IT TAKES A VILLAGE
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Many years ago, former first lady of the United States Hilary Clinton made famous an old African proverb, “It takes a village to raise a child.” The phrase has long since become part of popular culture and many of us, myself included will often use the a shorthand version, “it takes a village” whenever we encounter an obstacle could not have been overcome without the help of others.

I thought of that phrase again and again this past week as I drove around Vancouver, Richmond and the North Shore delivering Passover Kits to more than a dozen households in our congregation.

Many of these deliveries were to our elders and those that have been homebound not merely because of the pandemic but also because of health and mobility issues. I had not seen any of them in person in almost a year, in a few cases more than a year. It was so good to visit with them for a few minutes socially distanced on their front porch; but it was really hard to hear face to face how lonely and isolated so many have felt.

The stories were so often similar. Adult children and grandchildren unable to come into their homes because of worries about COVID transmission or because they live out of province or country and cannot visit like they used too.

I also heard how much they missed synagogue and the socialization and connection that attending services or even committee meetings always gave them. There is an old joke, made older because I know I have told it to you before about Schwartz and Goldberg going to synagogue. The rabbi is surprised to see Goldberg attending shabbat services every week. Schwartz, he thinks he understands, his father was a cantor, and he grew up in a religious home, but Goldberg; the man never used to come to shul; except maybe the High Holy Days and then he would sit in the back and leave early. The rabbi asks them why all of a sudden then are coming together and so regularly. Goldberg the previously twice a year Jew explains. “Schwartz likes to come to talk to God, I like to come to talk to Schwartz”.

There is so much more to synagogue than prayer, our services have long been just the medium, the excuse really for people to see their friends, get a little nosh and fil their day with something other than TV, cooking and housekeeping.

So I hear that as I stand on the porch, people who miss the people of synagogue. Prayer they can get online, like we are now, but people, they are irreplicable.

But then I hear something else that fills me up and enables me to ultimately leave the Passover box with at least a degree of diminished worry. Every single one of the people I visited; those

that were alone, and isolated. None were truly alone; they all had a neighbor, a friend, a member of the temple that would check in on them. Bring up their mail, offer to pick up groceries, take down their recycling. Many of these helping angels were friends from synagogue; others neighbors who had lived next to each other for years and years, now home all the time proximity was a blessing.

Judaism is the only religion I know of where holiness is not found alone on a mountain top but in the presence of other people. The whole idea that when we say kaddish, the time when we feel most alone and estranged, because literally the person who made our world complete, a spouse, parent, sibling, friend or God forbid a child is gone. In that moment of crisis when we'd want to curl up in a ball, shut out the lights, the blinds, the door and the world, Judaism says – NO you need to go find a minyan, you need to have people over to you shiva house. God is found between us.

My teacher, Rabbi Harold Schulweis of blessed memory captured this in a poem:

Where?
God is not in me
nor in you.
But between
us.

God is not me or mine
nor you or yours
But ours.

God is known
not alone
but in relationship.

Not as a separate, lonely power
but revealed through our kinship, our
friendship
through our healing and binding
and raising up of each other.

To know God is to know others
to love God is to love others
to hear God is to hear others

More than meditations within
More than insights within
More than feelings within
Between us are

Claims, obligations, commandments
to act, to do, to behave our beliefs

I seek God
not as if He were a person alone,
He or She,
a process, a power, a being, a thing.

I seek God
not as if I were alone
a thinker, a meditator, a discrete entity.

I seek God in connection
in the nexus of community
I pray and celebrate the betweenness
that binds and holds together.

Even alone
I am sustained by my
Memory of our betweenness

"Even alone I am sustained by my memory of our betweenness" Passover is a time of memory and remembering; things and events that happened to generations we know only through story and folklore – but who's experience is as relevant to us today as it was to them in their time.

Tonight, this week – we remember the world as it once was. We remember our betweenness. Gathering a synagogue, sharing a row together in the sanctuary, hugs and handshakes; standing around the table sampling oneg cookies and tearing challah.

We remember visits to each other's homes and going out to lunch together; taking walks and just sitting with children and grandchildren on the living room sofa complaining about what seem now to be such trivial things.

The memory of those moments, the certainty, like that of the ancient Israelites that redemption will come, we will share them again; it is our greatest strength as a Jewish people and as human beings.

Yes, it takes a village to raise a child and that's a wonderful thing. But the most wonderful thing, the most powerful thing, the most enduring thing is the village itself. We are the village, (no I am not going to say we are The Village People) and together we are getting through this – that which is between us, that binds us and obligates us to each other, that is holy, that is the place of God.