

An excerpt from Wintering into Wisdom: The Dance of a Lifetime: The Transaction of Individual and Community and Work

By Sally Z. Hare, Ph. D.

Not until we winter into wisdom can we see the dance we have been dancing all our lives, the transaction of Individual and Community and Work. We see what we know. And some things have to be believed to be seen...Life is a dance, not a linear uphill battle. It begins as a dance between our role as individual and our role as community member. It's a dance between light and shadow; a dance between simplicity and complexity; a dance between abundance and scarcity. This dance is about embracing paradox, about being in life in a way that is not either/or, but both/and. It's a lifelong dance between who we are and whose we are and what we are here to do; a lifelong dance co-creating our Work in the world, developing our birthright gifts so we can use them in service of the community. Through the process of this lifelong dance, we are constantly constructing and co-constructing the Individual and Community and Work.

I have spent most of my professional life in education looking at communities in classrooms and in schools, in work places and on college campuses, deepening my understanding that we humans are communal creatures – and that learning for us is a social action and interaction. Only as I winter into wisdom do I also recognize that we spend our lives in a dance co-creating who we are and whose we are and our Work in the world, what we are called to do.

Wintering into Wisdom: A Transactional Theory of Community

Community seems to be the solution for everything wrong in our world today. The breakdown of community is cited as the cause for everything from children murdering each other in schools to racism and ethnocentrism to drug overdoses to the high rates of suicide. The disappearance of community gets the blame for why we are destroying the planet – and it is Brian Swimme's solution for what he calls the "crisis of mass extinction" (Bridle, 2001).

Robert Putnam's *Bowling Alone* (2000) has become a national bestseller, as we search for ways to understand social change in the United States and the growing sense of disconnectedness and isolation that led to the Columbine shootings and the Oklahoma City bombing. Putnam's detailed graphs and tables point to his belief that we are looking for ways to create or re-create social capital as the antidote for the so-called loss of community. I say "so-called" because I don't believe we lose community any more than I believe we can create it. Humans can't exist without community. If we've lost anything, it's our own hearts – and our own capacity to know what's all around us, to hear our own inner selves, our spirits. We've lost our ability to know community, to recognize the dance.

Community begins at home. Our parents are our first dance teachers. Relationship and communication skills, so essential to community, start, for better and for worse, in the home. Community development has to begin within the individual, as each person reclaims his or her identity and integrity and remembers what it means to know community. And we learn those first dance steps, the basis for community development, at home.

T. S. Eliot's words offer insight into why we can't see this dance that we have been dancing all our lives until we are able to winter into wisdom: "We shall not cease from exploration and the end of all our exploring will be to arrive where we started and know the place for the first time." Some things have to be believed to be seen. We see what we know. Yes, it takes the grace of wintering into wisdom to see the dance of a lifetime, the transaction of Individual and Community and Work.