16th May 2025

Individuality

"I hold this to be the highest task for a bond between two people: that each protects the solitude of the other."

Rainer Marie Rilke, *in a letter to Paula Modersohn-Becker (1904)*

Following my reflection on "respect" yesterday, drawing inspiration from Frog and Toad "being alone together", and with the "solitude" thought still in my mind from the day before, I've been pondering something my wife and I have talked about often during our fifty years of marriage – retaining our individuality while being in a deep and lasting togetherness,

When I was a small boy, I played a lot on my own – maybe because I was forced to stay indoors in bad weather or I'd been grounded for being naughty. But there were also times when I had no friends to play with, so I had to be content with my own company. I played with toys, of course (I was never much of a reader then): cars; *Meccano*; a glove-puppet. But I also played solo games, like *Solitaire*. Do you remember that? A circular board about nine inches in diameter, filled with glass marbles in semi-circular indentations, with an empty space in the centre. You jumped one marble over another, discarding the one that had been jumped, till there was only one marble left. I never managed to complete my *Solitaire* (there *must* be a methodology), but it gave me endless fun.

It may be childhood experiences or something in my personality, but I've always been comfortable on my own. I enjoy company too, of course. But while I live in community, value connections and play my part in society, I will never lose my individuality – nor should I.

In *The Prophet* from 1923, the Lebanese writer Kahlil Gibran reflects on marriage, and offers us this:

Love one another, but not make a bond of love:
Sing and dance together, and be joyous, but let each one of you be alone.
And stand together, yet not too near together.
For the pillars of the Temple stand apart,
And the oak tree and the cypress grow not in each other's shadow.

In marriage, and in any deep relationship, there should be a respect for individuality, in oneself and for someone you love. It's so important that the loving bond between us always "protects the solitude of the other".

A prayer for today

Lord, in my aloneness with you, fill the empty places of my heart with blessings. Amen

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