



Hermits in New York, by Alan Watts

Let's take hermits. People today think being a hermit is a very unhealthy thing to do. Very antisocial, doesn't contribute anything to everybody else - because everybody else is busy contributing like blazes, and a few people have to run off and get out of the way. But I'll tell you what hermits realize. If you go off into a far, far forest and get very quiet, you'll come to understand that you're connected with everything. That every little insect that comes buzzing around you is a messenger, and that little insect is connected with human beings everywhere else. You can hear. You become incredibly sensitive in your ears and you hear far-off sounds. And just by the very nature of isolating yourself and becoming quiet, you become intensely aware of your relationship with everything else that's going on. So if you really want to find out how related you really are, try a little solitude off somewhere, and let it begin to tell you how everything is interdependent in the form of what the Japanese call 'jijimugi'. 'Ji' means a 'thing event,' so it means 'between thing event and thing event, there is no block.' Every thing in the world, every event, is like a dewdrop on a multidimensional spider's web, and every dewdrop contains the reflection of all the other dewdrops. But you see, the hermit finds this out through his solitude, and so also human beings can acquire a certain solitude, even in the middle of New York City. It's rather easier, as a matter of fact, to find solitude in New York City than it is in Des Moines, Iowa. But the point is that a human represents a certain kind of development, wherein a maximal sense of his oneness with the whole universe goes hand in hand with the maximum development of his personality as somebody unique and different. Whereas the people who are of course trying to develop their personality directly and taking a Dale Carnegie course on how to win friends and influence people, or how to become successful - all those people come out as if they came from the same cookie cutter. They don't have any personality. --Alan Watts