

Since I have been a kid I have sometime played solitaire obsessively and wondered why.

Over time I learned a few things about myself from this irrational pattern of behavior. I play solitaire when I am sad, depressed and don't know what to do. It calms me down, maybe because if I lose it is not my fault, but is "in the cards."

If I win I can see my skill but always understand how "the luck of the cards" helps. I now like timed solitaire on the computer because I can race myself for best time in two ways: How quickly I could win, and take advantage of the opportunity the cards gave me or, how quickly I could lose by exhausting all the alternatives the cards gave me.

It is all deeply satisfying.

Lately I have been playing soduko obsessively and wondered why. Since I have already thought so much about the reasons I play solitaire it was natural that I notice that I play soduko when I am struggling with a problem, or trying to work something out.

Maybe because, by definition, it is always possible to win Soduko. Even the toughest games have a solution – and just one solution. Of course I don't always win but I could have won, if I had been more careful, paid more attention, remembered the dire consequences of guessing and accepted the lack of probability in finding the right place to put a number. Timing is irrelevant, I don't care how long it takes to complete a puzzle. Because there is a right answer, carefulness trumps speed, always.

For awhile adopting soduko seemed a mature step. My fate is not in the stars of luck but in myself, my skills and my patience can always win the day. Losing isn't so bad because I can look at the correct answer and see where I went astray, if I want to. But I seldom do check out the answers. It is enough to know they exist in the back of the book.

But lately I have been alternating between the hypnotizing speed of timed solitaire on the computer and the calming slowness of paper and pencil (pencils! I haven't used them for years) on paper. I watch myself opening the computer when I am overwhelmed and am trying to accept defeat, or loss, or just my lack of control over a situation. I reach for one of my numerous soduko books when I need to remember that I can accomplish something when I want to push myself.

Now I wonder about it all. Is playing solitaire just accepting fate? Is soduko, even when I lose a winnable game, a way of finding efficacy somewhere, of not giving up the struggle to learn and do better?

Maybe maturity really is accepting both challenges as a part of the universe. It's hard because I often play solitaire to see my fate when rationally I should be seeking the achievable solutions of soduko. And vice versa. As I desperately keep trying to win the winnable game maybe I should be seeking the solace to be found in the luck of the draw. Or maybe it is all the other way around. I wonder