

SELF-RELIANCE AND COMMUNITY

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Self-reliance and community are two sides of the same coin. They live together.

Ideally, self-reliant people are raised and nourished by a loving family and community. Plenty of people build themselves into self-reliant individuals without these advantages, but a more caring start helps—it makes it more likely that someone will achieve independence and self-realization.

(I need to say that self-reliant people may or may not be physically independent. When I think of self-reliant people, I'm thinking of people who have gained courage, integrity, and character. It's the inner qualities that matter.)

Regardless of how self-reliant a person is, there will be times of illness or despair when they need help. But it's not just in times of crisis that a self-reliant person needs community. On an ongoing basis, intimacy and authentic communication are things that all people need, the same as we need to eat, sleep, and breathe. There is a continuum of personality here. I know some very strong people who want others around them pretty much all the time. I know other strong people who tend toward the reclusive end of the spectrum.

Community provides a sounding board and a catalyst for the new thoughts that free-thinking people generate. Either through support or opposition, the self-reliant person gains clarity and energy.

On the other side of the coin, communities need self-reliant people because they're the ones who are most capable of leading and providing for those who need help.

Because they're creative thinkers and they *believe* in their own thoughts and intuition and inner light, self-reliant people will inevitably spark controversy and dissension within their community. This is healthy. The self-reliant person will either reform the community from within or leave the community and start a new one. Others from the old community may follow, or the self-reliant person may stand alone as a beacon and example. Thus self-reliant people prevent stagnation and keep moving communities on to a higher level. This is how we

make progress. (If you subscribe to the idea that humans do indeed make forward progress.)

The Libertarian/Republican version of self-reliance is a perversion. It's not tied to the varied reality of human experience. It doesn't take into account how many wealthy, powerful people have achieved their status through the exploitation of their community and through a requisite *lack* of courage, integrity, and character. They are cowards and bullies who forfeit all claim to respectability.

It's important that the human community cultivate an awareness of what constitutes true self-reliance—true character.

I think this is the most critical challenge for twenty-first-century humans: to figure out ways to raise our youth so they can fulfill their innate potential—truly become who they are—and at the same time feel a genuine love and responsibility toward their fellow humans and their planet that translates into willing sacrifice to support the good that exists outside themselves. In any individual life, this is a continuous balancing act and requires deep self-awareness. We must inextricably tie self-reliance to community.