

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

I once remarked to someone that I don't think I could live with the notion that nothing exists beyond what the five traditional senses of sight, hearing, touch, taste, and smell can perceive. Perhaps what makes humans most unique is specifically the ability to create new combinations of familiar qualities and forms, to imagine things which previously have not existed, and to reinvent from time to time virtually all of the definitions by which we understand and relate to life.

This issue examines a few of those definitions and asks whether there might be more to what those words could teach and how life could be yet more wondrous.

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

Speculation

I sometimes wonder whether this activity has any place at all within certain individuals' lives. The human society we have collectively created rewards confidence where it cannot always reasonably exist. Specific plans and expectations are rewarded within those situations in which all intelligent minds know the outcome to be beyond anyone's actual control. I have often been encouraged to identify personal goals and to be committed to them, but not so committed that I cannot immediately release or revise them the moment circumstances veer in other directions. Right. It all sounds a little like self-induced schizophrenia to me.

So, in the best sense of the word, what is speculation? I suggest it begins with being open to new possibilities and embracing a willingness to do things differently (or perhaps in the same way) even if the only reasons are to have fun with the process or just to see what it would be like to do so.

Speculation is an intelligent merging of hope and possibility, identifying what one would like to see happen and creating a harmonious relationship between that hope and the available resources, circumstances, and relationships. At its best, speculation does not create specific expectation,

but it does provide positive guidance for actions which follow.

Speculation is the ability to look ahead while retaining the knowledge that the future is unformed and specifically because of the number of available variables, could go any one of a number of directions. Speculation is also a process by which I get to name and begin to limit or direct (to varying degrees) the individual variables involved.

Speculation is not intimidated by the fact that there will always be some variables which soundly reject all of my attempts to control them, but instead invites me to listen to such variables and respond to the unique character of the variable and the needs about which the particular variable is concerned. The variables are not my enemies but rather the internal and external guardian angels by which my life's path is shaped, one moment at a time.

With hope in our hearts, we step up to the threshold of the future. With positive imagination (another name for speculation at its best), we give ourselves a dream to pursue. With passion we step forward into the fluttering circuitous path of the butterfly we are chasing. With peace in our hearts, appreciation for its beauty, acceptance of its freedom, and thankfulness for the privilege of participating in its aerial dance, we watch as the butterfly again soars out of reach, only to return at another time.

Speculation has no limits. The question is not whether any particular thing is possible, but only of how it is possible or what it would take for something to pass from the world of the imagination to the world of realized physical reality. These two worlds together (along with many others) form the multifaceted and multidimensional thing we call life. Wherever we find a moment of genuine life (if our eyes and ears are open), we can also find a genuine facet of God. If we do, we will never be the same again.

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

Generalization

Sometimes I can see the forest but not the trees. I see commonalities easily but uniqueness almost not at all. If this condition lasts for too long of a time, I may slip into thinking that what I see is all there is. If nothing exists beyond the generalities I already perceive, then the new answers to ongoing problems, for which I prayed, will be ignored whenever they finally arrive and the ongoing problems will remain ongoing problems.

Although generalizations are necessary to conversation, I suggest that they are best used at the beginning of an investigation rather than the end. A generalization at the beginning of a discussion opens a new door and invites exploration of a new room. A generalization used at the end of a conversation, however, denies the existence of any non-conforming example. An effective discussion of any subject will therefore always end in a different way or with the inclusion of different elements than it began. If this is not the case, one could legitimately ask whether anything was actually learned by the communication exchanged.

Approaching this word from a different angle, every generalization is simultaneously also a specific quality when considered within a larger context. The earth may be the general container within which we all live, but is also a specific planet within a larger solar system. Race relations are often generalized when one is standing close enough to the particular situation to perceive almost nothing else, but if one travels the world observing human interactions within other contexts, it becomes clear that examples of race relations are dependent upon far more than simply skin pigmentation.

Yet such educational discussions would not happen if we were not willing to initially tolerate and even invite generalizations. Like unshaped clay on a potter's wheel, however, the generalizations are simply raw material from which more useful vessels can be formed.

The first time I ever worked with clay with the intention of shaping it on a potter's wheel, I did not begin at the wheel but at the wedging table. I had to learn the consistency, strength, resistance, and pliability of the material with which I was working in order to know how much pressure to apply when the clay was transferred to the wheel and the turning began.

The clay began as a general lump,

progressed to a specific form, and ended with a specific appearance in a process that required perhaps two weeks of time at least. Curiously, the more finished and individually unique the work became, the more susceptibility to irreparable breakage increased and the more carefully I consequently needed to handle it.

Do we respect each other in a similar way? Do we understand that we may begin with generalities, but that the more we know the unique individual we've encountered, the more we know how to bring out the best (rather than the worst) in each other? As we do so, we also learn what each has to offer that others cannot (even in their best moments and in spite of their best efforts) ever supply.

To use a different metaphor, generalization is the blank canvas upon which I can paint specific colors which more often than not contrast with the background color of the canvas as well as with each other. A painting is a general canvas upon which both contrasting and analogous colors are precisely placed to convey a picture larger and more diverse than any one of the individual bits of pigment could ever express.

It is all of us working together that turn the generality of existence into the electrifying inspiration of individual and collective experience. It is the generality of family systems, both biological and societally extended, that is the palette from which individuality comes into view with brush strokes and specific blendings that have never occurred before in exactly the same way as they are now occurring.

It is the intersection of specific streets within the general vicinity of a particular city which inspire accurate painting of a map by which residents and visitors are able to navigate specific turns within the larger generality of their journey.

It is the intersections of human lives with their accompanying myriad of details which give shape, form, and direction to the unfolding of life which will follow.

Most importantly, it is the intersection of human and divine lives which create the most incredible and wondrous moments of all. We may become the hands of God within the world. God may become the reason our hands do not remain in our pockets, uninvolved in what's going on around us or with the general possibilities which lie within reach of our fingertips.

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

Individuation

Sometimes I can see the trees but not the forest. I see uniqueness easily but commonalities almost not at all. If this lasts for too long of a time, I may begin to think that what I see is all there is.

When individual trees are grouped, a forest inevitably and automatically results. The trees lose none of their individuality by being within the forest. Individuality is only lost when it is unperceived. Insisting upon only the perception of individuality, however, results in varying degrees of isolation. Whether a particular incidence of loneliness is created by a striving for individuation or a general neglect or rejection by others, varies from incidence to incidence.

I maintain that God has hidden unique treasures within each individual. Further, those treasures are often the answers to countless prayers for divine intervention regarding humanity's challenges and problems. If such individuals are greeted with demands for conformity rather than the nurturing and encouragement needed to maximize their aptitudes, interests, and gifts, then we are in effect opposing the divine intervention which will begin to resolve our problems.

More concisely, I believe God often intervenes and answers prayers by creating unique individuals who can help, if we will only

"Listen
for a musical whisper
in the wind
and you may yet
come to understand
the curious tune
God has placed
within each one of us."

--Sister Who

provide mentoring, encouragement, and support.

Individuation and community formation are not inherently adversarial but rather have the ability to exist in positive symbiotic relationship (each one nurturing and supporting the other). Perhaps most of the time when this is not what's happening, it is because in some way, someone just doesn't understand.

So how do we move toward understanding ourselves, our communities, and our relationships to others, to the world in which we live, and to God? First, in virtually every instance, it begins with listening.

We must seize the self-control to stop speaking, to rest quietly, and to listen with no preconditions or expectations about what we will hear. We must seize the self-control to stop projecting, to rest quietly, and to see what is before us and around us with no preconditions or expectations about what is thereby discovered.

Essentially, we must deliberately allow for the existence of what is unique and different, especially in those persons, places, and things where this is least expected.

Individuality feeds community and every community I have ever seen which does not understand and affirm this, behaves as a hollow shell within which the spirit of life is being (or has been) starved to death.

Community feeds individuality and every individual I have ever met who has no such communal support, struggles greatly against the best parts of himself or herself being starved to death. Occasionally I have met artists and gifted people who are beyond that point, having long ago given up what God created them to do, specifically because of struggles to meet basic needs. How tragic that God's gifts to humanity within them have slipped away without ever becoming part of humanity's life-empowering heritage and combined resources.

Yet no matter how many failures of this sort occur, God continues to send us gifted individuals by which unprecedented healing, unconditional love, and the most empowering human-Divine relationships can finally be realized--perhaps even within our lifetimes to some degree. God continues to give us another chance to be wiser and more loving than we have been. How about giving these God-given chances a chance to begin a miracle of healing in our lives today?

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

Integration

For those who remember, this word may provoke memories of military men escorting black children to school. As significant as this step of societal evolution was, it only begins to show what true and empowering integration means.

Integration is also about recognizing that although the earth may have both a north and a south pole, there is an infinite spectrum of forms and expressions of life between those two magnetic points of reference. Integration is about pursuing answers and solutions which are "both... and..." rather than merely "either... or...". Integration is about not only seeing the shades of gray between the extremes of black and white, but seeing all of the other colors, blends, and combinations as well.

Integration is the recognition that no matter how different our opinions, backgrounds, perspectives, needs, or experiences, we can still be friends. Integration is the ability to listen, to look, and to respect, even when disagreement is inevitable.

Integration is the recognition that the present moment is not all there is; that something came before, something will come after, and we can create constructive and loving relationships with everything that exists beyond the present moment in any direction.

Integration is what allows my limited human perspective and emotions to communicate daily with the transcendence and incomprehensible wisdom and love of God.

Integration is the possibility of constructing bridges of love, understanding, and mutual empowerment with every person, place, and thing around me, as time, energy, and personal resources allow. How remarkable that God provides more opportunities to involve myself in what is good, than I can ever do. How unfortunate that such opportunities are often overlooked within the frenetic rush to keep up with the economically obsessed technological world in which I live.

Perhaps I don't have the opportunity to integrate myself within governmental decisions which positively affect millions of people. This does not inhibit me, however, from responding in love to each person whose face I see today. Perhaps doing so will be just the miracle of healing which that person needs.

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

On a Personal Note

It is difficult when the rain drips through the ceiling onto my bed, the foundation of the house is severely damaged, the freezer is nearly empty, my hands are having negative health issues, and the car is again making undesirable noises, to remember that God has the last word--which might explain the frequent arguments I have with God about the details and circumstances of my life. Easier by far, I sometimes lament, would be a reclusive life in a remote location--away from constant reminders that I often must find ways to do without. The problem of course, is that there would be within such a peaceful residential arrangement, no opportunity for the demonstration of love, nor could I fulfill from such a remote location, the purpose and activity for which God created me. Ah, well. I find it curious how often arguing with God turns out to be an instructive activity for me.

Amazing as it is to me, I am halfway through my education at Iliff School of Theology. That I am learning many new things goes without saying. Whether or not I am learning what various professors intend for me to learn is of course a very different matter. If any of you are or will be in the Denver-metro area of Colorado on March 15, the plan is for Sister Who to be the featured guest in a very unique chapel service at Iliff, which will occur from 11am until 12noon and be immediately followed by a community meal in the Great Hall. The reason I mention it at this point is that I am still working on the script, but so far it appears that it will be an event not to be missed, if at all possible.

Work on the 2006 calendar is proceeding well, work on an album of songs is progressing slowly but definitely progressing nonetheless, and I expect that significant progress on the new introduction to my TV show "Sister Who Presents..." will occur within the next month also.

Even within the most unlikely of times and circumstances, good stuff continues to happen.

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

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