

SISTER WHO'S PERSPECTIVE

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Overview

Life is a multi-layered phenomenon and more so as time continues to pass. That being the case, it is sometimes necessary to peel back the layers and remember what one's true foundation is. In rediscovering that foundation, we may even find guidance that can alert us to ways in which we have gotten off-course and need to seek re-alignment with truth and love.

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

Essential Love

I recall within reading Leo Buscaglia's book, "Love," many years ago, the rhetorical question, "Why do people assume they're born knowing how to love?" Additionally, often overlooked is the importance of recognizing that love is never optional. In fact, love is basically required if anything at all is to turn out well. One could even say that love is as necessary to the human spirit as air is to the human body. Noticing a person experiencing an inability to love should logically therefore be as much of an emergency as noticing a person experiencing an inability to breathe.

Considering how pervasive love thus needs to be, the next challenge is the ongoing prevention of becoming desensitized and thus less aware of it, perhaps even taking it for granted instead of preserving and maintaining love's presence and ability to function—once again perhaps very analogous to current concerns about air pollution. Previous generations of humanity apparently gave little thought to how very dependent upon clear air they were. In both cases, whether one is speaking of air or of love, if it's there all the time, it must still not be allowed to "become part of the wallpaper," being ignored until some threat has escalated to a dangerous level.

As much work as it is to maintain such awareness within a world that more often

discourages and even punishes awareness, even more difficult is the challenge of teaching or transferring such awareness and continuous practice to someone else. Within at least my experience, achieving any significant measure of success in maintaining awareness is always a matter of collaborating with persons and forces I cannot control. Corresponding to this and perhaps equally obvious but also often overlooked or ignored is that awareness must—by its very nature—take us beyond ourselves.

To love, one must become aware not only of the ways that life is experienced by others, but also of how equally essential to others the ability to love is and how much their lives will suffer if this ability eludes them.

Unexpressed, love may suffocate and die. A perhaps unique and remarkable quality of love, however, is that it can sometimes even then still be revived. Without any effective expression, however, it is much more difficult to confirm love's reality at all—just as it is much more difficult to confirm that one is physically alive, if breathing has stopped.

All that being said, it is an extremely common lament that within most communities love is more absent than present—so much so that many actually recommend resigning one's self to such adversarial circumstances; "it's just the way it is." I emphatically disagree.

Peace is not accomplished by resigning one's self to war. Health is not achieved by resigning one's self to any pervasive presence of illness. Prosperity is never attained by ignoring the presence of poverty. Wisdom is never integrated by overlooking ignorance and justice is never societally instituted without a most determined and collective response to oppression. In summary, within declaring love to be essential, is the assumption that life is either worth living or that—collectively—we can make it so. If we do not aspire to this, in spirit and ultimately in body as well, we expire.

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

Essential Truth

That we live within a time obsessed with money and competition seems fairly inarguable. In complete contrast to this, my childhood was filled with movies, television shows, and books that reiterated over and over again that loving relationships are far more important. What more often goes unnoticed, however, are the subtle and complicated relationships between ideas and practices.

Specifically because of economic obsession, financial needs are created and it is no secret that a shockingly high percentage of the world's population has insufficient funds to meet those needs. The contributions of religion and spirituality are often the provision of statements that allow us to cope with oppressive circumstances. The challenge initially raised by liberation theology, however, is that the religiously proscribed mantras often enable oppression more than moving practitioners toward resolution.

A popular current fad is the so-called "Law of Attraction," which essentially embodies timeless principles of giving and receiving found within most belief systems. From one perspective, those involved are advocating strategies of financial management. From a contrasting perspective, however, they are inadvertently enabling the fundamental problem of financial obsession and blaming victims for any hardships that occur.

When the principle is no longer a relationship with life but is instead reduced to a recipe or a formula, regimented into complete predictability, stripped of uncertainty, alienated from the reality of countless other influences, and unable to notice that the end result is once again an obsession with monetary concerns, the "Law of Attraction" becomes a license enabling the ongoing and monstrously destructive oppression of economic obsession.

With or without money, it is imperative that one persist in loving every person and responding to every event with whatever wisdom and resources are available. With or without money, the fundamental purpose of earthly life is still the growth of one's soul. With or without money, living without integrity is synonymous with failing to truly live at all.

Even after years of contemplation, I am still convinced that all things exist within contexts of interconnected and interdependent relationships. Managing resources within any phase of life is a matter of good stewardship by which one demonstrates the character and values of one's soul. Viewing heavenly and earthly rewards as being in hierarchical rather than egalitarian relationship, however, has negative implications, regardless of which role each categorization occupies. Maintaining an egalitarian balance between the two is essential to effective daily life. Too much of one or the other and some form of suffering quickly follows. Without continual vigilance, honesty, and willingness to respond, the worst possibilities become probable.

When love rather than anticipated results is the reason for one's actions, integrity is maintained. To the extent that one loves the true rather than merely the projected, one also looks, listens, and continually alters actions—including those of financial stewardship—toward thriving inclusively in body, mind, and spirit. In the faces of those not included, like a mirror's reflection, is the very definition of failure.

If what is intended to empower instead blinds one to the sufferings of others and provides excuses for leaving needs unmet, integrity is thereby shredded. To the extent that all living things remain family, however, maintaining balance is not a matter of keeping score, but rather of facilitating distribution. The degree to which one does this effectively is ultimately the truest measure of one's life.

It makes no sense to hoard what one can ultimately never keep. It makes no sense to neglect that upon which one is ultimately dependent. It makes no sense whatsoever to deny what has already happened in the formation and development of one's soul. One can, nonetheless, continue to shape it for as long as love and relationship and time allow.

Just as true as the discouragements of the past are all of the infinite possibilities of the future—among which is that of shrugging off economic slavery and re-embracing love and life. This is why we must press ever onward: because of what really is still possible.

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Essential Wisdom

The distinction between knowledge and wisdom imparted to me many years ago was that the former was knowing factual information and the latter was knowing how to use it. An important consideration related to that, is that while knowledge and wisdom may be helped by formal schooling, they are not dependent upon it. Numerous wise people I've met throughout the past five decades of my life have never been to college. Some had not even finished high school. Conversely, some of the least intelligent and most dishonest people I've ever met were PhD's.

In any case, the problem with naming any particular wisdom as essential is that this determination is purely subjective, inviting the subsequent question, "To whom or what?" To go one step further, using only myself as a reference, the list of things I consider essential has fluctuated throughout my life, according to a myriad of particular (and usually temporary) contexts. More concisely, circumstances change, causing needs to change, causing the definition of essential wisdom to change.

From one perspective, there are a great many adversarial changes which one can survive if sufficient ingenuity and at least a minimum of resources are available. An alternative perspective categorizes me as a resource to be exploited by any and all available means. Somewhere between the two lie possibilities of communal collaboration that have the potential to benefit a much greater number of persons.

Somewhere near the foundations of all such dynamic relationships is nonetheless the fact that the world is, always has been, and always will be a shared space—borrowed not only from every other living creature, but also from future generations as well. To neglect

*"Within the development
of love and wisdom
is the justification
of ongoing life."*

-- Sister Who

this fact in any way, quickly establishes a narcissistic trajectory—with similar results. It is important to understand, however, that Narcissus' death was not because he was "full of himself," but rather because the thin veneer of his reflection was so distracting that he never embraced the multi-dimensional reality of himself—never exploring the virtually infinite capacities of his abilities to learn, to grow, to create, to feel, to think, to imagine, to respond, to dance, to sing, and to become. Narcissism, in summary, is a negation of all relationship which is often unavoidably accompanied by an experience of greatest isolation.

An unfortunate corollary of this is that social circumstance within which (for whatever reasons) one is so shunned that all relationship is rendered impossible. Narcissism does not play a role within this second scenario, however, mostly because the one most concerned persists in watching and reaching toward true connection with others. More directly, there is a major difference between being selfishly preoccupied and being rejected, neglected, or completely abandoned by those who could otherwise constitute an extended family or community able to receive one's best and most empowering contributions.

Additionally, loving those who do not want to be loved, is yet another lingering conundrum within the broader spectrum of human experience. No matter how much I love certain individuals, I have met several who have been so hurt by past offenses that an invisible emotional wall now denies every possibility of deeper connection. It is not that I don't care, but rather that they will not let me in.

Part of essential wisdom, however, is that every good seed needs to be given a chance. Without opportunity accompanied by ongoing support, it does not matter how good the particular seed is, because it is doomed to fail. It does not matter how many thousands of hours I train for a bodybuilding competition, if there is no competition in which to participate.

While other blessings and rewards are still possible, winning a medal is a great validation, but a poor goal. What matters most is what I become through the sustained effort.

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Essential Life

A skilled craftsman may create the most beautiful vase humanity has ever seen, but the vessel will be meaningless and profoundly lacking in purpose if no flowers ever occupy its inner emptiness. As easy as a negative interpretation of all such voids is to make, the essential shift that gives life is transforming that emptiness into opportunity. Unfortunately this often takes longer than one might prefer.

Without that hope and faith of creating life within, however, there is no reason to endure the struggle; no possible answer for the allegedly simple question of "why?" With a solid reason, an inspiring vision, and a bit of passion, however, I can generally always find the strength necessary to persist. Without such inner drive, despair is the more probable experience. The challenge of maintaining essential life is thus fairly inseparable from that of maintaining essential hope and faith.

To the extent that I have faith that better things will follow, I press onward, defying every obstacle in my path. Obstructions may be distracting, but I am reminded at such points of the advice of the Leprechaun leader's wife within the movie, "The Magical Legend of the Leprechauns." Not as a dismissive apathetic comment but rather as a strategy tested through time she recommends, "Sleep on it."

It is perhaps a paradox of essential life that its best possibilities are dependent upon having dreams worth both pursuing and defending and also having sufficient rest and recuperation that the body is prepared to serve the purposes the mind and spirit have already embraced. The invisible and possibly larger part of ourselves whispers to us in dreams, intuitions, and visions, beckoning us toward a wholeness of life which a mere fraction of humanity has ever thus far achieved. It is not for that reason, however, any less essential—just as the ability to hold one's breath while underwater makes breathing no less essential.

We have been spiritually holding our breath for far too long. It is time to remember what is essential and cease living with less than all the good that we truly are.

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

On a Personal Note

Progress on the house continues, but at a much slower pace than I'd hoped. A few significant counseling sessions by phone have nonetheless reassured me that my ongoing contribution to life and community is not without constructive purpose. The challenge of inspiring people around me who have become entrenched in despair and hostility, however, is a more daunting problem. Somehow I need to find the cracks in the walls, through which more light and life can enter. Needs are obvious. Solutions, unfortunately, are not.

The minor medical problem with my left eyelid remains a problem, mostly due to bureaucratic inefficiency and limited availability of appropriate professionals, but for the most part I have found ways to work around any and all related challenges.

The dogs are an alternative sort of family and seem happy as long as we're all together, but I'm sure would prefer more play and less work. That being the case, going jogging together is such a thrill that Gawain will run up and down the stairs repeatedly from the moment I touch the three-clip leash. For me it is a bit of a challenge yet, since appropriate responsiveness to my commands is something upon which we're still working.

Living with unmet needs is often the norm here, but I am usually able to improvise or do without until the next donation arrives. I can only hope that utilization of such survival methods is a very temporary phenomenon.

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