

sister who's perspective

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Overview

On those occasions in the past when I've been forced to drive long distances through dense fog, I chose to limit my concern for the larger journey. Most of my attention was instead focused upon the shortened stretch of road barely visible in front of my car.

Perception within times of transition can often feel similarly limited, requiring us to reorient to whatever perception is still within reach. May these words be similarly helpful.

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

Navigating Adversity

No matter how many times I hear the words, "I'm only doing this for your own good," the action is usually far more concerned with the ego of the perpetrator than with any need of mine. If I am not allowed to be unique, inappropriate methods will be imposed and (metaphorically) I will be forced to wear shoes that don't fit and thus to stumble everywhere I go--never knowing a pain-free moment until or unless such "shoes" are removed.

Thus the road to hell is once again paved with good intentions--often in ways that embody abuses of power. Ambivalence and apathy in relation to suffering, only reinforce the oppression while simultaneously encouraging more desperate response to the ongoing injustice. Globally, these dynamics are unfortunately common. Examples can also be found, however, within even intimate interpersonal relationships.

Among the ways to navigate such behavioral failures, is that of pausing to listen to each others' stories. Plunging forward with inadequate information and understanding is analogous to directly inviting disaster.

A central problem, however, is the frequent disinterest in either listening to each others' stories or in being open and honest

about one's own. Ultimately, every story includes experiences both of being victimized and of accomplishing good things and is therefore a sort of map through time, explaining the formation of one or more individuals' consciousness. If we are unfamiliar with another's map, we may ignorantly insist that they (metaphorically) cross a river at a point where no safe crossing is possible.

Sadly, circumstances do not always include sufficient time to relate the story. One way to circumvent this, is to phrase everything as a question (i.e. "Can you... Would it work to... Have you ever tried... What resources would be required to... Have you considered... What if we were to make this particular change to your earlier attempt?" and so forth). By approaching the conversation in this manner, the other is recognized and respected as an authoritative voice regarding his or her own experience. The assertion, whether overtly or covertly, that one knows another better than that one knows the self, is inescapably arrogant, condescending, and presumptuous--and thus self-sabotaging.

If non-violent resolution is not possible, however, one must choose between (1) devaluing one's self by embracing violence and (2) allowing degrees of self-sacrifice. Even fleeing requires the sacrifice of important aspects of self-identity, self-agency, and self-perception that may limit future possibilities.

An important question within such moments, is whether resisting sacrifice requires psychological denial. Physical life, for example, limits familial experiences, denies to pets human longevity, and imposes the effects of over-use and aging. As spoken by a particular martyred missionary, however, "He is no fool who gives what he can't keep, to get what he cannot lose." There are indeed many things far greater and far more valuable than the limited physical lives we now experience.

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

Navigating Abundance

Infinite wealth is only a blessing if one fails to consider the possible effects upon those involved. It is the work of life that keeps our minds and bodies strong and ready to face future challenges. Holistically, however, such work must include play, because of certain parts of mind and spirit which are nurtured in no other way.

A significant part of growing up, is the challenge of integrating both work and play--as well as many other things. It is common, however, especially during times of crisis, to temporarily embrace imbalance. Oddly, living in abundance includes no guarantee of holistic and healthy balance. Whether traveling by bicycle, boat, car, train, or plane, balance remains essential to effective motion and must be constantly and carefully maintained.

Within the current era, narcissism has enabled many to slip into thinking that blessings are to be utilized for exclusively individual personal empowerment and life experiences. At the heart of narcissism is the negation of relationship--ultimately to the point of self-destruction. The holistic, healthy, and thus relational self, however, recognizes the interconnectedness of all things and thus works to balance the interests and needs of the self with those of others.

Being the steward of abundance and blessings, consequently, is concerned with doing all that one can to eradicate needs within others. Specifically because of how extensive interconnectedness is, it was written long ago, "the one who waters others, waters himself." It could even be said that the wealthiest one-percent of the world have the ability to purchase world peace. By eliminating need in food, clothing, shelter, education, mental health services, and medical care, crime rates would plummet, societal morale would sky-rocket, and creative innovation could provide a quantum leap to humanity's spiritual, intellectual, technological, and social growth.

Having too much of a good thing without any impulse toward generosity, charity, and philanthropy, conversely, invites intellectual and physical muscles to atrophy. If "necessity is the mother of invention," then the absence

thereof could easily become an invitation to stagnation and death in dreams, aspirations, relationships, and possibilities. In a very real sense, therefore, abundance is potentially dangerous and must be carefully navigated.

There is something very healthy and empowering about the fact that we need one another in order to survive. By offering a buffer between one's self and experiences of need, however, wealth encourages us to forget this and consequently to quietly and unintentionally isolate ourselves--never becoming obvious until some sort of crisis occurs and survival itself challenges us to rediscover the strength which can only be found within each other.

Part of avoiding narcissism and navigating abundance includes relating positively to all the invisible mysteries that lie beyond the limits of physical perception. No words can create Godde if Godde does not in fact exist and no words can negate Godde's existence if in fact Godde really does. What is beyond us is not determined by us, but rather can only be discovered or ignored--in both cases with various consequences. Among other things, what is central to abundance is that these and many other options are always available.

It could thus be said that a primary challenge of humanity is coming to terms with infinite possibility. Specifically because the possibilities are infinite, however, there are as many or more ways to do this as there have been, are, and ever will be unique and individual persons. To imagine a Being that is the embodiment of infinity, eternity, highest wisdom, and greatest love who is somehow involved in our incomprehensibly complex and ever-evolving processes, is a possibility that many have found to be empowering.

If the Divine has for whatever reason chosen to refrain from disclosing Itself in any particular way to any particular individual, the navigation of infinite abundance dictates that I allow that individual the freedom to follow an individual path and experience an individual life in whatever ways empower that individual--thus making my love for that individual both unconditional and miraculous in its possibilities.

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Navigating Failure

"Nothing lasts forever," it's been said, but this is too often interpreted in exclusively negative ways. Yes, the loss is painful and it is extremely helpful to have a virtual village of friends and family (although many of us do not) to help one through the experience. Once the loss has been grieved and accepted, however, it is wise to awaken to the possibilities of whatever follows. Failure, to the very best of my knowledge and understanding, is inseparable from some sort of experience of loss, but there are innumerable constructive ways to respond to such experiences--even if one must do so all alone.

In order to leave behind a loading dock, a ship must raise the anchor, untie itself from moorings, and engage its engines, sails, oars, or whatever propulsion the particular vessel utilizes. For experiences of loss, this could be construed as rituals associated with grief, separation, or relinquishment. In some cases, rituals may be unnecessary but nonetheless potentially helpful; in others, however, rituals may be absolutely essential to the performance of well-organized sequences and subsequent generation of empowering transition.

Considering the over-abundance and variety of recommended but unverifiable solutions to virtually any problem that could be publicly named, I have often resorted to the witticism, "Couldn't hurt; might help; why not give it a try." What is often bewildering to me, however, are the arguments which follow, depending upon the success or failure of the particular method applied. A great many are eager to blame me (i.e. "You didn't do it right"), but equally puzzling are those dogmatists who advocate for a particular explanation of why the method did or did not work (i.e. "The key ingredient is...", "One must be absolutely certain to always...", and so forth).

*"The moment of struggle
is also the moment
of opportunity."*

-- Sister Who

Life being the more or less infinite phenomenon that it is, variability between sometimes inexplicable success and failure would be a reasonable expectation. The farmer must harmonize with natural cycles of drought and flood, of seasonal changes, and of available resources. Even the wisest strategies won't prevent the drought, but they may dull the sharper edge of the experience and make it less wounding.

Essential to all navigation of failure, is a commitment to embracing "the truth that makes one free." A genuinely positive and enduring transition cannot be built upon lies or alongside attachments to things that are no longer true--which is distinct from choosing interpretations of truth that one finds empowering. The first essentially proclaims, "I've made up my mind; don't confuse me with the facts"--and tolerates no disagreement. The latter asserts, "Although in some respects unverifiable, it is empowering to interpret and integrate what is known with what isn't" and remains open and teachable within ongoing life experiences.

Every failure is, after all, an opportunity to learn, although certain lessons may be too painful to integrate until open wounds have had a chance to heal somewhat. The most skilled of surgeons are those who have learned how to do their work in ways that are predisposed to relatively quick and effective healing.

Perhaps the most difficult challenge to navigating failure, at least to the current generation, is the amount of time and patience that is sometimes required. "I don't have time to be sick (or to have an unexpected set-back, contrary weather pattern, or whatever)!" Yet one can only nurture and never demand the accomplishment of healing and/or growth, any more quickly than the affected parts are able to provide. In some cases it may even be the impatience itself which creates the failure.

Life has its own patterns and rhythms and as an artist I learned early that every creative work quickly takes on a life of its own that cannot be strictly controlled without doing damage to the work. To the extent that I am willing to serve life, however, it tends to turn out far better than I imagined.

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

Navigating Success

Perhaps the most obvious first challenge of any journey is deciding upon a destination, but it has often been said that life is a journey and not a destination--so it would seem that the most for which we could hope would be a succession of chosen destinations within a larger collective journey, the ultimate outcome of which one can never be completely certain.

Is it possible to navigate without a destination? Logically one would first need a map. In regard to life, various religious views have claimed to provide exactly that, but my personal exploration of some of those maps resulted only in a succession of broken promises and crushing disappointments.

Acknowledging that we each respond to such experiences in individual and unique ways, what allowed me to remain engaged in my own spiritual health was the recognition that Godde is so much greater than all of these contrasting views put together.

Success has been so widely and variously defined that nothing I can offer here would have any chance of being the final word on the subject. My concern, therefore, is upon remaining engaged in the active navigation of success rather than upon some paralyzed realization of it.

Drawing upon only two of the myriad of popular definitions, it may ultimately be that one's own experience of success does not include wealth or fame; it may be that success is experienced inwardly rather than outwardly; and it may be that no one else's validation or approval is required. What every use of the word will include, however, is one's own awareness of having changed from what preceded to what followed the particular moment of success--and the corresponding enlargement of one's soul.

If, conversely, the particular success fails to enlarge one's soul--perhaps describable as a holistic integration of body, mind, and spirit--the question must be asked whether the particular success has any integrity at all. In that life remains collaborative and relational, true success will also always require love.

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

On a Personal Note

I am attempting to complete my doctoral program, but finding myself battered by ever-increasing demands to somehow be more "normal" and to do whatever I do in more usual (but, for me, less effective) ways. I do not know at this point whether or how an effective compromise will be found, but since my entire world is currently financially based upon my doctoral program, this is extremely threatening to me--which makes it all the more difficult to concentrate adequately, to think clearly, and to remain even minimally effective within social interactions. As I recently stated to a number of online friends, "autism adds considerably more layers of complexity to every interaction."

With regard to newsletter distribution, I hope that every interested person is still able to receive and benefit from this newsletter's contents. I have been informed, however, that emailing the newsletter as an attachment is extremely problematic for electronic filters and I must consequently begin sending only a link to an Internet page from which the newsletter can be downloaded and printed or else read online.

I must also break the distribution list into groups of less than one hundred persons because of those same filters. All of this prompts me to wonder whether basic freedoms will ultimately be so compromised that the online reality of this ministry will end. Yes, nothing is forever, but I intend to do all the good that I can, for as long as I can--and to find other means, if possible, if the necessity arises.

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

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