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Day 23. Set Aside a Day of Solitude

Winter is an ideal season to set aside some time for this spiritual practice. In *Anam Cara*, the late John O’Donohue calls solitude a key that unlocks the process of a homecoming to our deepest self:

“Solitude is one of the most precious things in the human spirit. It is different from loneliness. When you are lonely, you become acutely conscious of your own separation. Solitude can be a homecoming to your own deepest belonging. One of the lovely things about us as individuals is the incommensurable in us. In each person, there is a point of absolute nonconnection with everything else and with everyone. This is fascinating and frightening. It means that we cannot continue to seek outside ourselves for the things we need from within. The blessings for which we hunger are not to be found in other places or people. These gifts can only be given to you by yourself. They are at home in the hearth of your soul…

In everyone’s inner solitude there is that bright and warm hearth. The idea of the unconscious, even though it is a very profound and wonderful idea, has sometimes frightened people away from coming back to their own hearth. We falsely understand the subconscious as the cellar where all of our repression and self-damage is housed. Out of our fear of ourselves we have imagined monsters down there. Yeats says, “Man needs reckless courage to descend into the abyss of himself.” In actual fact, these demons do not account for all the subconscious. The primal energy of our soul holds a WONDERFUL WARMTH AND WELCOME FOR US. One of the reasons we were sent onto the earth was to make this connection with ourselves, this inner friendship.”

O’Donoghue suggests that we keep in our mind’s eye the image of our inner solitude as a “bright and warm hearth.” Try this practice and see what comes up for you.