

SISTER WHO'S PERSPECTIVE

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Overview

It is extremely difficult to navigate daily life without indulging expectations and judgments of various kinds. Closely aligned with both of these are personal beliefs about probability and possibility. What is ultimately regarded as miraculous are those moments, developments, or challenges when such beliefs are most disregarded by the Divine in order to manifest something better.

Improbable Beginnings

It continues to amaze me that when just about everything is going wrong, something will often suddenly--in defiance of all probability and statistics--go wondrously right. Theologically, however, this is absolutely consistent. Human thinking would suggest that if one is going to build a universe, the first task is to assemble all of the necessary materials. Conversely, the Christian creation story, for example, asserts that everything was created from nothing--or was it really nothing?

Perhaps specifically because human experience involves so much physicality, a common error is to think only in terms of material resources. When immaterial resources are re-introduced, however, possibilities increase a thousand-fold. What was present within the void described within the Christian creation story, was the embodiment of highest wisdom and greatest love (what I call "Godde")--with an intention to create something new.

Similarly, when I find myself within a specific place and moment within time, I may feel that I have nothing with which to respond to a particular challenge. I may not even have a mirror by which to see my own face. It may be easy for me to forget, therefore, that I have myself and all that my being and my consciousness includes. My creative intention within that moment may be all that the surrounding emptiness needs, to begin expanding in a more empowered direction. It is quite legitimate within such circumstances,

therefore, to announce (to one's self, if it appears that no one else is present), "It is not true that there is nothing here; I am here."

I have several times during my life, been within a situation within which even my very existence was denied and those around me seemed to regard me as invisible, inaudible, and without any significant contribution to make. On one hand, if I truly value the freedom of choice, I must allow them to choose not to include me. On the other hand, however, there are times when it is not only myself who is being excluded, but rather an entire classification of people. Within such circumstances, what is at stake is the shaping of humanity as a whole. The fundamental question is whether or not I am willing to stand up for all that is good, just, and actually essential to life or whether I will instead become yet one more victim of a self-serving, tyrannical, abusive, and authoritarian force.

As a person of faith, I take delight in Godde's apparent fondness for defying human definitions of both impossible and improbable. It's as if the more improbable or impossible a thing appears to be, the likely it is to happen when love and wisdom are present in fullest measure. Relatively speaking, the easiest way to be sure that such love and wisdom are present, is to bring them along within one's self.

Similarly, if I wish for the healing touch of the Divine to be present, I can offer myself to be the embodiment of that divine fingertip, touching whatever wounded part of another most needs healing. The ability of an unlimited divine presence to flow through something as weak and limited as a human being in ways that may perhaps even change the course of history, is perhaps the most improbable new beginning of all. It is imperative within such blessed moments, however, to leave one's ego at the door and focus purely upon serving the miraculous, impossible, and improbable work.

May one and all and everything, blessed and loved ever be.

Improbable Developments

When Gareth first arrived, he was no bigger than Galahad. Having never had an Old English sheepdog before, I had no idea that by the time he stopped growing, he would be nearly four times larger. At one point, his bones were expanding so quickly that he literally had growing pains and was whining and crying quite frequently. One night the pain became so severe that I even took him to the animal hospital, where the veterinarian explained (after performing an x-ray) that the inside of his bones were inflamed due to the accelerated growth they were experiencing. I had never before realized that such a condition was possible.

Similarly, when I first recognized my gay orientation and wanted to learn what it meant, I had never before imagined participating within an international bodybuilding competition nor of meeting someone such as Sister X while doing so. It is no exaggeration to say that the conversations that I had with Sister X that week literally changed the course of my life.

I also had never imagined that becoming Sister Who would lead to the creation of a television series that is still occasionally in active production more than twenty years later. I had not imagined hiking to the summits of fifteen of Colorado's highest mountains in full ritual garb nor had I imagined performing an award-winning modern morality play at a graduate-level institution.

All of this is like the growth of a tree, which sends out branches in response to light. Looking at a tiny apple seed lying upon the palm of one's hand, it is difficult for us to envision the huge plant, the ever-expanding orchards, and the millions of individual fruits that could ultimately use this tiny seed as a doorway of opportunity.

Similarly, it is easy to forget and difficult to remember that every word, conversation, and act of kindness could be a doorway through which love and wisdom enter the world and expand throughout time. The first step, however, each and every time, is giving the seed a chance to grow.

What makes the subsequent development probable or improbable is the extent to which we not only provide the opportunity, but also remain sufficiently present to nurture that development and growth. Like the biblical parable within which seeds were scattered and landed within four different types of soil, the task doesn't end with scattering the seed. Plants--and people--need

more than just placement in order to grow. To my observation, however, most people are unaware of the difference even just their presence can make.

Consequently, development is made improbable by absence, whether that absence is physical, mental, or emotional. It is obviously possible to be physically present, but mentally distracted by some project or concern that may not be directly related to that present moment at all--such as those who attend a communal gathering of any sort, but spend the time thinking about work or recreational activities which are planned for later within the day or week. It is possible to physically and mentally present with someone during a moment of crisis, but remain emotionally distant; in no way feeling anything at all for the pain and confusion the other person is currently experiencing.

It is also possible to be emotionally and physically present with someone, but to remain mentally absent by playing along with an emotional outburst but dismissing any accountability to relevant truths. If accountability to truth is not also part of the process of resolving the moment of challenge, the roots from which that moment sprung will fail to be addressed; the causes of the problem will remain in place and probably give a repeat performance at a later time.

Improbable developments begin with genuinely loving both one's self and others non-competitively and thereby allowing love to bring a more holistic and constructively integrated harmony than would otherwise be possible. Remarkably, such harmony has in fact occurred (at least momentarily) within even the least supportive circumstances. By its very nature, like an ever-flowing river, however, life is forever fluctuating and evolving. Sustaining positive development therefore requires constant vigilance; remaining fully present within each moment of one's life and fully connected to whatever relationships and opportunities one's life will ultimately include.

Considering the myriad of possible distractions and opportunities for imbalance and disharmony, maintaining such awareness, consciousness, and/or vigilance is logically improbable. Considering the alternative possibilities, the creation of the universe itself and of any individual currently living is distinctly improbable as well.

Undeterred, love and wisdom ask that we give life the chance it needs for better things than pain and emptiness to happen.

May one and all and everything, blessed and loved ever be.

Improbable Transitions

Looking around at the current state of the world within which we live, many people seem to now be asking--rhetorically--how did we get here?!

I don't think they actually want a history lesson, which is why I describe the question as rhetorical--those questions which we ask out-loud more as a way of expressing an emotion than as a request for actual information. What this indicates, however, is that we have not been as conscious of each step of our journey as we might have been.

The intriguing point to me is that often without conscious intention and sometimes in defiance of logic and probability, unlikely and improbable transitions continue to happen--taking us to places in life where we never thought we would go.

Sometimes we may not even remember saying "yes" to a particular opportunity. Consciously or unconsciously, however, each day includes more choices than most of us ever remember making. Part of growing up is becoming more conscious of those choices and consequently becoming more involved in directing them one way or the other.

Once we have become more conscious of some of the choices that today includes, there are still many more within yesterday and tomorrow to which we would do well to attend also. For some, such personal reflection could even slip into being an unproductive addiction, what some have termed "the paralysis of analysis," providing an excuse for them to avoid dealing with the appropriate and healthy challenges of living their own lives. The ingredient that can prevent this is application.

During my masters academic program, I would occasionally irritate my professors by insisting that any idea without an application was worthless. For me, it was akin to saying that there is no point in owning ballet slippers if one never puts them on and begins dancing. There has never been a dancer who danced perfectly the first time; it has always been a matter of constantly

*"If I never sit still and listen,
I diminish opportunities
to notice divine arms of love
embracing me."*

-- Sister Who

developing and improving one's skills. The transition from beginner to expert, in dancing as in everything else, however, happens so slowly and subtly that it is difficult to say precisely when the transition from beginner to expert happened.

In a similar way, many people like to speak of freedom and slavery, but these too are things which result from subtle and slow transitions. Slavery does not begin when chains are applied; it begins when self-agency, communal awareness, and interpersonal dynamics are neglected. Freedom does not begin when a tyrant is deposed, but rather when individuals and communities finally find their voices and begin to speak, to choose, and to act with integrity, wisdom, and solidarity. It is easy and in many places popular to say that everyone matters, but this idea will remain meaningless until we begin to live like we truly believe it.

According to most people with whom I have spoken, who have understandably become cynical about life and the direction and implications of humanity's development, a world within which people live like they truly believe that everyone matters, is profoundly improbable. The transition to becoming just that sort of world, however, is absolutely within our reach and will in fact become reality when all of us together finally decide that we really want it.

A similar note begins with words from Dwight Eisenhower, "If you want total security, go to prison. There you're fed, clothed, given medical care, and so on. The only thing lacking is freedom." Freedom is in fact an improbable transition requiring both time and effort. As an idea only, freedom is worthless. Only when integrated with the many challenges related to its application, does freedom begin to have value. Among the costs of attaining freedom, is that of relinquishing security and engaging in the more or less endless societal debate about how it should look, act, and be experienced--allowing the opinions and answers within that debate to also shift and change as necessary from one age to the next.

What remains inspiring about improbable transitions is that they continue to happen, to surprise us, and--if we are willing to truly listen--to teach us. Through ongoing debates, we can learn from each other, never knowing what new insight or ability another person may provide--which is yet another way to be each others' guardian angels, challenging each other to truly be our best and supporting the efforts that follow.

May one and all and everything, blessed and loved ever be.

Improbable Realities

After listening to professors, preachers, and persons present their ideologies and opinions, I have often concluded that within the ideological schemes presented, I am not supposed to exist.

The fact that I do exist, however, might be interpreted as Godde's opinion that the particular ideology or opinion is in need of expansion. The same could be said of every other person as well.

A fascinating aspect of humanity, individually and collectively, is that we are each a peculiar combination of contrasting qualities. It is quite legitimate to say, therefore, that each and every one of us is in fact an improbable reality. Although it may be possible to present a case that asserts that some part of us is the way it is because of where and when we were born, because of our childhood experiences, and because of other experiences our individual lives have included, there is somehow always a little bit more than such a combination can fully explain--some mysterious something still lying just beyond our mental reach.

Is it real? Some say yes and some say no. A truly accurate answer to that question is what is yet beyond our reach. What is of more concern to me is what we each do with it and what we also decide to do with it together. For myself, I persist in my contention that everything is real within its context but only within its context. That being the case, there are many times when all I need to do to change a particular reality, is to change the context.

Regardless, there does not seem to be much disagreement that many invisible things are absolutely real. Finding effective ways to live with them, no matter how improbable they may otherwise appear to be, is a lifelong effort. Doing less than that, however, leaves us with the inescapable reality of contributing to our own limitation and defeat; of being our own enemies.

As improbable as any reality of healthy and holistic integration of our spiritual, social, mental, emotional, and physical dimensions may be, this integration may be the closest conception to a truly healthy and beautiful soul that anyone could ever hope to find.

It is not wise, however, to give up the search simply because it's taking more time than we thought it would. If we did, we would miss all the experiences of love, joy, and truth along the way.

May one and all and everything, blessed and loved ever be.

On a Personal Note

The holidays are past, along with the fears of some that the world was coming to an end. The suggestion that this day was not so much an end as a new beginning, however, was partially affirmed for me by meeting a new friend while at the annual event called "Drumming up the Sun" at the Red Rocks amphitheater. She was not only impressed by this ongoing unconventional ministry, but also confided that she has significant past experience in public relations and wanted to help in whatever ways she could. Since that time we have been working together on a second modern morality play, "A Sequential Journey," which is somewhat of a companion piece to the first modern morality play, "A Circuitous Journey," performed at Liff School of Theology in 2006 and thereafter given an award. The work on this second liturgical play has been quite inspiring and I look forward to sharing it with you as soon as possible.

On the home front, things have been much more challenging, financially and environmentally. A complex combination of circumstances has made it very difficult to keep the house comfortably warm and remaining financial resources after all quarterly bills were paid have the appearance of being impossibly inadequate--but one way or another, I'm doing my best to cope.

The dogs seem to be getting along okay most days, but every now and then Gareth's unstable emotions seem to linger just below the surface. A few moments of pure fun occurred on Christmas day, however, when sufficient snow allowed Gareth and Bedivere to experience pulling the dogsled up and down the street together.

Blessings, love, and peace, S.W.

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