I made appeal, (10) "What is to be gained from my death, from my descent into the Pit? Can dust praise You? Can it declare Your faithfulness? (11) Hear, O LORD, and have mercy on me; O LORD, be my help!"  
(12) You turned my lament into dancing, you undid my sackcloth and girded me with joy, (13) that [my] whole being might sing hymns to You endlessly; O LORD my God, I will praise You forever.

תהילים ל'

(א) מִזְמוֹר שִׁיר-חֲנֻכַּת  
הַבַּיִת לְדָוִד: (ב) אֲרוֹמְמֶךָ  
ה' כִּי דָלִיתָנִי וְלֹא-שִׂמְחַת  
אִיבֵי לִי: (ג) ה' אֱלֹהֵי  
שׁוֹנְעֵתִי אֵלַיךָ וַתִּרְפָּאֵנִי: (ד)  
ה' הֶעֱלִיתָ מִן-שְׁאוֹל נַפְשִׁי  
חַיִּיתָנִי (מִיֹּרְדֵי-  
[מִיֹּרְדֵי-  
זְבוּר: (ה) זָמְרוּ לַה'  
חֲסִידָיו וְהוֹדוּ לְזִכְרֶךָ קְדָשׁוֹ:  
(ו) כִּי רָגַעַ | בְּאִפְּוֹ חַיִּים  
בְּרָצוֹנִי בְּעֶרְבַּ יְלִין בְּכִי  
וְלִבְּךָ רָנָה: (ז) וְאֲנִי  
אֲמַרְתִּי בְּשִׁלְוִי בַל-אֶמוּט  
לְעוֹלָם: (ח) ה' בְּרָצוֹנְךָ  
הֶעֱמַדְתָּה לְהִרְרֵי-עַז  
הַסִּתְרַתְּ פְּנֵיךָ הַיִּיתִי  
נִבְהַל: (ט) אֵלַיךָ ה' אֶקְרָא  
וְאֶל-אֲדוּשָׁם אֶתְחַנֵּן: (י)  
מִה-בְּצַע בְּדַמִּי בְּרַדְתִּי  
אֶל-שַׁחַת הַיּוֹדֶךָ עֲפָר  
הַיִּגִיד אֲמַתְּךָ: (יא) שְׁמַע-  
ה' וְחַנְּנֵי ה' הֲיֵה-עֲזָר לִי:  
(יב) הַפְּכַתְּ מִסְפְּדֵי לְמַחֹל  
לִי פִתְחַת שִׁקִּי וַתִּזְרַנֵּנִי  
שְׂמִיחָה: (יג) לְמַעַן | יִזְמְרֶךָ  
כְּבוֹד וְלֹא יִדָּם ה' אֱלֹהֵי  
לְעוֹלָם אֲוֹדְךָ: {פ}