

# Sister Who's Perspective

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*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

Ideally, life is an ongoing oscillation between active and passive modes of participation. If we get stuck in one or the other, however, we begin to experience the consequences of having too much of something and too little of something else.

Just as a healthy diet includes both liquid and solid nourishment, we must be willing both to listen and be receptive as well as to stand up, speak out, and maintain appropriate boundaries.

The first step toward doing either in a healthy manner, however, is to own or accept responsibility for whatever listening or expressing we do within various areas of life. This issue of this ongoing newsletter is a very small introductory piece of that larger discussion of owning our individual participation in the complex unfolding of life within and around us, each and every day; a complex unfolding which includes a very great number of overlapping lives and personal realities.

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

## Owning Religion

I continue to insist that identity begins with individuality and communities form when commonality between individuals is either discovered or created. Similarly, when commonality is diminished, communities break apart. When the latter occurs, the wholeness which existed previously is lost and a certain process of grieving is appropriate.

From a different but equally valuable perspective, a community which experiences a breaking apart can produce new communities, uniquely suited for challenges, opportunities, and tasks which the previous community was unable to address. Ideally, the two new communities will form an agreement of mutual respect; distinction of focus, activity, and identity; and recognition of possibilities for specific and limited future collaboration. Differences in goals and purposes does not, however, require them to be enemies.

To form such positive relationships, however,

we must first be willing to own our religious practices and contexts, including recognizing that these are our own and that they do not necessarily belong to anyone else.

If a particular practice or context of mine is helpful to someone else, that person and God must determine whether "the shoe fits." Far too many well-intentioned people have forced ill-fitting shoes onto another's feet, resulting in a very large number of people limping through life in pain. I cannot believe that the source of divine love intended positive human-Divine relationship to have this characteristic.

Additionally, shoes that properly fit are not intended for every type of path. Some have many different shoes to wear; some have only one pair. Depending upon the specific path, I may choose to wear hiking boots, tennis shoes, or sandals. Each type of shoe is not only the right size and shape, but is also uniquely suited for the particular conditions. I have occasionally gone hiking with someone confident that tennis shoes would be adequate, who quickly realized that hiking boots are much better for rocky trails. Similarly, the weight of hiking boots is burdensome while jogging through an urban park.

Owning my religious/spiritual practices, therefore, is also about recognizing their applicability to whichever environment I am experiencing. There are, for example, some practices only suitable for those with greater financial resources as well as practices only suitable for those with limited financial resources. If at one point in life one is relatively wealthy, certain religious practices become appropriate. If misfortune creates a time of financial poverty, the unconditional love and presence of God are still quite available, but different practices will have to be not only accepted but also embraced.

It is not ultimately the specific practices which are important but rather the fact of positive relationship with God--which begins with honesty concerning the expressions and practices which are in fact one's own.

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## Owning Politics

Understanding that whether or not I am conscious of the politics active within my life, they are still very real and present, the first task of owning one's politics is that of recognizing that they are mine, that they are not someone else's, and that the action of owning them requires a vigilance by which I regularly check to see whether these politics are satisfying expectations.

If one of the expectations or beliefs I have about my politics is that they constitute a system by which everyone's needs are effectively met, do I check in to see whether needs are in fact being met by my political system? If needs are not being met, do I take whatever steps are necessary to restore effectiveness? If I do not take whatever steps are necessary, either working tirelessly to reform the system or changing my allegiance to another system, then in some way I will someday be called to account for the resulting oppression.

Perhaps this will occur as some form of pay-back within my own life, such as not receiving the help I need when I myself am in some sort of trouble. Perhaps this accounting will occur in some other way. Regardless, an accounting will happen. The basic law of karma, of sowing and reaping, of getting back whatever you give, and of the Golden Rule, some form of which is found within virtually every religion in the world, although sometimes slow in completing its circle, always finds its way back to its point of origination.

To own one's politics, one must first begin to understand that at a very basic level, this is simply the ways in which interaction and collaboration are organized within societal contexts. As such, politics are found within every church, every business, every municipality, and every regional administration. More concisely stated, politics might be described as the ways in which we all get along, whether characterized by mutual respect or intimidation and fear.

If we do not own our politics, however, there is a very good chance that we also will wind up victims of our particular system, simply because such systems do not inherently have an intelligent and compassionate brain to organize and run them. It would be analogous to a passenger jet on a trans-Atlantic flight, within which there is no pilot in the cockpit of the plane. It may work for a while, but if someone is not there to monitor the instruments and provide whatever minor course corrections are necessary, there is no telling where the plane will land when the ocean has

been crossed and, consequently, whether the plane will peacefully land at an airport or crash and burn within a field.

In addition to the necessity of such vigilance is the necessity of compassionate intelligence, which most importantly recognizes that "Life is a collaborative effort: we all take turns being the one in need." If we allow one marginalized person or group to be categorized as non-essential or second-class today, we may be the ones who are labeled non-essential or second-class tomorrow.

Imagine if you will a forest in which a decision is made that all examples of a particular tree are to be cut down and refashioned into benches upon which passing hikers can sit and rest. Never again will such trees cast their seeds into the wind, spread their particular fragrance on the breeze, or participate in the dance of Autumn colors or the usual progression of seasons. In time, such wooden benches would also rot away and be replaced by something else. Unless this is the fate one would wish upon one's self, it must not be the fate we assign to someone else.

"The forest must be wisely preserved!" someone might protest. The inescapable relevant reality, however, is that no forest can ultimately survive the elimination of its individual trees. The contribution of each unique part is essential to the whole, just as each circuit within my computer is essential to the production of this newsletter.

"The laws and principles according to which the forest was planted must be preserved!" another person may protest. The inescapable relevant reality, however, is that the forest does not exist within a single unchanging moment of time. Changes arising from growth, seasonal events of weather, and the impact of other species (people, animals, plants, viruses, etc.) demand constructive response if the forest is to survive at all. Laws and principles created within one context, may not be effective within another. If we do not pay attention and constructively respond and adapt to changes within ourselves and within the world around us, we will die with the forest we believed to be self-sustaining and eternal.

How is that our politics, our forests, and our world are not completely self-sustaining and eternal, in whatever form we currently know them? It is because they are ultimately extensions of ourselves (and we of them) and life depends upon us to recognize and respond to this, during the relatively few years we each live.

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

## Owning Sex

What is sex? The word is used in so many ways that I am often unsure whether anyone really knows. The infancy of our understanding, however, does not recommend failing to own the variety of ways in which expressions occur within our world.

For some sex is a marketing tool, an attention grabber, and a perception which can boost sales if a viewer can be persuaded to associate sex with an otherwise completely non-sexual product.

For others sex is no more than those things which are generally done only within very private settings, knowledge of which is somehow dangerous to children and young people who have not yet reached a societally defined level of maturity. Because open discussion is widely discouraged, very little attention has been directed toward the inequities of societal assumptions about what is or is not legitimate and healthy with regard to sexual practices. For a great many years, individuals with certain mental disabilities were routinely castrated or sterilized, because it was assumed by others that they would never develop sufficient intellectual maturity to responsibly manage such expressions within their lives. I shudder at the implications of applying such a strategy to general populations (i.e. that everyone judged at a particular point in time as being unable to responsibly manage such expressions would be castrated or sterilized). On a similar note, a friend who is blind once commented that very little pornography is translated into Braille.

Although certain conservative theological groups would prefer that pornography not exist at all, its prevalence within our current adult world suggests that there is some need which it satisfies, which is not satisfied by any other means. I am actually less concerned about the existence of pornography as adult entertainment, than I am about the interpersonal values which are depicted.

*"Money is not the true measure of anything;  
our use of it, however, very much measures  
our interconnectedness with the rest of humanity."*

-- Sister Who

If, from a hopefully more enlightened but obviously idealistic perspective, sex is the physical expression of love, I have often remarked that considering how messed up the world is, those who find love in any form at all are the lucky ones. What respectable person would therefore deny someone an experience of genuine love?

Nevertheless, in owning sex, I am challenged to consciously integrate and take some sort of responsibility for the ways I physically express love to others as well as the ways that I allow others to physically express their love. Especially problematic to the majority of the current generation of America is the issue of the sexual lives of children.

I have not forgotten how very real but also how very incomprehensible this was to me during my childhood, nor how inadequate scientific explanations of physiology were to the integration of such perceptions and expressions within the complex, fearful, and confused world in which I was raised. As recommendable as it might have been to know and to own this part of myself, all such efforts were seriously hindered by ideological agendas of parents, ministers, administrators, and therapists all around me. All I wanted to know was the truth, but the truth of others' agendas and paranoia around this subject was even more complex than the truth of the subject itself.

Part of owning sex, however, is also owning its possibilities. From some spiritual perspectives, I have heard sex described as a tool of healing. Other spiritual or religious perspectives seem to consider sex to be just about the most wounding interaction in which one can engage. In general, whether sex is wounding or healing more often seems to correspond to where and how unconditional love is integrated.

Although there are many sexually transmitted diseases which must be seriously considered, the alternative of celibacy/abstinence leaves a peculiar vacuum where experiences of love could be. Because of how powerfully and deeply centered within us this component is and also because of how little we truly understand this part of ourselves, whether or how one chooses to express sex or love is an area of life experience within which we must own the fact that we are all learners and explorers--testing our limits and mapping out an extremely diverse, complex, and uncertain territory. May a wholeness of truth and honesty guide us each step of the way.

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

## Owning Economics

Life being what it is, I am occasionally uncomfortably caught between competing ideals, striving to discern what is truly wise and unconditionally loving, even if it results in pain. Nevertheless, I am willing to wrestle with the complexities of issues, even for very long periods of time, like the patriarch Jacob wrestled with the angel all night at the river bank and in the end only asked to know his adversary's true name.

On one hand, I do not believe in a theology which makes being financially wealthy inherently sinful, even though selfishness and disregard for those in need are more obviously so. On the other hand, I insist upon the right of individuals to make their own choices based upon the best information available and I insist upon the ability to disagree peacefully. What I must therefore set aside, is any notion of the right to judge others for making decisions with which I disagree. Considering an accumulation of wealth to be divine reward is equally problematic.

Discernment is clearly needed, but its expression is rarely easy or comfortable and no matter what decision I may make, I must be willing to own that there will be those who disagree with my decision and that they have some very good reasons for doing so. All that being considered, I sometimes suggest to individuals that they make the decisions with which they wish to live. Can I wake up the next morning, remember what I did, and be okay with the fact that I did it?

Part of owning economics is also owning my place within a complex and interdependent web of life. Are those upon whom I depend able to legitimately get their needs met? If not, their unmet need will eventually have a negative impact upon my life. If the spirit of God, of life, and of divine love and wisdom live within me, I must respond rather than ignore what occurs within the lives of those whom I meet, in whatever ways I can. I must value them as I wish to be valued.

Additionally, I cannot presume that I will always be the one supporting by an affluent lifestyle those being paid less than a living wage. The life and economics which I expect such persons to tolerate and perhaps even to embrace, must be those which I will tolerate and embrace, should I ever find myself in their position. In this way, they offer a mirror of my own soul and allow me to truthfully see more of who and what I am.

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

## On a Personal Note

An unexpected email advertising a local event entitled "SpiritFest," occurring within a particular Denver-metro suburb on October 7, provided a reason to make an extra push toward completion of the portable chapel. As of last Friday evening, the entire tent has been sewn and painting of it will hopefully begin today and be completed by the end of the week, depending upon cooperative weather. That this project is so close to completion without the majority of the funds it originally seemed would be required, is quite amazing. Various financial sacrifices on a much smaller scale have provided what I think will be enough paint to complete the project, but there is a very long tradition of artists spending the food budget on supplies, so this is of little concern to me. As with nearly every other creative project, the final form of this tent will not be as originally envisioned, but it may in fact be more exactly what it needs to be. As always, it is important to trust the work to find its form, rather than indulging emotions of anger and frustration because things go in a direction contrary to any agenda or expectation I might have had.

Subject to finding the time to do the work necessary, a number of possibilities for theatrical offerings, new photographic work, literary compositions, and television episodes of "Sister Who Presents" are all waiting to manifest within the coming weeks.

I continue to appreciate the accomplishment of an academic masters degree, but have not yet been notified whether or not I will be accepted to a doctoral program, nor have I found a more usual employer who adequately values my accomplishments to pay me a living wage. Being self-employed certainly does not provide any significant amount of security, but I am thankful that it does allow me to continue this unconventional and diverse ministry. Your support in various forms is most appreciated also.

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

### Subscription Information:

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