

Ethics and Spirituality

Reflections and Contemplations on Life and Living

Going Solo or Singing With the Choir?

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Yes, it takes work to be a friend, to be a member of the neighborhood. The alternative though — going it alone — is far harder.

Years ago I heard this story about an African tribe: When a woman in this tribe knows she's expecting a child, she heads out into the wilderness with a few women friends, and they pray and meditate and listen for this child's song. When they hear it, they sing it over and over again. And when they

return to their village, they teach it to their entire community, so that when this child is born, everyone can sing this child into the world.

The community continues to sing this child her* song when she enters school, comes of age, marries, and when she is ready to sojourn from this world to the next.

There's one other time the villagers sing this person her song: if she were to commit a terrible social wrong. In such a case, the villagers would gather together, form a circle around her, and sing her song to her — not to shame her, but to remind her that though she committed a wrong, she is not the wrong, and she can move past it.

Most of us have not lived in one community our entire lives. We moved for college, marriage, employment, or because we fell in love with a particular place or a particular person in a particular place. In these new places most of us probably joined communities — faith-based, academic, work, yoga, book, hiking or neighborhood — be-

cause we understood that if we didn't, we would somehow be unmoored, disconnected and alone.

Perhaps this is why I'm intrigued by people who choose to live in retirement communities so that they will not be alone, and yet doggedly distance themselves from the other residents in these very communities.

I know many of these people. I'm a chaplain in a senior living community. When I ask them about their choice to withdraw, they say things like, "I don't have the energy," "I can't bear to lose yet another friend," or "It's just too much work."

Going Solo: *Continued on page 42*

“Do not separate yourself from the community.”

— Ethics of the Fathers

I understand. I do, but I also witness these loving, caring, supportive and connected moments that those who choose to opt out miss:

Eleanor enters the building carrying two bags of groceries. One bag is for her, the other for her friend who isn't feeling well and cannot get to the store.

Stella is sitting in her apartment. The bell rings. In walks Arlene who has made it her mission to check on Stella ever since Stella's husband died. Today, the gift of a flowering plant sits on the chair of Arlene's walker.

Leon calls me. There's a woman in the building he's concerned about, and he wants to meet to brainstorm ways to help her.

Sheila sees me in the lobby. She tells me she's worried about Mattie who called her this morning at 4:30 a.m., seemingly unaware of the hour, to ask her how to sign up for the access bus.

I'm in the elevator when it stops on Richard's floor. He tries to enter but is unable to because the footrest of his wheelchair is digging into the ground. So I get off the elevator to help him. About 10 minutes later, Richard and I enter the elevator together. When we arrive on the main floor, Marcia, who had been riding the elevator with me when it had stopped on Richard's floor, is standing there waiting for him. She welcomes him to the main floor, and though he is perfectly capable of wheeling himself into the dining room, she places her hands on the handlebars of his wheelchair and tells him that she will escort him to dinner.

Lottie finds me by the concierge. “You must wish Harold a happy birthday. He is 100 today.”

I lead Healing Stories, a group I created because I believe we're all in need of healing, if not of body, then of soul. In this group we sit in a circle and share our stories. Catherine speaks about her impatience with her husband, whose health is failing. Mimi mentions how difficult it was to grow up with a mother who did not believe in her. Sophie alludes to something in her relationship with her husband who died years ago that she remains ashamed of.

Sharing our stories, or singing our songs as it were, reminds us that we are not alone in our brokenness, guilt, shame or pain. This is truly powerful. This is what the African villagers wanted the person who committed a wrong to understand when they sang to her. That though she felt

terrible inside, and perhaps had lost faith in herself, she was not alone. She had the strength and love of an entire community to help her find herself again.

We all need others to help us sing our song. It's hard to go it alone. Yes, it takes work to be part of a community, but from what I've witnessed, it's worth it. ♦

**The feminine gender stands for all.*



BRAIN GAMES ANSWERS / From Page 18

Answers to Crossword Puzzle

S	H	A	M	S	C	A	N	G	L	A	S	S			
P	A	V	E	C	L	U	E	L	U	R	E	S			
A	L	A	R	H	E	R	S	O	A	K	E	N			
C	O	N	G	R	E	G	A	T	I	O	N				
E	S	T	E	E	M		S	T	M	F	D	A			
				P	A	T	H	E	Y	E	L	E			
A	L	I	V	E	S	E	A	M	C	O	M	A			
F	A	M	I	L	Y	A	N	D	S	C	H	O	O	L	
O	R	A	L		A	R	C	H		H	O	R	S	E	
U	R	G	E	O	N		E	D	G	E					
L	Y	E		D	N	A		N	E	S	T	L	E		
				N	E	I	G	H	B	O	R	H	O	O	D
E	T	H	O	S		L	O	O	M		E	T	U	I	
R	A	I	D	S		O	N	T	O		B	A	S	T	
A	T	S	E	A		W	E	A	N		A	L	E	S	

Answers to Sudoku

4	7	3	6	8	5	2	9	1
6	9	5	2	4	1	7	3	8
8	1	2	9	7	3	4	5	6
1	2	9	7	5	6	3	8	4
3	8	6	1	9	4	5	7	2
7	5	4	8	3	2	1	6	9
5	3	1	4	6	8	9	2	7
2	6	7	3	1	9	8	4	5
9	4	8	5	2	7	6	1	3

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