

sister who's perspective

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Overview

It seems that virtually every system of philosophy and/or theology stresses the importance of awareness, which can be further developed through practice and education. As interconnected as everything is, however, study of any specific component requires considering that part equally in isolation and in its relationships, in order to understand more fully and completely what is often "right under one's nose."

The Part that is Strong

Defining what it means to be strong is a much more complex challenge than most seem to realize. Perceptions and statements seem to vary radically from one person to the next. Additionally, one's own definition may confirm the existence of strength within one's self, which is neither valued, nor rewarded, nor even recognized by others.

With or without validation, however, the reality remains of whatever strength actually does exist. Especially within moments that one may forget and simply act or respond instinctively, that reality bursts into view. It sometimes seems that the absence of any strength within a particular circumstance is more a matter of projecting one's personal self-image and self-understanding, rather than of simply allowing whatever in fact is.

"Can I do this? I guess I'll find out." One needs only the freedom and ability to try. In granting even just the possibility that there is more to me than I have thus far discovered, infinite possibility is once again a sort of magic brought within reach.

To be more direct, the point within all of this is that the existence of strength does not depend upon the approval of others--or even upon self-awareness. What does require others' acknowledgement, however, are subsequent opportunities for the strength to

be shared. I cannot give you what you are not willing to receive (and vice-versa: you cannot give me what I will not accept).

It is often not the absence of strength which limits us, but rather the absence of communal collaboration. It is not so much that communities have become weak as that they have lost contact and communication within and throughout their membership, thus isolating the community as a whole from individuals' potential contributions. We live within a time within which it is essential that all of this be rediscovered.

At the heart of all true strength is also a profound and sometimes mysterious sense of love--a yearning for connection, mutual empowerment, and shared beauty. If I can participate in any way in the beauty of a soul blossoming into the light in ways that can be seen by every nearby person, then I never have to wonder whether or not I've done something good and worthwhile with the personal time, energy, and resources I am able to invest. I don't even need to be validated for doing so.

If my attention remains upon doing all the good I can for as long as I can in as many places as I can, I may not even wait around to bow to the audience at the end of a play I've just performed; I will already be headed off toward the next opportunity. Conversely, I may hang around after the play to speak with members of the audience in order to explore ways that the work and effects of the play can be further expanded. Although I may have been preoccupied with addressing the entire audience during a particular play, a subsequent and related task is interacting with the individual members of the audience, during which I may additionally learn new ways of improving my work.

This is the part that is strong; the part that inspires me to keep going--no matter what.

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

The Part that is Weak

It became clear to me a number of years ago that as much as everyone is inescapably an individual and not the embodiment of a category, every individual is inseparable from a constellation of relationships. That being the case, weaknesses can legitimately be interpreted as opportunities to affirm, nurture, and develop those relationships. From another but related perspective, it remains true that "Life is a collaborative effort: we all take turns being the one in need."

If I disown that part of myself which makes interconnection and interdependence possible, I diminish the totality of who and what I am and consequently both what I can become at various times within the future and what I can contribute to the surrounding community. While it may seem obnoxious to think of one's weaknesses as communal contributions, I sometimes embody the opportunities for growth beyond small and potentially narcissistic notions of self. In reaching out to me, such persons may even discover greater dimensions of themselves.

All which makes it extremely puzzling that societal norms generally place such a high priority on concealing weaknesses and/or pretending that "everything is okay." Having weaknesses seems to have somehow been interpreted as a form of ugliness and beauty as a state of needing nothing from anyone, but believing this is adversarial to healthy relationships with one's community. The part that is weak can thus be quite legitimately reinterpreted as a treasure to be carefully guarded and retained, while also shifting from one specific individual to another, throughout the diverse and ever-changing experiences and circumstances of life.

Retaining this treasure is not, however, synonymous with enabling it. It is not that weaknesses should be preserved indefinitely in any specific current form, but rather that the dynamics of having weaknesses and being free to speak of them in ways that provide opportunity to others, are desirable components within any and every example of healthy community. In thus strengthening dynamics essential to real and manifested

community, what is weakness for the individual is transformed into strength for the community as a whole.

Ideally, by developing interdependence and also responsiveness to others' needs, leadership is decentralized and both industriousness and showing initiative is encouraged. Virtually every need is addressed and eliminated promptly and the loss of any particular individual has minimal effect upon the community's ability to function effectively and thereby endure. The parts that are weak within certain individuals are matched with others' strengths and thereby rendered virtually unnoticeable.

So what prevents such ideal dynamics from becoming the norm? I suppose there are a hundred possible reasons, but at the heart of it all are generally people who suffer from the pathologies of narcissism and greed. I was tempted to add ignorance to the list also, but this is not so much a pathology as it is a state which is remedied with a fair amount of ease by self-education.

The person who is truly the weakest of all, therefore, is usually the one who is unwilling to listen, learn, and/or live in symbiotic relationship with the surrounding community. By choosing to isolate, one remains vulnerable to problems which can only be resolved by communal collaboration.

In contrast to all of this, are the hopefully few occasions when it is the surrounding community that is weak, due to embracing a fallacy--such as was the case within the folk tale entitled, "The Emperor's New Clothes."

The essential contribution of an individual which can restore strength to a community within such circumstances, is truth. In this case, it is not a matter of inherent weakness, but rather of weakness that is created by neglecting wisdom and love. What this essay has addressed is the former; what the latter requires is some form of repentance (which is not a purely Christian theological term). To the extent that one turns from doing wrong toward doing right, the part that is weak is, in a sense, healed.

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

The Part that is Symbiotic

At first glance, this title may seem a bit problematic. By definition, relationships that are described as symbiotic refer to some sort of mutual exchange between at least two entities. The central question which remains at stake, however, is whether this exchange is done consciously or unconsciously.

I don't recall ever giving any plant any sort of permission to breathe any of the carbon dioxide that I have exhaled nor have I ever received permission from any plant to breathe its discarded oxygen. What is thus central to this exchange is the dynamic of giving freely to support the lives of others. In some ways this is analogous to learning to love unconditionally. It is not about granting or receiving permission or authorization of any kind, nor is it about keeping a record of who has demonstrated the greatest amount of self-sacrifice and in which ways generosity has truly been demonstrated, but rather of actively, wisely, and constructively relating to any and all other forms of life.

Far too often in relationships of love, one or the other is distracted by meaningless score-keeping--as if restricting the flow until a sufficient response is received, could be anything other than self-sabotaging. In choosing to be symbiotic, I involve myself in giving even before any incentive has been received. Even if any of my counterparts fail to reciprocate any contribution to symbiosis in which I choose to engage, my concern, commitment, and attention must remain upon those in need whom the Divine has

"The greater part within each individual is still undiscovered and in most cases will remain so, if others do not intervene with opportunities, guidance, and encouragement."

-- Sister Who

placed within reach of my path.

Ultimately, the part of me that is symbiotic is also the part which is most alive--because of the empowerment I have received from others. Life is not a phenomenon of isolation but rather of interactive relationship. That which is toxic to interpersonal connections is consequently adversarial to life itself.

Prominent among these are inappropriate applications of potentially empowering emotions, such as fear or anger--both of which offer significant power and energy that will become destructive in the absence of wise and loving guidance. A brief verse I first saw many years ago on a greeting card advises, "If you love something, let it go; if it comes back to you, it's yours forever; if it doesn't, it never was." In contrast, what is central to both fear and anger is that some particular circumstance or component is not what we would most like it to be.

True love and wisdom begin with genuine acceptance of what is, but not in a way that resigns one's self a limited or oppressive relational posture. Instead of embracing the past and present, the orientation is to future growth and development, some of which are derived from carefully choreographed past and present experience. More concisely, I strive to do what I do in the ways that I do it, specifically because of what I want myself, everyone, and everything around me to become. I do not wish to reinforce their limitations, but to enhance expansiveness.

I want all things to breathe--deeply, fully, joyfully, restoratively. This is what symbiosis ultimately does: it allows everything to become more beautiful, especially if one truly understands what is occurring. Without awareness, however, life remains tragically sabotaged, caged, and devalued--allowing innumerable other evils to follow.

The part that is symbiotic is inescapably part of each and every one of us, but without nurturing and support will never blossom in the ways that it could. At some point in the future, I and every one of us will be gone--but our acts of love and wisdom will remain.

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

The Part that is Shared

Human beings are inescapably creatures of time, which includes that at some point time will run out and all material realities will inescapably be transferred to someone else's keeping. That being the case, current popular notions of ownership can seem a bit silly and ultimately self-sabotaging. Failing to love, give, or do good whenever an opportunity arises, leaves only regret when the moments of one's life are finally gone.

In sharing all that we can, conversely, the effects, evidence, and expansiveness of life is increased (sometimes dramatically). It is not that one is good or great because of what one has, but rather because of what one does; because of the relationships one either creates or nurtures. Even experiences of loss within relationships can do nothing to erase the historical reality of every act of kindness ever performed.

Whatever is shared, specifically because it may inspire an endless succession of yet more sharing, defies the constrictions and limitations time otherwise imposes upon our lives. If one strives to make any and all such contributions positive and/or empowering, one's life becomes real and timeless in ways that will never diminish. As advised by the skin horse within the timeless classic, "The Velveteen Rabbit," "Once you are real, you can never be unreal again, except to people who don't understand."

The genuinely good part that is shared--that in many cases becomes truly real--defies and in many cases transcends the limitations that would otherwise be imposed by time. One could even describe this as an echo of the timelessness of the divine spark within each and every person.

In recalling our spiritual connections, we are no longer merely creatures of time, but also healers of the universe if we choose to act collaboratively rather than adversarially.

The part that is shared invites us ever and always to become more than we are, by placing a little bit of who we are or have been, within as many others as possible.

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

On a Personal Note

I read somewhere not long ago, "If what doesn't kill us makes us stronger, then I should now be able to bench-press a Buick."

The transmission on my car has frozen and the first estimate suggests that it may cost a thousand dollars to fix it, so all I have for transportation in the meantime is my motorcycle. As if that weren't enough, a painful romantic break-up unfolded this month as well. It seems the rewards for hard work and perseverance are sometimes very long in coming, with plenty of people offering questionable free advice and harsh criticism along the way.

For better or for worse, I still find the most wisdom within clinging to integrity, honesty, and loving kindness. To become someone I'm not in order to be minimally rewarded for conforming to dehumanizing systems, seems to be a step away from truly living at all.

Regardless, repairs are now done on a major set piece that was seriously damaged during moving and as soon as I can find a camera operator, video production of this year's twenty-four new episodes can begin.

After that, it will be time to focus on the 2018 calendar, followed by further work on the book manuscript shedding light on the creation, development, and experience of being a twenty-first-century nun and sacred clown. Yes, lots of work to do.

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

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