

# 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

There are few things upon which everyone agrees, but one of the most current possibilities is that we are all living within a time of transition. While there is a certain tendency to run away from what is unfamiliar and frightening, it is also true that "what one resists, persists" and that no true resolution is accomplished by running away.

Consequently, rather than running from awareness of transition or striving to maintain out-moded ways of being simply because they are familiar and consequently reassuring, I suggest we embrace this time of transition as a sort of laboratory within which we could collectively create new ways of doing both community and individuality, since both are essential to life. We will not lose anything that we have the ability to keep and we can thereby create constructive relationship with what is already unavoidable.

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

## Celebrating Self within Transition

Living life with awareness allows for both greater appreciation and greater utilization of each moment. If all I see are the perceptions of the moment, however, my world will be a small and limiting space. Furthermore, what may be the most perfect form, action, or state within one moment, may be completely ineffective and inappropriate within the next. At times, however, remaining aware and able to respond rather than merely react, although worthwhile, may be quite exhausting.

Within each time of transition, however, I still have myself—the face in the mirror, the collection of memories, and the unique combination of ethical principles and beliefs which have been formed and shaped by the integration of my choices and my life experiences. It may even be that this combination of internal resources is God's gift to humanity through me, during times of particularly intense struggle. What therefore becomes my point of focus, is serving the creative work that is my own individual life—making it as wise, beautiful, and

loving as it can possibly be. I might also create a body of work that will out-live me, making whatever positive contribution to the surrounding community that I can. Such contributions cannot, however, be at the non-consensual expense of others. It is not the virtue of self-sacrifice that is being demonstrated, when the contribution is taken or forced rather than given.

In celebrating the self within the time of transition, I am not suggesting that more awards, public recognition, or fame is what the world should provide. By taking whatever gifts we individually have and giving them even more opportunities to shine within service to others, we may unconsciously bring God's creative presence to an otherwise trouble-filled situation. Wherever divine love is present—specifically because of the creativity we freely invest in others—healings of various kinds will follow.

The point of this essay is that expressing one's gifts simultaneously celebrates those gifts and this can be done relationally rather than narcissistically. Acting relationally means paying attention to how the gift is being received, whether the gift is being given in a language the recipient can understand, and so forth. Acting narcissistically means ignoring the recipient's perceptions, needs, language, values, etc. and perhaps even expecting applause regardless of whether or not the work is effective.

Integrity is absolutely essential to a genuine celebration of self and accountability is essential to integrity. Accountability is simply a matter of being willing to "stand behind" one's work; a willingness to sign one's name to the work and guarantee in some way the quality of that work. Without accountability, relationship is sabotaged; without relationship, community is destroyed; without community, individuality cannot survive; and without individuality, the ability of love and wisdom to heal every wounded heart and mind are limited. A true celebration of self, therefore, requires a willingness to be the healing hands of God.

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## Celebrating Community within Transition

Maintaining relatively peaceful coexistence of diversity is a never-ending and always-fluctuating challenge. Specifically because individuals and families are constantly moving in and out of various communities, there is a constant need to get better acquainted with those who are arriving and redistribute the activities and responsibilities of those who have left. This is how communities renew themselves, how they grow, and how they expand their capabilities.

At its most basic definition, times of transition are simply those moments when we realize—willingly or unwillingly—that needs have arisen which current systems are not able to satisfy. If we have already established good collaborative relationships with others within our community, the invention of new ways of responding to challenges can become a sort of brainstorming party.

Through lively conversation, exchange of various kinds of refreshments (i.e. "Does anyone need anything from the buffet table?"), and civil disagreement, new methods and possibilities are discovered, debated, shaped, and perhaps ultimately put into action. Essentially, we can reaffirm and celebrate community by directly addressing through conversational interaction, the new needs which have become apparent. The diversity of experiences, resources, perspectives, and coping strategies thereby becomes a treasure chest filled with promising possibilities. In isolation, however, we may never realize the abundance that is available through each other.

Some may choose to isolate themselves and thereby prevent their experiences, resources, perspectives, and coping strategies from being a benefit to their community. Others may be sufficiently different that their community unwisely regards them with suspicion. In both cases, this would be analogous to a potential party that never actually happened. Instead of a celebration is a (usually painful) struggle to survive.

As phrased within a common idiom first published by the German Franciscan Thomas Murner in 1512, "don't throw the baby out with the bathwater," it is imperative to remember within times of transition that every child and every person is a gift from God containing virtually infinite potential—if only the surrounding community will nurture that potential toward its best possible manifestation. The resolution of each of the many challenges within the time of transition requires

both acceptance and mentoring of what is new by whatever has preceded the arrival of the new. It is the integration of old and new and not the replacement of the one with the other which moves the community forward. If it is time for the old to fade from view, a respectful ritual of closure can be devised by the community which preserves the best of what was and constructively integrates this with the new. Failing to do so would place the community at the mercy of the words of George Santayana, "Those who cannot remember the past are condemned to repeat it." I sincerely doubt that repeating the past could legitimately be considered to be a celebration of true community.

At the heart of this discussion is a basic attitude shift at a communal level, that rather than fear transition or change, the individuals of a community can constructively embrace that transition and change and steer their way through whatever circumstances occur—rather than bobbing along like a rudderless log in a river swollen by melting snow in springtime.

If there is inadequate civility or communal consensus, however, the log will be steered first one way and then the other, chaotically careening against shorelines, sandbars, and scattered stones. Will the communal vessel be able to withstand such abuse? Only time will tell. There are better alternatives, but most of them require us to both speak with and respect each other.

Meanwhile, somewhere in the distance, someone's community is having a party, pooling their resources, sharing their intelligence, and rediscovering the strengths and weaknesses of each person their community includes. The only thing that prevents other communities from having similar parties, is the particular combination of their individual and collective choices.

The good news is that there is still time and opportunity to create that constructive party. Those who insist that it is already too late may have reason for discouragement and cynicism, but it must be remembered that there is nothing so self-defeating as the unwillingness to try.

During the current time of transition, we are all being challenged to live by faith—to persist in believing that things can turn out right, even within the worst of circumstances. Faith—it may be all the opportunity life needs to create the miracle that is so desperately needed. At the very least, faith could create the miracle of humanity once again being the family it was always intended to be.

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

## Celebrating Relationship within Transition

As an interfaith minister, I am occasionally blessed with the honor of officiating a wedding—a communal profession of love and commitment between two people who could not possibly know with any certainty the diversity of challenges, circumstances, and opportunities their future together holds. While attending theological school, there was unfortunately minimal discussion of whether pre-marital counseling should be required or what it should include. The inescapable fact of which I try to remind each couple, however, is to anticipate growth, development, and change.

In ways that are similar to the constructive embrace of transition and change by communities, a couple can choose to engage in civil and intelligent dialogue about needs, challenges, and perceptions as they arise. They are not being honest with themselves, however, if they think for even one moment that the person whom they married on their wedding day is exactly the same person with whom they will possibly still be sharing daily life twenty years later. None of us is exactly who we were twenty years ago, nor exactly who we will be twenty years into the future.

This is not a problem, however, as long as we embrace and celebrate the integration of our relationships with the various unavoidable transitions that occur. The central reason for close relationships is ultimately the task of nurturing and bringing out the best within each other. This is only possible, however, if we have listened, looked, and learned as much about the other person as we can; if the other person has been open enough to share such things; and if we are also being open enough about our own lives that our loved one can do the same.

All information is tentative, however, pending the arrival of new information. Sometimes the reason a loved one does not tell us something

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presenting one's self  
as more than one is  
and presenting one's self  
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*-- Sister Who*

before he or she actually does, is simply because the information was not personally and consciously known. Just as we can learn more about ourselves and our capabilities with each passing year of life, others may be doing the same. A relationship is not only about monitoring one's own progress through life; it is also about monitoring the progress of certain others.

Ultimately it is virtually impossible for relationship to exist without the simultaneous occurrence of some sort of transition. Even the human body itself is constantly in a state of transition, replacing worn-out cells and used-up materials within each and every moment.

On the level of human relationships, a significant question that arises is whether or to what extent we have prepared ourselves to be effective replacements of those who have come before us—carrying their wisdom forward in whatever ways we can, adding our own insights to this collective work, and steering the individual and collective evolution of humanity in positive directions. Within many tribal societies, elderly people were expected to be repositories of wisdom, but they could only do this if their earlier lives were filled with accumulating and remembering every bit of wisdom that crossed their paths. In a sense, every preceding moment of life was preparation for the vocation of being a wise elder when the time and need finally arrived.

Celebrating relationships within transition is thus analogous to the occasional classroom parties children might experience within educational events. Such celebrations do not need to end, however, simply because they have graduated from high school. The accomplishment of new insight, understanding, and ability is something that should occur throughout life and that should be celebrated whenever it does—specifically because it gives to life new and ever-expanding possibilities and makes us co-creators with God.

When one says that life is ultimately about truly living, it is important to remember that truly living is inseparable from constant ongoing creation of both material and ideological components; welcoming new possibilities and letting go in a respectful and loving way of any that are worn out or for whatever reason no longer useful.

The truth of ourselves is among the best things we can bring to this effort; the truth of each other is the among the best things we can lovingly bestow, in gratitude for the gift of life itself.

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

## Celebrating Life within Transition

Among the most difficult aspects of living are the constant fluctuation and change of nearly everything and the fact that this fluctuation and change occurs within both material and spiritual levels or dimensions. When I reflect upon the various churches and religious groups with which I have associated throughout my life, I am first amazed by the breadth of the spectrum that my experience has included, but I am even more impressed by the ways that one experience built upon whatever came before it—collectively taking me places where I never imagined I would go.

For myself at least, each new realm of experience was a new and different perspective of what I call God—the embodiment of highest wisdom and greatest love who at various times has appeared with qualities that might be considered masculine, feminine, both, or neither. It seems to me that That Which is Truly God encompasses all the personal qualities we can imagine and probably more and that because all of these qualities are available to any manifestation of the Divine to humanity, God is able to be whatever any of us needs at any point within time and may even be subtly shifting between one form and another as well—perhaps like a horizon, receding and beckoning as we advance.

What this ultimately means to me is that God and Life are a dance partner who is sometimes leading me across the dance floor in harmony with unfamiliar music, but who also sometimes stops and looks to me to choose the next step. As long as the music plays, however, we never stand still for very long. Even if I were to cover my ears and strive to ignore the music, I would still have to respond to a myriad of other dancers all around me, who might then be bumping into me and jostling me this way and that.

None of us lives in isolation, even when we wish we could. Time is passing, however, and if we are to affirm and celebrate the beauty and potential of each moment, we must keep dancing in one way or another. If we dance not only with our material realities but also with our spiritual, emotional, psychological, and social ones, the dance floor will be a most beautiful place to be. In the weaving together of all of our dances, we could even form a parade of ingenuity, of joy, and of love. For a greater triumph than this, I very much doubt we could ever wish—so let's dance.

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

## On a Personal Note

In reflecting upon the year that is rapidly drawing to a close, I am somewhat mystified by the irregular, usually unpredictable, and oddly populated calendar of events. There were times when no matter how much I wanted to create new episodes of "Sister Who Presents," essential assistance could not be found. More recently, the pace of production has set a new record for the most shows produced within a two or three-month period of time. Sometimes this was accomplished by sheer perseverance, but more often it was a matter of diverse persons, resources, and abilities coming together—most of which are at least somewhat beyond my control. My response is simply that I'm glad to have been part of it all.

The 2012 calendar, dozens of new episodes of "Sister Who Presents," countless appearances that included both a major urban event and a mountain top, perhaps even hundreds of conversations, two more pre-dissertation doctoral papers, new friendships, extensive further development of the God Space Sanctuary interfaith spiritual center—how could I or anyone else have planned the year to include so much?

Although not exactly like Santa Claus but nevertheless with genuine interest, someone recently asked what I most wanted for Christmas. My response was that I would like myself and the interfaith spiritual center that I am continuing to build to be more utilized by others to serve their own personal and spiritual growth, in whatever ways they and God decide is appropriate. It is, after all, the moments when I get to see a light suddenly appearing within another's eyes as he or she suddenly understands what needs to be done, or discovers an aspect of truth that genuinely creates freedom and joy, that I know I have done well and accomplished what I was born to do.

Certainly the new year will be filled with unimagined challenges, but if we travel it both together and with God, it will be beautiful indeed.

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

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