



Loneliness as a Spiritual Crisis

Rabbi Mychal Springer

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Lamentations 1:1-3

(1) Alas!

Lonely sits the city

Once great with people!

She that was great among nations

Is become like a widow;

The princess among states

Is become a thrall. (2) Bitterly she weeps in the night,

Her cheek wet with tears.

There is none to comfort her

Of all her friends.

All her allies have betrayed her;

They have become her foes. (3) Judah has gone into exile

Because of misery and harsh oppression;

When she settled among the nations,

She found no rest;

All her pursuers overtook her

In the narrow places.^{-b}

איכה אֵלֶּאֱסֹג

איכה | יִשְׁבֶּה בְּדָד הָעִיר

רַבְּתִי עַם הָיְתָה כְּאַלְמָנָה

רַבְּתִי בְּגוֹיִם שָׁרְתִי

בְּמַדִּינֹת הָיְתָה לְמָס:

בָּלוּ תִבְכֶּה בַּלַּיְלָה

וְדַמְעָתָהּ עַל לִחְיָהּ אֵין־

לָהּ מְנַחֵם מְכַל־אֲהָבֶיהָ

כָּל־רֵעֶיהָ בְּגָדוּ בָּהּ הָיוּ

לָהּ לְאִיְבִים: גָּלְתָה

יְהוּדָה מֵעֲנִי וּמִרֵּב עֲבָדָהּ

הִיא יֹשְׁבָה בְּגוֹיִם לֹא

מְצָאָה מְנוּחַ כָּל־רֹדְפֶיהָ

הַשִּׁיגוּהָ בֵּין

הַמְצָרִים:

**“The Loneliness One Dare Not Sound,” by Emily
Dickinson 1830 (*Amherst*) – 1886 (*Amherst*)**

The Loneliness One dare not sound—
And would as soon surmise
As in its Grave go plumbing
To ascertain the size—

The Loneliness whose worst alarm
Is lest itself should see—
And perish from before itself
For just a scrutiny—

The Horror not to be surveyed—
But skirted in the Dark—
With Consciousness suspended—
And Being under Lock—

I fear me this—is Loneliness—
The Maker of the soul
Its Caverns and its Corridors
Illuminate—or seal—

Psalms 13

(1) For the leader. A psalm of David.
(2) How long, O LORD; will You ignore me forever?
How long will You hide Your face from me?
(3) How long will I have cares on my mind, grief in my heart all day?
How long will my enemy have the upper hand? (4) Look at me, answer me, O LORD, my God!
Restore the luster to my eyes,
lest I sleep the sleep of death; (5) lest my enemy say, "I have overcome him,"
my foes exult when I totter. (6) But I trust in Your faithfulness,
my heart will exult in Your deliverance.
I will sing to the LORD,
for He has been good to me.

תהילים י"ג

(א) לַמְנַצֵּחַ מִזְמוֹר לְדָוִד: (ב)
עַד־אָנָּה ה' תִּשְׁכַּחֲנִי נָצַח
עַד־אָנָּה | תִּסְתִּיר אֶת־פָּנֶיךָ
מִמֶּנִּי: (ג) עַד־אָנָּה אֲשִׁית
עֲצוֹת בְּנִפְשִׁי יָגוֹן בְּלִבִּי
יּוֹמָם עַד־אָנָּה | יְרוֹם אֵיבִי
עָלַי: (ד) הִבִּיטָה עֲנִנִי ה'
אֱלֹהֵי הָאֵרֶה לַעֲיִנִי פֶן־אִישָׁן
הַמּוֹת: (ה) פֶּן־יֹאמַר אֵיבִי
יְכַלֵּתִיו צָרִי יִגְלִלוּ כִּי אֶמּוֹט: (ו)
וְאֲנִי | בַּחֲסִדְךָ בִּטְחֹתִי יִגָּל
לְבִי בִישׁוּעָתְךָ אֲשִׁירָה לָהּ כִּי
גָמַל עָלַי: {פ}

Psalms 88

(1) A song. A psalm of the Korahites. For the leader; on maḥalath leannoth.^a A maskil of Heman the Ezrahite.
(2) O LORD, God of my deliverance,
when I cry out in the night^b before You, (3)
let my prayer reach You;
incline Your ear to my cry. (4) For I am sated with misfortune;
I am at the brink of Sheol. (5) I am numbered with those who go down to the Pit;
I am a helpless man (6) abandoned among the dead,
like bodies lying in the grave
of whom You are mindful no more,

תהילים פ"ח

(א) שִׁיר מִזְמוֹר לְבְנֵי־קֹרַח
לַמְנַצֵּחַ עַל־מַחֲלַת לְעֲנוֹת
מִשְׁכִּיל לַהֵימָן הָאֶזְרָחִי: (ב)
ה' אֱלֹהֵי יִשׁוּעָתִי יוֹם־צַעֲקוֹתִי
בַּלִּילָה נִגְדָּדְךָ: (ג) תִּבּוֹא
לִפְנֶיךָ תִּפְלֹתֵי הַטָּה אֲזַנְךָ
לְרִנָּתִי: (ד) כִּי־שָׁבַעָה
בְּרָעוֹת נִפְשִׁי וְחַיִּי לַשָּׂאוֹל
הִגִּיעוּ: (ה) נַחֲשִׁבְתִּי עִם־
יּוֹרְדֵי בּוֹר הָיִיתִי כְּגִבֹּר אֵין־
אֵיל: (ו) בַּמֵּתִים חָפְשִׁי כְּמוֹ
חֲלָלִים | שֹׁכְבֵי קֹבֶר אֲשֶׁר

and who are cut off from Your care. (7) You have put me at the bottom of the Pit, in the darkest places, in the depths. (8) Your fury lies heavy upon me; You afflict me with all Your breakers. *Selah.* (9) You make my companions shun me; You make me abhorrent to them; I am shut in and do not go out. (10) My eyes pine away from affliction; I call to You, O LORD, each day; I stretch out my hands to You. (11) Do You work wonders for the dead? Do the shades rise to praise You? *Selah.* (12) Is Your faithful care recounted in the grave, Your constancy in the place of perdition? (13) Are Your wonders made known in the netherworld, Your beneficent deeds in the land of oblivion? (14) As for me, I cry out to You, O LORD; each morning my prayer greets You. (15) Why, O LORD, do You reject me, do You hide Your face from me? (16) From my youth I have been afflicted and near death; I suffer Your terrors wherever I turn.^e (17) Your fury overwhelms me; Your terrors destroy me. (18) They swirl about me like water all day long; they encircle me on every side. (19) You have put friend and neighbor far from me and my companions out of my sight.

לֹא זָכַרְתֶּם עוֹד לְהִמָּה מִיָּדְךָ
 נִגְזְרוּ: (ז) שִׁתַּנִּי בְּבוֹר
 תַּחְתִּיּוֹת בְּמַחֲשָׁיִם
 בְּמַצְלוֹת: (ח) עָלִי סִמָּכָה
 חֲמַתְךָ וְכָל־מִשְׁבָּרֶיךָ עָגִיתָ
 סָלָה: (ט) הִרְחַקְתָּ מִיָּדַי
 מִמֶּנִּי שִׁתַּנִּי תוֹעֵבוֹת לָמוֹ
 כָּלֹא וְלֹא אֶצֵּא: (י) עֵינַי
 דָּאֲבָה מִיָּעֲנִי קִרְאֲתֶיךָ ה'
 בְּכָל־יוֹם שִׁטְחֲתִי אֵלֶיךָ כָּפִי:
 (יא) הִלַּמְתִּים תַּעֲשֶׂה־פֶלֶא
 אִם־רָפְאִים יִקְוֹמוּ יוֹדוּךָ
 סָלָה: (יב) הִי־סֹפֵר בִּקְבֹּר
 חֲסִידְךָ אֲמוֹנֶתְךָ בְּאֲבֵדוֹן: (יג)
 הַיָּדַע בְּחֹשֶׁךְ פֶּלֶאךָ
 וְצִדְקֶתְךָ בְּאֶרֶץ נְשִׁיָּה: (יד)
 וְאֲנִי אֵלֶיךָ ה' שֹׁנְעֵתִי
 וּבִבְקָר תִּפְלֹתִי תִקְדָּמָה:
 (טו) לָמָּה ה' תִּזְנַח נַפְשִׁי
 תִּסְתִּיר פָּנֶיךָ מִמֶּנִּי: (טז) עֵינַי
 אֲנִי וְגוֹעַ מִזֶּעַר נִשְׁאַתִּי אֲמִיךָ
 אֶפְוֶנָה: (יז) עָלִי עֲבְרוּ
 חֲרוֹנֶיךָ בְּעוֹתֶיךָ צִמְתוּתֶיךָ:
 (יח) סִבּוּנִי כְּמִים כָּל־הַיּוֹם
 הִקִּיפוּ עָלַי יָחַד: (יט)
 הִרְחַקְתָּ מִמֶּנִּי אֱהָב וְרַע
 מִיָּדַי מִחֹשֶׁךְ: {פ}

TABLE 9-A

<i>Spiritual Diagnosis</i>	<i>Image of God</i>	<i>Experience</i>	<i>Existential Question</i>	<i>Experience</i>	<i>Image of God</i>	<i>Spiritual Diagnosis</i>
Fear	Unpredictable, Capricious, Chaotic	Mistrust, Victimization, Helplessness, Passivity	"Am I safe?" "Is my world a threat, or an opportunity?"	Hope, Courage, Active agency, Opportunity	Trustworthy, Reliable	Faith
Alienation	Vengeful, Divisive	Social stigma, External judgment, Rejection, Estrangement,	"Do I belong?"	Social acceptance, Communion, Embrace	Loving, Inclusive	Community
Guilt	Punishing, Judgmental	Internalized stigma, Personal responsibility for illness	"Am I worthy?"	Grace, Repentance	Meriful, Compassionate	Reconciliation
Despair	Withholding, Silent, Absent	Meaninglessness, Death anxiety, Non-being	"Am I valued?" "Do I leave a legacy?" "Did my life make a difference?" "Am I content? regretful?"	Vocation, Purpose, Creativity, Meaning	Blessing, Affirming, Revealing	Providence

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-לּוֹ עֶזְרָא כְּנֶגְדּוֹ: (יט) וַיִּצַּר ה' אֱלֹהִים מִן-הָאָדָמָה כָּל-חַיֵּי הַשָּׁמַיִם וְאֵת כָּל-עוֹף הַשָּׁמַיִם וַיֵּבֵא אֶל-הָאָדָם לִרְאוֹת מֶה-יִקְרָא-לּוֹ וְכָל אֲשֶׁר יִקְרָא-לּוֹ הָאָדָם נִפְשׁ חַיָּה הוּא שְׁמוֹ: (כ) וַיִּקְרָא הָאָדָם שְׁמוֹת לְכָל-הַבְּהֵמָה וְלָעוֹף הַשָּׁמַיִם וְלִכָּל חַיֵּי הַשָּׁדָה וְלָאָדָם לֹא-מָצָא עֶזְרָא כְּנֶגְדּוֹ: (כא) וַיִּפֹּל ה' אֱלֹהִים | תַּרְדֵּמָה עַל-הָאָדָם וַיִּישָׁן וַיִּקַּח אֶחָת מִצִּלְעֹתָיו וַיִּסְגֵּר בָּשָׂר תַּחֲתָנָה: (כב) וַיִּבֶן ה' אֱלֹהִים | אֶת-הַצֶּלַע אֲשֶׁר-לָקַח מִן-הָאָדָם לְאִשָּׁה וַיְבָאָהּ אֶל-הָאָדָם: (כג) וַיֹּאמֶר הָאָדָם זֹאת הַפֶּעַם עֵצָם מִעֲצָמִי וּבָשָׂר מִבָּשָׂרִי לְזֹאת יִקְרָא אִשָּׁה כִּי מֵאִישׁ לָקַחָהּ זֹאת: (כד) עַל-כֵּן יַעֲזֹב-אִישׁ אֶת-אָבִיו וְאֶת-אִמּוֹ וְדָבַק בְּאִשְׁתּוֹ וְהָיוּ לְבָשָׂר אֶחָד: (כה) וְהָיוּ שְׁנֵיהֶם עֶרְוָמִים 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^c
enjoyment? That too is a futility and
an unhappy business. (9) Two are
better off than one, in that they have
greater benefit from^e 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!

קהלת ד' ז'-י"ב

(ז) וְשִׁבְתִּי אֲנִי וְאֶרְאֶה הֶבֶל תַּחַת
הַשָּׁמֶשׁ: (ח) יֵשׁ אֶחָד וְאֵין שְׁנִי גַם
בֶּן וְאִם אֵין-לוֹ וְאֵין קֵץ לְכָל-עֲמָלוֹ
גַם-[עֵינָיו] (עֵינָיו) לֹא-תִשְׂבַּע עֵינָיו
וְלִמִּי אֲנִי עֹמֵל וּמַחֲסֹר אֶת-נַפְשִׁי
מִטּוֹבָה גַם-זֶה הֶבֶל וְעֵינַי רָע
הוּא: (ט) טוֹבִים הַשְּׁנָיִם מִן-
הָאֶחָד אֲשֶׁר יִשְׁ-לָהֶם שָׂכָר טוֹב
בְּעֲמָלָם: (י) כִּי אִם-יִפְּלוּ הָאֶחָד
יִקִּים אֶת-חֲבֵרוֹ וְאִילוֹ הָאֶחָד
שִׁיפֹל וְאֵין שְׁנִי לְהַקִּימוֹ: (יא) גַם
אִם-יִשְׁכְּבוּ שְׁנָיִם וְחֹם לָהֶם
וְלֶאֱחָד אֵיךְ יִחָם: (יב) וְאִם-יִתְקַפּוּ
הָאֶחָד הַשְּׁנָיִם יַעֲמִדוּ נִגְדָּו וְהַחוּט
הַמְּשֻׁלָּשׁ לֹא בִמְהֵרָה יִנָּתֵק:

Psalms 71:9

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

תהילים ע"א:ט'

(ט) אֶל-תִּשְׁלִיכֵנִי לְעֵת זְקִנְיָה
כְּכָלֹת כֹּחִי אֶל-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-

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

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-

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

אל תסתיר פניך ממני.

וכאשר אקיץ להרהר
המתקו כל-כך הספורים

שמספרים החושים

Do not hide Your face from me.

לנשמת-

(האם ספורים מבצרי?)

When I wake, wondering
if the stories of my senses
are really so sweet to my soul-
(Are stories my fortress?)

הלא בשעה אבלה עשנה

בי נגע בקשיחות של מליצה
אף יפיו הרך של פרח.

Oh, at a mournful, smoldering hour
even the tender beauty of a flower
has touched me with the harshness of
flattery.

וכאשר אקיץ בוכיה

לו אדע

לאן מובילים את חיי

השמים.

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

איכה ג':כ"ה-ל"ג

(כה) טוֹב ה' לְקוֹן לְנַפֶּשׁ

תְּדַרְשֶׁנּוּ: {ס}

(כו) טוֹב וַיַּחֲלֵל וְדוֹמָם לְתַשׁוּעָה

ה': {ס} (כז) טוֹב לְגֶבֶר

כִּי-יִשָּׂא עַל בְּנֵעוּרָיו: {ס}

(כח) יֵשֵׁב בְּדָד וַיִּדָּם 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,

עָלִיוֹ: {ס}
 (כט) יִתֵּן בְּעַפְרֹ פִּיהוֹ אוֹלֵי יֵשׁ
 תִּקְוָה: {ס}
 (ל) יִתֵּן לְמַכֵּהוּ לְחִי יִשְׁבַּע
 בְּחִרְפָּה: {ס}
 (לא) כִּי לֹא יִזְנַח לְעוֹלָם
 אֲדוֹשָׁם: {ס}
 (לב) כִּי אִם־הוֹגָה וְרַחֵם כָּרֹב
 חֲסָדָיו: {ס} (לג) כִּי לֹא
 עֲנֶה מִלְּבֹו וַיִּגָּה 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;^b
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
אֹיְבֵי לִי: (ג) ה' אֱלֹהֵי
שׁוֹנְעֵתִי אֱלֹהֵי וַתִּרְפָּאֵנִי: (ד)
ה' הֶעֱלִית מִן-שְׁאוֹל נַפְשִׁי
חַיִּיתָנִי (מִיֹּרְדִי) [מִיֹּרְדִי-
[בֹּר: (ה) זָמְרוּ לַה'
חֲסִידָיו וְהוֹדוּ לְזִכָּר קֹדֶשׁוֹ:
(ו) כִּי רָגַעַ | בְּאַפּוֹ חַיִּים
בְּרָצוֹנוֹ בְּעֶרְב יְלִין בְּכִי
וְלִבְקָר רָנָה: (ז) וְאֲנִי
אִמַּרְתִּי בְּשִׁלְוִי בַל-אֶמּוּט
לְעוֹלָם: (ח) ה' בְּרָצוֹנָךְ
הֶעֱמַדְתָּה לְהִרְרִי-עַז
הַסִּתַּרְתָּ פְנֶיךָ הֵייתִי
נִבְהָל: (ט) אֱלֹהֵי ה' אֶקְרָא
וְאֶל-אֲדוּשָׁם אֶתְחַנֵּן: (י)
מִה-בָּצַע בְּדַמִּי בְּרִדְתִּי
אֶל-שַׁחַת הַיּוֹדֶךָ עָפָר
הִיגִיד אֲמַתְךָ: (יא) שְׁמַע-
ה' וְחַנּוּנִי ה' הֵיחָל-עֲזָר לִי:
(יב) הַפְּכֶתָ מִסְפְּדִי לְמַחֲוֹל
לִי פִתַּחְתָּ שִׁקְי וַתִּזְרֶנִּי
שִׂמְחָה: (יג) לְמַעַן | יִזְמְרוּ
כְּבוֹד וְלֹא יִדָּם ה' אֱלֹהֵי
לְעוֹלָם אֲוֹדְךָ: {פ}