

SISTER WHO'S PERSPECTIVE

Sister Who's Perspective, Issue 213, April 2017, copyright

Overview

Chaos is common with transitional seasons of life. The first casualty within such times is usually awareness of the larger, more complex, and slowly unfolding picture of life. In seeking guidance within such times, the only answer I have often received was to "trust the unfolding." Heeding this advice, however, has never meant that I should be less responsive or lovingly aware in relation to whatever unfolds.

Enabling Danger

It seems that self-reflection and deep spiritual contemplation have been significant ongoing dynamics throughout my life, partly because I want to avoid enabling danger in any way whatsoever and I recognized long ago that my own vigilance and awareness were my best defenses. It is consequently a bit puzzling to me when I notice others who speak against various dangers, enabling those same dangers by stressing to me that the evilness of the surrounding world cannot be changed. "It's the way it is," they insist, without considering why it is the way it is or what empowers it to remain the way it is.

"We have met the enemy and he is us," a comic printed in 1971 declared. Application of this must be done cautiously, however, if one wishes to also avoid any abusive form of victim-blaming. Wisdom recommends being mindful of a number of important distinctions.

Drawing from the quote just cited, it is essential that self-sabotaging behaviors be discovered by the individual performing them rather than dictated by an outside source that may or may not have complete and accurate information. More concisely, one must meet the enemy one's self, rather than relying upon reports about the enemy from others. Well-intentioned persons may tell me where to look, but I am the one who must do

the looking, if I am to constructively utilize whatever is found.

Having met an enemy, one must then discern the enemy's identity--not just its qualities and characteristics, but also its constitutive dynamics. That is, what has made it what it is and what allows it to persist in its current form. It is a common battle strategy within ongoing conflicts to seek out ways of interfering with an enemy's supply lines, but few think of applying this to daily social and psychological struggles.

If, as the ancient Greek philosopher observed, change is the only constant in the universe, then life and the world are also constantly changing for one's enemies and their defeat may reside within manipulating those ongoing changes. Dismissing their fundamental humanity, however, leaves valuable resources unutilized. Finding ways to infuse love and wisdom into whatever brokenness resides within them, conversely, robs their destructiveness of its momentum.

Perhaps the most insidious form of enabling danger, however, is the extent to which one tolerates the phenomenon of learned helplessness within one's self. If I have more faith in my oppressor's ability to evade the all-encompassing force of endless change than I have in life's ability to adapt to all contrary circumstances and survive, any victory an enemy celebrates owes a debt to my cooperation. Until I discover any and all such collusion, my defeats and the enemy's victories will continue to increase in number.

My cooperation should never be a reliable component of an enemy's strategy. Struggle by its very nature provides a reason for the ongoing development of innovation, creative alternatives, and imagination. Those who avoid life's struggles--whether their own or someone else's--thereby avoid growth. In actuality, struggle can be opportunity.

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

Substandard Expectations

From one perspective I accept that I have limitations and must thus manage just how much struggle or challenge I embrace at any one point in time. From a contrasting view, however, among my struggles are those who perceive [real or imagined] limitations within me and expect me to conform to their visions of how I should respond, for what I should settle, or what I should become. Deciding an outcome in advance that is somehow less than what such persons would tolerate for themselves, however, is a much more insidious erosion of one's personal worth.

Cloaked in pretended compassion, such limiting expectations pressure one to be smaller rather than to embrace life's inherent expansiveness. By its very nature, the force of life within every creature and thing seeks to become larger and more diverse. If I am conversely to be less tomorrow than I am today, then in what sense am I truly living?

A contrary pretended compassion says that what I offer is never good enough but rather must be replaced with attempting more than my abilities can support--and is unwilling to accept any responsibility for the disaster which follows. That my abilities can develop and change throughout life is quite wonderful, but moving too far too fast has sown the seeds of defeat on far too many occasions throughout human history.

Both pretenses of compassion do far more to support the dysfunctional egos of the managerial bystanders, than to extend healing or empowerment to the specific protagonist involved. What is even more offensive are the ways that credit for resulting success is claimed by those who had no active part in it. Either way, however, the result also has the effect of categorizing the protagonist as being somehow less than the managerial bystander.

The truest triumph of any teacher is that students build upon what they have learned and thereby surpass all that the teacher was able to present. If the student becomes nothing more than a copy of the teacher, no progress has occurred. In effect, knowledge and understanding will have stagnated.

When value of persons becomes even subtly hierarchical in nature, empowerments essential to personal and communal growth remain unknown. Whether in relation to persons with disabilities, particular races, or philosophical differences, when civil dialogue stops and oppressive conditions are deemed acceptable because "it's the best we can do," true resolution and empowerment are placed out of reach and poverty lingers.

In contrast, describing a person, dynamic, or community as being "in process," gives life to aspirations and retains a focus upon becoming, growing, and expanding. An expectation of a victory of some sort to follow may need to initially be phrased in vague terms, in much the same way that every birth is inescapably mysterious. One cannot know in advance everything that a new life will bestow upon its surrounding world.

Nonetheless, to the extent that a specific life perseveres, specific victories will always follow. The perseverance to which I refer is not, however, the mere maintenance of physical functioning analogous to leaving a body connected to hospital machines designed to keep the heart beating and the lungs breathing. It is the perseverance of the spirit which makes all the difference.

A substandard expectation takes no thought of whether or to what extent a spirit perseveres, but rather settles for superficial functionality. Providing a person with food, clothing, and shelter may be a worthy place to begin, but if no thought is given to the life of that person's spirit, the job of keeping that one truly alive is far from finished. To be fully human, one needs meaningful purpose.

All of which prompts the question of whether or to what extent war and conflict are expressions of dissatisfaction with the world as it is--which calls for an all-inclusive return to meaning and purpose within daily life. If one conversely has no voice or willingness to act on behalf of those in substandard life conditions, it is legitimately questionable whether any word one speaks is worth hearing at all.

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Sacrificing Integrity

Considering how fundamental integrity is to all relationships, dynamics, and societal systems, it is incomprehensible to me that current societal practices are so oriented instead to dishonesty and deceit. As much as I would concede that integrity requires a bit more work than a quick and easy lie would, avoiding the long-term effects of dishonesty has always impressed me as being far more worth the effort. Perhaps, however, it is specifically because life itself has lost so much value and meaning, that sabotaging one's life with dishonesty seems to be of minimal consequence.

I cannot imagine that anyone could come to such a conclusion if an appreciation of life's positive possibilities were glimpsed for even a brief moment. As hard-won as such a more far-reaching perception may be, it continues to empower every day I live. My constant reminder, perhaps, is the plaque on my desk, often quoted within my monthly newsletters: "For those who have had to fight for it, life has a special meaning which the protected shall never know."

Inherent within this statement is the possession of a personal integrity that has been retained rather than sacrificed for whatever distracting baubles any societal entity may from time to time have offered. I do not believe for a moment, however, that this in any way confers any sort of superiority over those who made other choices. It is not ultimately a question of being superior or inferior, but rather of choosing one path over another whenever opportunity allows.

What is often central to a sacrifice of integrity is forsaking awareness of just how very egalitarian life ultimately is. In finding ourselves as equals, interconnection and interdependence facilitated by unconditional

*"No resource, comfort,
or convenience
is worth the absence
of integrity, honesty, and truth."*

-- Sister Who

love are absolutely within reach. These are not super-human qualities or dynamics but rather are absolutely inherent in what it means to be truly human at all.

They are not, however, automatic in their expression, any more than having fingers automatically confers the ability to play a musical instrument. It is specifically within humility (something quite distinct from subservience or surrender) that the delicate balance of vulnerability and personal power become obvious. Within the realities and context of daily life, humility requires a significant amount of strength, wisdom, and awareness and those who are driven only by fear or hatred are rarely capable of any such demonstration within their relationships and interactions with the surrounding world.

It is specifically by strength, wisdom, and awareness that integrity is maintained as the empowering personal treasure it has the ability to be. If truth establishes the boundaries of one's thoughts, speech, and actions, one has no need to remember which particular falsehood was utilized within which specific situation, nor to be concerned with whether or not one's words were congruent, because truth--by its very nature--is consistent and congruent. The reality and truth of a sunrise in no way contradicts or invalidates the reality and truth of a sunset.

Throughout the living universe, all things move in masterful synchronicity that has taken literally millennia to reach its current form--except for humanity, which may aspire to such synchronicity, but in its collective understanding and practices is relatively an infant in comparison. The human body itself offers innumerable metaphors of harmony and synchronicity, but far too many of its messages and warnings go unheeded.

It is not, however, a problem to be an infant if one chooses to be an infant with integrity, rather than pretending forms of growth and development that have not yet been achieved. In embracing the growing, the curiosity, and the learning, the integrity and beauty of innocence can still be found.

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

Retaining Momentum

The distinction between ongoing change and momentum is perhaps very subtle, but also very important. To the extent that the former is not fully understood, the experience might be characterized as chaotic. Within experiences of the latter, conversely, there is direction, movement, and predictability of certain outcomes as being probable.

In many cases there is also a significant amount of personal intention, passion, or altruistic desire. Like the albatross, however, it may be difficult to get a particularly large yet beautiful dream off of the ground. Having faith in the yet unseen possibilities is not something often found within weak and short-sighted persons with minimal stamina.

That being said, super-human or impressive demonstrations of faith are also not required. If one has only sufficient faith to make one attempt or to merely be open to a possibility enough to provide it with an opportunity, that may turn out to be enough.

The important difference between momentum and accomplishment, is that the doing of a particular good thing is not seen as a place to stop and rest, but rather as a launching pad for an even greater action to follow. A brief celebration may be good, but one should not linger there while neglecting even greater possibilities that can find opportunity within a potentially transitional accomplishment. Life, by its very nature, is persistently ongoing.

This is equally true of traumatic events and adversarial seasons. Every unfolding moment of life can be viewed as a launching pad for something better to follow. While mourning losses is essential to mental health, exaggerating those losses as if they were the last thing one will ever experience, sabotages all future life to varying degrees.

Remembering all of this within the time of painful experience is difficult, specifically because of how close one is to the particular experience. In reaching for a larger and more divine perspective, however, we can remember the larger part of who we truly are.

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

On a Personal Note

I think this was supposed to be where I tell everyone about how wonderful life is in Trinidad, Colorado--considering all of the pressure I felt from numerous people to embrace the option of a affordable one-bedroom apartment here. The unfortunate reality is that on only the third day, as we returned from a local laundromat, my service dog, Bedivere, was viciously attacked by a badly trained, unsocialized, unvaccinated, unlicensed, and significantly neglected Rottweiler living across the street. I'm still having great difficulty forgiving myself for being unable to protect him, but it appears that, although psychologically traumatized, he will recover--hopefully with minimal scarring across his face.

I seem to have picked up a number of mental and emotional scars myself, through the experiences of recent years. It would be much more than merely nice, to finally find a place where self-healing could be integrated with ongoing ministerial activities. Only time will tell, however, whether this will be the place for such a combination to happen.

While a half dozen local individuals have responded with amazing compassion and suggested better options, manifestation is lagging. Be that as it may, it seems unwise to let certain opportunities pass, but I am weary of dealing with adversarial choices.

Nonetheless, may one and all and everything, blessed and loved ever be.

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