

Sister Who's Perspective

Sister Who's Perspective, Issue #79 January 2006, copyright

Life is a collaborative effort, encompassing more than we know. In a time of abundant "information overload," news, communication, and travel across great distances, we often talk at each other without listening, communicating, or understanding. Humanity needs its icons, but also its iconoclasts to grow beyond the good and bad qualities that now limit and describe us. The essences of both God and us remain, in the midst of questions, to be discovered, experienced, and expressed. Please share in this ongoing dialogue, remembering to indicate whether and how you wish to be identified. Blessings, love, and peace to you. ---Sister Who

Overview

It has been suggested that one never really knows how to live until one also knows how to die. By understanding that physical life will end, we can understand how precious every preceding moment is and place within every such moment as much love, wisdom, understanding, and growth as possible.

Yet it is all part of a larger picture than we can ever perceive. Specifically because of being participants in the continuous unfolding of this larger picture, we are standing too close to the work to have God's broader perspective.

To recognize that God's broader perspective exists is the beginning of pushing back the walls which could otherwise make all that we do here seem trivial or accidental at best.

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

The Life of Death

It has been said that death is a normal part of life, in spite of the extreme attempts made by some to avoid it. The general perception seems to be that it is a rude interruption to constructive and enjoyable activity and relationships. While I am NOT advocating the pursuit of death in any way whatsoever, other perspectives of death do exist.

Death is the ultimate transformation from physical to spiritual forms of existence. Because the change is so radical, it is difficult to find uniformly convincing evidence of the reality of spiritual dimensions, but individual perceptions have many of us completely convinced that life does not end when the physical body ceases to function.

Death is also a season of transformation which may last a few moments, a few months, or a few years. The life of death begins with something that gets our otherwise distracted attention, encouraging us to look beyond appearances and begin to live within an awareness of the much larger unfolding of life. The life-purpose of death is to teach us to value each preceding moment.

As I think I've mentioned from time to time in

the past, I have a plaque on my desk which reads, "For those who have had to fight for it, Life has a special meaning which the Protected shall never know." For those who have experienced a close but uncompleted brush with physical death, each moment of life is precious. Similarly, when the moment of physical death does arrive, they are able to greet it with wisdom, dignity, and completion rather than with protest, fear, or struggle.

Letting go is not something our consumer economy encourages us to either understand or do, no matter how reasonable that action may be. Accepting that life frequently includes as much loss as gain and that we must sometimes surrender in order to win, are not comfortable ideas. That having unfulfilled expectations produces only disappointment and not failure, is a new perspective for many people.

As with most things, dealing constructively with the life of death first requires that we acknowledge it exists and that it is not inherently evil nor always adversarial. Usually in ways that are difficult to accept, divine guidance may reside within the occurrence of death, a suggestion that contrary to superficial appearances, this really was the appropriate time and means for a particular person's transition. I do NOT recommend, however, ever saying that to someone experiencing such grief.

Perhaps most of all, the life of death is a challenge of acclimating ourselves to God's timing of our earthly lives in a way that shows our lives to have been truly beautiful and effective contributions to the growth of our souls and to the growth of souls around us, who may also continue and expand the work which we and others have begun.

We are all in this great unfolding of life together, receiving something from those who have gone before, sharing something with those who travel with us, and leaving something for those who will come after us. Let's make each moment into something precious and good.

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

The Death of Life

Living comfortably without gratitude or awareness, trivializes the struggles of those who must do without. Living in a manner that is self-centered and self-serving denies the fact of our interconnectedness with the infinite web of life which God has only generally orchestrated. Dismissing or devaluing the reality of another's sometimes painful process of personal and spiritual growth, devalues living creatures created by God. These are among the forms by which Life dies before it has a chance to truly live.

Conversely, a morbid or excessive pre-occupation with others' suffering does not give them the space they may need to work toward a true and effective resolution. There are some things which, no matter how well-intentioned, we just cannot do for someone else. Failing to care for ourselves at all because we are giving everything away, sacrifices years of future generosity for the sake of a present moment of shrugging off all personal responsibility. Wresting choices and personal involvement from those who are struggling against an adversary familiar to us, because after all they just aren't "doing it right," denies those individuals their own unique (as in, different in some way from our own) processes of growth. These too are forms by which life dies before the body ceases to function.

Somewhere between these extremes are the true living out of life; the grey areas where nothing is clearly black or white, obviously yes or no, or unquestionably right or wrong; and the tolerance of various forms of mental and emotional tension which can ultimately but not intentionally shape who are and how we behave.

I say "ultimately but not intentionally" because we have choices within every moment of tension and the exact result of experiencing the particular tension is not precisely predictable. Some choices are so unbalanced that they hardly warrant being labeled choices, but I reluctantly concede that they are still choices. Suicide is always a choice, but addressing it as such is (in my humble and unprofessional opinion) rarely effective. In such extreme cases, it seems advisable to address the causes of the tension rather than the ability to choose.

In less extreme examples, however, a very wide spectrum of possible responses is available--usually a wider variety in fact than would ever occur to any of us without some sort of open

dialogue with trusted friends or family. The old adage says that "two heads are better than one." I would echo this by suggesting that because our eyes are both on the front, there are always at least three other perspectives of the world around us which we are not seeing.

Preventing the death of Life requires all of us to work together in some sort of positive collaboration, but it is not concerned only with physical survival nor tied to the expectation that a crisis is a momentary thing. Crises may last for a season if other self-supportive means are not created. It may be that while we are ensuring that everyone has food (which is a good place to start), we have completely neglected the nurturance of their dreams and passions, their abilities to become self-motivated, and the social and educational opportunities which would allow them to make their best contributions to the world.

A failure of any individual is a failure of that individual but it is also a failure of the community, society, and nation in which they live. It is, in any case, the death of a life. Is life such an abundant commodity that we can afford to waste it, dismiss it, ignore it, trivialize it, or devalue it?

Is the fact that God creates so many lives an indication that God is unconcerned if we are careless with a few of them now and then? Where and what would humanity be if Da Vinci, Mandela, Mozart, Galileo, Shakespeare, and Jefferson had been allowed to die in childhood? Six individuals out of the literally billions which have lived here--how could they possibly be so important? Indeed, how do we know that each individual around us will not ultimately be equally as important?

We live constantly within the temporal tension between birth and death with the ever-present possibility of dying long before our bodies cease to function. We are daily presented with the possibility of neglecting our own personal and spiritual growth. We can, as the man in the biblical parable of the talents did, return the gift of life to God without having ever truly opened it.

We can also choose to do and to be much more than that. The death of life may be a possibility but it is not--and never has been--inevitable. We can remember to love each other, to aspire and pursue the greatest within ourselves and others, and to reach for the divine hands that can give our spirits wings. Life doesn't have to die; with God, life can fly. Come, fly with me.

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

Life as Death

In the best sense, life and death can serve as tools that open new windows and doors of perception, understanding, and opportunity. In the worst sense, however, instead of empowerment, we experience debilitating limitation. We may work in jobs that steal our dreams, drain our energy, and leave our souls lifeless and grey. We may feel stuck in relationships that refuse both to grow and also to release us from their enslaving grasp. We may even feel trapped by our own bodies, daily facing a disability or incongruity which may force us into extensive unwanted adaptive behavior. I suggest that only one form of slavery was abolished at the conclusion of the US Civil War in the mid-nineteenth century. Many other forms are still very much with us.

When life becomes a long, tedious, oppressive form of death, the very idea of justice is a sick joke and faith in a truly loving God is sometimes stretched beyond its breaking point. I have heard it said that God never gives us more than we can bear, but if God didn't give it to us, then where did it come from? On too many occasions I have loudly protested within my prayers that wherever it came from, it is verifiably here!

Perhaps now is not the most perfect time to point this out (I'm sure I wouldn't always respond positively to this suggestion), but I must concede that sometimes the breaking has been a necessary preparation for the growth which followed. Many examples could be presented in which it was necessary for someone to die in order for a greater victory to be won or a greater prize to be accomplished.

Within Christian theology, Jesus died in order to purchase humanity's salvation. Within old Norse theology (if I remember correctly and my sources were also accurate), Odin gave up one of

***“With the right resources
and the right tools,
anything is possible--
even the best possibilities
of you and me.”***

--Sister Who

his eyes and was hung upside down on a tree in order to bring the Runes to those who lived on the earth. In one of Jesus's parables, he stated that unless the seed falls to the ground and dies, it will not produce life. Within more immediate personal histories, innumerable parents have given up personal pleasures and lived with great restraint in order to provide greater opportunities and resources for their children.

There are many times when life feels like death, but it remains to be seen whether it will be lingering oppression or somehow redemptive. Death is actually quite tolerable if we know for certain that something good is thereby accomplished.

But perhaps most of the time, I do not know whether anything good was accomplished by the sacrifice I made and it is little comfort to tell myself that God will take care of visiting justice upon evil-doers, rewards upon those with pure hearts, affliction upon oppressors, and healing upon whoever is wounded. Sometimes I just really want to see it--now, not later. The burning smoke from my own anger is proof enough that moments of life can feel like meaningless death.

Yet I know that feelings come and go with relatively the same frequency as storm clouds overhead. Still, I am thankful for my feelings, which make it clear that I am still able to feel anything at all. I am also thankful that just as clouds do not allow me to see that the sun is still shining and hasn't gone out like some flickering candle flame, feelings also often hide the enduring greater brilliance of the source of all life. On a similar note, I recall reading on the front of a church bulletin many, many years ago, "There is not enough darkness in the entire universe to extinguish the light of a single candle."

When life seems like death, wait for the seed to sprout. When life seems like death, wait for Easter morning. When life seems like death, wait for the insights which can only arrive during the dark night of the soul. When life seems like death, know that the differences between the two are not diminished by our failure to perceive them.

Seeds still sprout, the sun still rises on Easter morning each and every year, and humanity continues to be blessed with insight and understanding beyond whatever previous generations knew. As possible or probable as death is, Life is just as ready to spring into action.

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

Death as Life

During my Christian upbringing, I recall having often heard of being "crucified with Christ," "dying to self," and "whoever saves his life shall lose it but whoever loses his life for [God's] sake shall find it." Other religious perspectives and traditions often speak of emotional detachment from things, that we do not inherit the world from our elders as much as we borrow it from our children, and that we are only stewards of the places we live and the things we supposedly own, since our time upon this planet is sometimes more limited than the particular possession being discussed.

Death as life is not a suggestion of going about with a gloomy face, atiring ourselves in austere ways, and being preoccupied with life's limitation and finality. Death as life is a suggestion that if are dead to the things of the world, we may find ourselves unimaginably free to enjoy the truest and deepest essences of what genuinely matters most in life.

A perspective of death as life understands that since I can take no material thing with me, I am determined to accomplish the most eternal good with it that I can, while the capability exists.

Death as life understands that making a living is actually about nothing more than holding an occupation; that what I do is not the same as who I am. It is not my job, my house, my car, or my collections of things which live--it is me.

Death as life is the recognition that I am not here to make a living but rather to live a life for as long as it is entrusted to me, and to leave the world a better place than I found it by leaving fingerprints and footprints of love everywhere I go.

No matter what has happened to me, in some way or another, it can be healed. That is the nature of life. No matter what has wounded me, in some way or another, it can die. That is the nature of death. Brokenness is no more immortal than the body in which I live. Love, however, the energy which makes the soul dance, is eternal and there is no evil in the universe which is able to alter that fundamental divine reality.

As I allow that which will die to constrict and choke upon itself and that which will live to expand and shine within the dark expanse of the night sky, I find that once again and in spite of anything else I've ever seen, God is real and God is love.

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

On a Personal Note

After more than a decade of waiting, wishing, hoping, praying, and striving, my first album of songs has finally been recorded. Certainly I know I am not the best singer to ever grace a recording studio, but I do know that my songs are worth singing and that they have already succeeded in blessing the lives of others on many occasions. The purpose of the album, therefore, is that the songs can be shared and that others can learn the words and sing along.

The man who assisted me in finally making this recording, Ron Byrne of Naked Ear Recording Studio, was an absolute angel throughout the project. I could almost even be thankful that the attempt to make a recording last August failed, since its success would have meant that Ron and I would never have met. He was supportive, encouraging, patient, understanding, very competent, and very interested in continuing to make it possible for artists to record their work. I cannot imagine a better person with whom to undertake any such a project.

The album has been titled the same as the first song, "My Soul Knows its Face" and includes eighteen of the dozens of songs I have written during the past fifteen to twenty years, including a four-part round entitled "The Blessing of Sister who." Although it did require some rather intense concentration, I somehow thought it would be more difficult than it was, to record a four-part round using only my own voice.

The next step is to create the CD album cover artwork and packaging. Hopefully by the beginning of next month at the latest, the completed and packaged CD will be available to all interested persons.

On a different subject, I have sent out the 2006 Sister Who calendar and perhaps most of you have already received it. If you would like more copies or know of someone who would like a copy, please contact me.

May God's blessings, love, and peace be with you now and always, *Sister Who*

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