

matter how badly I've felt at the beginning of such a hike, I've always felt a bit stronger and more alive at its completion. The question respectfully asked at the end of such a hike might be whether I still wanted to go through with the intended suicide or if possibly we might do this again next week.

The challenge to everyone that the very existence of a phenomenon such as suicide poses, is to create a world in which we are all so supportive of each other that no one ever feels trapped, overwhelmed, or without hope. One of the greatest judgements upon humanity, I think, is that we have created (and continue to create) a world in which suicide is often the most intelligent option.

But we could do otherwise.
Which will it be?

Please accept my sincere apology for the lateness of this issue, due to changing my place of residence and other personal difficulties. I am very thankful to everyone who as subscribed to this newsletter and hope that each of you will seriously consider renewing when the time comes.



Recommended Reading:

The Irrational Season by Madeleine L'Engel. Intuition suggested a few weeks ago that this should be the book I recommend within this first issue of my newsletter within the final year of the millennium. Much as many of us might try to treat one day just like the next, just trying to make it through each day's frequently confusing mixture of difficult accomplishments and failures, the fact remains that we are living in times of extreme change. The mixture of daily-ness and cosmic evolution, the interconnectedness between simple moments and the transcendent ebb and flow of divine life within the universe challenge both the author and the reader's awareness in the pages of this text. Though written from a specifically Christian perspective, this book's insights into the relationship between that which is human and that which is divine are much more inclusive. Perhaps it is severely irrational that humanity and divinity would be so interconnected, and perhaps "irrational" (at least from our perspective) is one of the better ways to describe the current season in which we live. In any case, I find the book to be very helpful to exactly that activity: living within an irrational season.

Subscription Information:

"Sister Who's Perspective" is a newsletter produced once every two months and available for an annual (six issues) subscription price of \$12.00 (please make checks payable to Denver NeVaar with the initials SWP on the memo line of the check).

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Sister Who's Perspective

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Life is a collaborative effort, encompassing more than we know. In a time of abundant "information overload," news, communication, and travel across great distances, we often talk at each other without listening, communicating, or understanding.

Humanity needs its icons, but also its iconoclasts to grow beyond the good and bad qualities that now limit and describe us. The essences of both God and us remain, in the midst of questions, to be discovered, experienced, and expressed.

Please share in this ongoing dialogue, remembering to indicate whether and how you wish to be identified.

Blessings, love, and peace to you.

"Hello--and How Are You Today?"

Would anyone care to argue that we are not in a time of very great transition? It's as if life must give birth to a new form in order to continue, yet for all of humanity's scientific progress we have not been able to create painless birth. We can block nerve impulses from communicating states of physical, emotional, and psychological trauma, but we cannot keep the trauma from being nevertheless, in fact, true.

A further aspect which seems to be seldom consciously considered is that within the process of each birth is the possibility that one or both of the actual participants may not physically survive. Yet again and again, in a myriad of ways, people continue to risk giving birth to new things.

The standard consolation seems to be that when the birthing process is over, that the experience is never regretted, due to the new life that was thereby created--but this too is not always the case. A (thankfully) few parents have gone so far as to directly state that they would rather their child be still-born or aborted than to be born with a disability; to be born, grow up, and be discovered to be Gay; or to be born and grow up to express some other quality the specific parents find to be completely undesirable.

Yet I believe that God has placed hidden meanings and something deeply sacred even--or perhaps especially--in the most unlikely places and things (at least, unlikely from a typical human perspective).

The standard greeting that forms the title of this column is not a question I enjoy answering of late, because I sense the hope in the other that I will answer positively and I do not wish to disappoint

"Rediscovering Ritual--and Making it Personal"

What began as a suggestion for a weekend retreat facilitated by Sister Who has now progressed to a finished book manuscript of fifty-six pages, available upon request for a donation of \$5.00 to cover printing and postage costs. The table of contents reads as follows:

Introduction

Chapter 1: The Possibilities and Purposes of Symbolism

Chapter 2: Trustworthy Intuition

Chapter 3: What to Expect from a Ritual

Chapter 4: Creating and Maintaining a Sacred Space

Chapter 5: Creating Personal Tools for Use in Rituals

Chapter 6: Living in the Midst of Ritual Objects

Chapter 7: Selection of a Ritual

Chapter 8: Composing the General Structure of a Ritual

Chapter 9: Shared/Communal Rituals

Conclusion

Final Notes From and About the Author

the speaker with the news that such is not the case--for now.

Yet I sense that the current struggles of my life are like those of a birth, with something not entirely known or understood struggling to create a space for itself. Like so many others, I have no trouble remaining committed to the process, I only find myself occasionally wondering whether I will survive.

Yet just when it seems that all is lost, small curious divine synchronicities seem to find their ways into my life-experience and I know that somehow I must find a way to serve whatever life now wants to create through me. I know that I must be ready for my guardian angels to appear to me in forms they've never used before. Mostly, I am reminded that I must not allow my world to become small, such that there would not be enough room for me to live within it.

So when speaking with possible employers, for purposes of earning a little extra money by which to pay my bills, I find myself secretly looking past their faces, wondering where they are in each of their own life-paths and what I can do to encourage that part of them and their spectrum of life-experiences.

In those moments I remember again that the almighty "it" of "what's it all about" is not about the specific face of the place I live, the people with whom I interact, the economic level at which I participate in society, or the religious definition by which I order my own life. Rather, "it" is about me and God and what happens when the two come together--and the times when by working together we manage to send ripples of divine love and understanding out through the world and possibly even out through the universe.

So how am I doing? As long as I'm doing the ministry of Sister Who, the ministry I believe I was in fact born to do, I'm doing very well indeed. Thank you for asking.

Recommended Movies:

More often, the movies I have recommended must be sought in video stores. This time, I'd like to recommend the two I viewed most recently, still being played in public movie theatres.

Star Trek: Insurrection. I was absolutely struck by the beauty of every detail of life in the village at the beginning of this movie, though as the relationships to the village of various characters within the movie are revealed, clearly paradise is not for everyone--at least not all of the time. Stages of personal growth are filled with choices. Consider the choices of each person within this movie, both in terms of what initially prompted the choice and also what the outcome of the particular choice turned out to be. Then take another empowering look at your own daily choices and recognize that many small things are magnified by time and continuing life experience. Is this not a significant part of what is meant by the suggestion that each moment of life--whatever it is--is somehow sacred?

Stepmom. How does one safely jump onto a moving freight train? Indeed, is it actually possible to do so? Perhaps it isn't possible to do so safely, but I suggest that metaphorically such leaps are nevertheless made every day. To love someone and to be willing to become intimately involved and fully committed to the unfolding of that person's life, is just such an action. The pitfalls, challenges, wounds, and hopefully the eventual triumphs of such an interpersonal connectedness require determination and acceptance of great emotional pain--much like a physical birth. The poet within me wants to say that the strength required can only be found within the amazing power of love. What I found most inspiring within this movie, however, (perhaps equal to the amazing power of love) was the willingness of everyone not only to greatly expand their definitions of the word "family," but also to grow into absolute committedness to being exactly that--a family.

A Place of My Own

Let me first be clear about the following subject: I am not a professionally certified authority, nor is this a complete presentation of my ideas. This is simply one perspective of something about which very few are willing to speak openly and about which I hope to say more later.

In facing the new millennium, the beginning of the year 2000, the current resurgence of institutionalized religion is perfectly consistent with people being somehow deeply, unconsciously afraid. Who knows what such a change will bring? No physical person alive has ever faced such an enormous change before.

Not as a prophet of doom but rather as an observer of human behavior, I suspect that incidences of suicide will dramatically increase toward the end of this year, as we look directly down the throat of this monstrous change.

Hopefully we will soon find the monster to be not truly a monster at all but rather a wonderful new beginning. For now, however, it seems that the next year will be one of facing deep and irrational fears of all kinds.

In this article, rather than describing any sort of new understanding that might serve us better, I want to address how we might help each other through this time. We can work on a new understanding of life later.

I don't believe that serious thoughts of suicide are uncommon, nor is there anyone who wouldn't become suicidal, given a specific set of circumstances. Suicide has more to do with subjective reality created by circumstances and perspective than with objective reality, but reality that is subjective is not for that reason any less reality. The good thing about subjective reality is that it is easily influenced.

Being suicidal is not a matter of being self-centered, weak, or psychologically dysfunctional; it is a matter of feeling trapped, overwhelmed, and without hope--and of being unable to see anything else. Often I am confronted by how extremely unique I am, in such a way that I temporarily despair of ever finding a place, in which I will be allowed to

truthfully exist.

Were I two persons in such moments, able thus to minister to myself, what could I say or do?

First and foremost, I would respect the choice I have made, validating the reasons or feelings which provoked the choice of killing myself. I would not telephone the police or anyone else, who might come and prevent the suicide by stripping myself of the freedom to decide my own fate. A suicidal state is one of radical disempowerment. Further disempowering myself by placing my future in someone else's hands would not be helpful. If life is to be worth living even one more moment, I must traverse this frightening junction of feelings and events in a way that accomplishes empowerment in the deepest parts of my soul.

Second, I would not say things I didn't mean just to change my mind. It is not, after all, my mind that I wish to change; it is my emotional experience of life that needs changing. If I promise more than I can deliver, all I am really giving is a future experience of betrayal.

Just as with any other great decision, I would be a friend to myself, trying to help myself verify whether I'd made the best decision or not, accepting whatever answers are given as being truthful and sincere. It does not matter if I don't believe the answers; what matters is that I do.

Third, remembering that this is usually primarily an emotional event of feeling trapped, overwhelmed, and without hope, I would ask myself for a last mountain hike together, to more completely say goodbye and to have more beautiful surroundings in which to die than to do so staring up at a plaster ceiling in a bedroom. The trick of this maneuver, just because I know myself, is that I know that a hike in the mountains always strengthens and refreshes my spirit. I know that no