

# 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

## Cultivating Reality

An email was recently sent to me, recommending a particular online course in techniques of prayer which are supposedly more effective. The goal of the presenters was stated as the collaborative manifestation of world peace. Essentially, we should all learn the techniques and then at an agreed upon date and time we will superimpose our desire for world peace over all existing material circumstances. Obviously, perhaps, I disagree with basic premise.

The lack of world peace did not spring from a lack of effective prayer but rather from the experience of a myriad of different kinds and intensities of needs. In general, I will not be peaceful, if I do not have enough to eat. I will not be peaceful if I am living under a bridge during the season of winter and my extremities have grown so cold that I can no longer feel them. I will not be peaceful if every time I leave my house, I find myself wondering whether it will still be there when I get back, or if some foreign country's military will have destroyed my house completely because of a disagreement with my government. In my own life, I know that I will not be peaceful if I wonder each time I leave my house, whether my dog will still be safe or if I will find when I return that he has been poisoned to death by juvenile delinquents who live across the street from me, as they have done to other dogs within my immediate neighborhood.

It is not that I choose to be without peace, but rather that I choose not to be blind to the elements and implications of the environment within which I live, and what I see is very disturbing to me. As much as I wish to support and encourage spiritual evolution, I am very concerned that it is becoming just another escapist tactic, just another way of practicing psychological denial instead of dealing constructively with the difficulties and undesirable elements of the material and social reality within which my body lives.

If the spirit were in fact the only important part of ourselves, genocide would be extremely empowering. Our spirits would then be free of all

the limitations a physical body includes, free of all of the complex tasks of integration and collaboration that civilizations of physical bodies require, in order to effectively coexist.

To demand a harvest of peace from a field in which seed has not been sown, can produce nothing beyond some form of starvation during the winter months ahead. There is a season during which opportunities to sow peace within our world are plentiful, as well as a season during which no seed that is sown will ever sprout and we must find some other way to survive until the season of planting returns. When it does return, however, and I believe it will, we must get up, get out into the field, and get the planting done, or we will face yet another Autumnal season of no harvest.

A very long list of spiritual and religious movements throughout the history of humanity on this planet, have attempted to separate spiritual and material elements of life, rather than constructively integrating them into a more complete and empowering picture of reality. Negative incongruities may not prevent good things from being real, but they most certainly fail to encourage or support the increase of such things. It seems desirable to encourage the existence of good things, rather than merely give thanks when such things manage to occur or exist without any active encouragement from any of us.

While it is reassuring that there is not enough darkness within the entire universe to put out the light of a single candle, it seems nevertheless desirable to increase the number of candles. I don't recall the exact quote, attributed to the original Buddha, but the general sense of a brief conversation with one of his disciples was something like, "Master, I have spent the last twenty years studying how to levitate myself from the first floor of my house up to the second and I have finally succeeded," to which the reply was, "so why didn't you just get up and use the stairs instead of waiting

twenty years to get there?" Buddha apparently failed to see spiritual and material realities as separate, non-interactive, or even competing things.

A question that remains, within all of this discussion, is whether raising someone's spiritual awareness and/or ability will empower him or her to more effectively meet his or her material needs. To me, however, this is somewhat analogous to Buddha and his disciple. It seems to be a rather indirect and more time-consuming way of doing something which could be effectively accomplished by much more accessible means. Is it really necessary or is there in fact anything to be gained by taking the long way around? Sometimes, perhaps, but I very much doubt that this is the case, as often as humanity seems to prefer that approach (or avoidance, as the case may be).

Perhaps if we were to look upon our daily material activities with mindfulness, seeing the physical actions as symbolic of spiritual intentions, and accompanying each action by a conscious prayer, which is somehow relevant to or reflective of the particular action, some of the mess created by our own neglectfulness of each other would begin to get cleaned up.

So my prayers for peace have changed. Now instead of simply saying within my prayers, "let there be peace on earth," I pray, "may the one who is hungry come to know a little more peace in his life today by finding the needed nourishment, may the one who is afraid of violence come to know a little more peace in her life today by finding reliable protection from victimizing forces, and may the one who is unable to see beyond his own selfish interests come to know a little more peace in his life today by the discovery of empathy, love, and interrelationship with others with whom he shares the world. If there is a hunger which I have the legitimate ability to satisfy, may I see that opportunity and thereby be a channel of peace today. If there is reassurance or protection I can legitimately extend to someone who is afraid or in danger of being victimized, may I recognize that opportunity and thereby be a channel of peace today. If there is blindness which can be legitimately healed by sharing a fresh insight or perspective, may I seize that opportunity to be a channel of peace today. If in spite of all opportunities to be otherwise, there is a short-sighted tyrant of some sort along

my path today, may he or she be removed to a place and situation in which he or she can finally learn how to love unconditionally and thereby find deep inner healing for whatever emotional and/or psychological wounds may exist within him or her."

I have often heard of the need to change the world "one person at a time." Like a jigsaw puzzle with an incomprehensible number of pieces, each person and moment is included within the overall picture of reality, within that overall picture which includes spiritual, material, social, political, psychological, emotional, and historical (to name only a few) elements of reality. Like countless others before them, some of my "new age" acquaintances are fond of dismissing material reality as being "only an illusion" and insisting that spiritual reality is the only true one. My response is generally that everything is real within its context, but that perhaps the majority of the human race typically runs "on autopilot" without any real awareness of its current general, regional, or local context. Certainly this was visible on the passenger jet plane within which I traveled to Australia for the Sixth International Gay Games. Many of those onboard took little notice of whether we were flying through cloudy skies or clear ones, nor did it seem that most of them had reflected upon the point in space which we occupied.

Except within the metal bubble of an airplane, I cannot quite grasp the notion of being thirty-five thousand feet about sea level. Suppose I were standing on some sort of platform at that elevation, not moving at all, just gazing out at space and down at the world far below. I suspect it would be even more of a spiritual and emotional experience than any of the times I succeeded after hours of hiking, in standing upon high mountain summits--humbling, awe-inspiring, a feeling of timelessness, a fresh reminder that the perspective I have while engaged nose-to-nose with life's struggles, is far from the only perspective available and may not be the most empowering one. I must remember that I am more than just what I am within the limited context of the small present moment in whatever corner of life in which I find myself to currently be.

I must remember within the fullest sense possible, who I am. I must also be mindful of the overall reality that to some degree or other I am helping to create. Perhaps within the final picture, I will simply be the one dissenting vote. Nevertheless, even this small contribution brings a balance which the picture would not otherwise have. If that is the best I can offer, let me be sure to do it.

## Winter's Transitions

Perhaps the most striking change of mind and newsletter policy which has gradually come about during the past month or two and which now will become public knowledge, is that I have decided not to charge any money for newsletter subscriptions any more, but to continue distribution to all interested person for as long as I am financially able to do so.

Initially, the idea of a newsletter was imagined as being one of the possible ways in which Sister Who's ministry could begin to become financially self-supporting. In that no profit has ever been realized, from the first day of publication to the present, it seems more important that the messages of the newsletter go wherever they may be helpful to anyone. Financial matters will simply have to be addressed in other ways.

Therefore, if you know of someone who would like to receive the newsletter each month, in either of its two available forms, please encourage them to contact me to request this. For those who are able and interested in doing so, "Sister Who's Perspective" is available by email as an electronic "pdf" file which can be read by the Adobe Acrobat program. This saves printing and postage costs and also allows you to forward copies of the newsletter to others, after verifying beforehand that they wish to receive the newsletter by that means, in order to avoid any legitimate accusation of newsletter distribution being done in the manner of spam (excessive unsolicited advertising which thereby clogs and hinders effective email communication). For those who for whatever reason do not wish to receive the newsletter electronically by email, I will continue to distribute printed copies using postal mail, to the best of my ability and resources.

If you are receiving an electronic copy by email or a printed copy by postal mail and would like to either discontinue receiving the newsletter at all or to receive it in the other form, please contact me at your earliest convenience so that I can respect your wishes completely.

In other news, having struggled for four months or so with a new home-built computer designed to have video-editing capabilities, I have reverted to the computer which preceded it, in order to avoid losing my mind due to the excessive frustration and unreliable operation of the computer, which characterized every moment of the struggle. I still want to expand into video-

editing, but will need to wait until a properly built computer can be purchased. I thank my friend and former-lifepartner for having made a valiant attempt, but clearly this requires someone more familiar with the specific applications and operations involved.

Simply as a gesture of gratitude for the encouragement all of you have been to me, I have created and mailed out a calendar for the remaining months of 2003 to each of you and to other friends and acquaintances as well. I trust that most, if not all, of you have received this by now. For anyone who wishes to request a copy, I have also created a smaller half-sheet-size calendar with large numbers; something to hang on my desk just to remind me of what day it is. I do ask, however, that if you request that smaller desk calendar, that you offer (since it is not required) either a dollar or perhaps three or four postage stamps, to help to cover the cost of printing and mailing such a copy of the calendar to you. If you know of someone else who would like to have a copy of the calendar in either size, please encourage them to contact me with their request.

As before, a copy of the text of each newsletter from the very first one through the last issue of the last semiannual newsletter archive update (in this case, the beginning of 1998 through the end of 2002), is included within the online newsletter archive of my web site.

It remains my hope, now and always, that my creative expressions and deeply spiritual musings, will be a help to you in some way in terms of your own personal and spiritual growth. May one and all and everything, blessed and loved ever be!

*"Only the strong  
can be gentle;  
one who is not gentle,  
is not truly strong."  
--Sister Who*

## The Forest of One

A good friend has become very fond of late of remarking that, "Sometimes life sucks worse than others." Though I am inclined to agree with him and know that it is occasionally refreshing to be completely honest, to call things what they are, and to refrain from spending any energy upon the popular societal exhortation of making everything nice or happy or pleasant, I also know that we must always find a reason to go on.

Since an annual concern of life here in Colorado is the danger and/or real and present threat of forest fires, it is not difficult to find a place which has been touched by such tragedy. One of the typical curiosities of the phenomenon of a forest fire, however, is the way in which it is almost never a complete destruction. More than just the fact that roots of trees and bushes survive and begin to send up new shoots almost before the ashes have finished cooling, is the mysterious occasional presence of individual trees surrounded by blackened earth, still dressed from top to bottom in a vibrant healthy green.

How can they have stood so close to such suffering and devastation and yet somehow have been spared? Yet no one can argue that there is in fact a green healthy tree standing there; that it is not the result of some grief-induced hallucination or state of psychological denial. I find myself wondering sometimes, whether the tree itself, as a living thing, might be experiencing its own form of grief, empathizing with all of the trees nearby as they burned to their deaths and feeling a very great sadness at the loss and resulting loneliness.

In some ways, this is similar to what I occasionally heard referred to within the early 1990's as "survivor's guilt." Essentially, many healthy gay men were surrounded by friends who were dying of AIDS-related complications and there was very little they could do to stop the carnage, once the virus had found its way into their friends' bodies. At some point, their friends were gone but they were still standing there, wondering why they hadn't been taken by the epidemic also. Certainly some of them had been careless enough in their sexual activities, while others who'd been extremely careful had been infected.

In a sort of angry denial, we want to know why we must witness what we are powerless to prevent or remedy. As I remarked to a close friend the other night, no matter how much I love someone or something, it's not enough to keep the person or thing from growing older, wearing out, and eventually dying.

Which leaves me as a forest of one, entrusted with the responsibility of carrying life forward, beyond the season of devastation and loss. I am the one who must deliver the memories and understandings of all that I have witnessed during the many or few days of my life, to those who will sprout, grow, and spread their branches in whichever field, long after I myself am gone. In the season of war and violence, I am the seed or the bearer of seeds, of the peaceful civilization which may follow. In the season of death, I am the bearer of life. In the season of ignorance, I am the bearer of intelligence. In the season of bigotry and prejudice, I am the bearer of tolerance and understanding. In the season of hate, I am the bearer of love. I am the forest of one.

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All correspondence may be directed to: Sister Who, POB 18474, Denver, CO 800218-0474; or email address: [SisterWho@sisterwho.com](mailto:SisterWho@sisterwho.com). Sister Who's internet website is located at <http://www.sisterwho.com>.

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Thank you for your help in spreading my words to new places and people.

--S.W.