

There is a rabbinic story from the middle ages that talks about a young Jewish disciple's observation of the monastic movement. He sees the monks going off into a solitary, ascetic life to know God better. In his own pursuit of God, he asks his rabbi about this practice and perhaps if he should commit to a similar life. The rabbi responds:

"My son, I'm so glad you want to know God and are committed to Him. Take off your tallit."

The young man takes off his tallit, the outer garment worn by observant Jews. He stands humbly in his under gown, expecting to be asked to give away everything to be like the monks.

"My son, take off your haluk."

Again, the disciple obeys and now stands naked before his rabbi.

"I'm sorry, my son, but I see you have a belly button. You cannot live a life of solitude for God."

How is the belly button connected to solitude? What is the point the teacher is making?

To the rabbi, the belly button is a sign that we are connected to others. We all have come from someone and the physical mark gives a picture to remind us of our need for one another.

God calls us to love others. That requires interaction. We reflect the fruit of the Spirit in relationship. God chose pictures that reflect connectedness to describe us. We are parts of His body, each with an important function that the others need. We are all stones in His temple, together being built into a place where He dwells and reveals Himself to the world.

God's people are messy. We blow it and can hurt each other, intentionally or not. If you are tempted to withdraw, to lean away from people and God's community, it might be time to take a good look to see if you have a belly button.

And let us consider how to stir up one another to love and good works, not neglecting to meet together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another ... Hebrews 10:24-25



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