

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

In Dorothy's House

One of the greatest cinematic productions of all time, "The Wizard of Oz," spends only a few moments elaborating on the experience of riding within the small farmhouse, as it is presumably carried from Kansas to the land of Oz. Except for the final moments of the film, one might think that for the house, it was a one-way trip. Certainly, despite finding itself within a land of talking scarecrows and interactive trees, the house expressed no wish (as Dorothy did) to return to its former location in Kansas.

The moments aloft within the tornado, however, much like a dream-quest or other experience of altered consciousness, have much more to say than is ever realized at the time.

As Dorothy is first hit on the head and then opens her eyes and looks outward, a puzzling array of diverse objects fly past the window--a woman waving from her rocking chair, farm animals, and finally Miss Gulch on her bicycle.

At this point, however, magical interpretation intervenes and one possibility is that she begins to see the spirit rather than the form of things. Until now, the objects within the swirling winds of the tornado were inherently neither good nor bad, to any great degree. Now, a new wave of understanding arrives. As with any such dream-quest, life will never be the same and the real journey homeward has just begun.

The journey homeward: it was not the frantic dash to the farm to relate the incidents concerning Miss Gulch within the first moments of the film, nor the hurried retreat from the fortune teller's wagon, but the ride within the whirlwind which initiated a radical deepening of Dorothy's conscious connection with her soul and with the most fundamental, pervasive, and enduring aspects of who she truly was.

At times we find ourselves within a similar whirlwind and can only hope that when the house finally lands and the air is quiet again, we will have also vanquished "the wicked witch of the east."

For the moment, I am within such a whirlwind, wondering at the peculiar objects flying

past my windows and attempting in some way or another, to simply keep up with the sometimes exhausting pace.

After seven months of unemployment, I again said a prayer and cast my net out into the sea of possibilities. Amazingly, I am now both a half-time administrative assistant at an office and a full-time student at Iliff School of Theology, pursuing a Master of Arts in Specialized Ministry degree, sub-heading Religious Leadership. Needless to say and virtually overnight, life became very, very busy. I also received an acceptance for Sister Who to at last present to the general public, the workshop series "Rediscovering Ritual and Making it Personal."

So I'm feeling a little bewildered by the winds of change swirling around me of late, though as far as I can tell, it's all good.

Like Dorothy, I am choosing to stay with the house, as everything around me pitches first one way, then another. The circumstances through which I and my house are flying are hardly the ideal circumstances by which to reach a more wonderful and magical place--at least from my perspective--but the journey is nevertheless going forward.

So why does God choose, again and again, to do great and wonderful things within contrary circumstances? To go one step further, what is helpful or necessary for such things to occur within such times?

I suggest it all begins with you and I, giving our hands, our feet, our minds, and our hearts to being a conduit of a brighter light than any darkness which may surround us.

I suggest that it all begins with a love that will no longer tolerate the persistence of darkness or dysfunction, but insists instead upon doing the great and diverse work of healing the world, one person at a time.

I suggest it is time for all of us to find our voices and speak the truth in love, which will make that healing possible.

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

A New World Coming

I frequently hear people muse about a more perfect world and about how long it will probably take for humanity to resolve this or that current societal problem. I am reminded at such times of the quirk of group communication which was presented to me many years ago.

A confession is presented privately to each member of a group. The confession itself could be just about any socially controversial thing one could name (i.e. orientation, religious conversion, an unusual hobby, etc.). The unanimous response individually submitted was "Personally, I have no problem with this, but I don't think you should mention it to anyone else. They just wouldn't understand."

The end result if the speaker heeds the advice, of course, would be an enslavement to silence because of an incorrect assumption.

I suggest to you that much of humanity's lack of sociological and psychological progress, is specifically because of enslavement to incorrect assumptions.

"If such and such happens, it will mean this or that result!" the protest is often given. Time and time again, the speculation has turned out to be false. A congresswoman once quipped, "For years we were told, 'The Russians are coming! The Russians are coming!' Well they finally came and they brought their credit cards!"

Change is virtually the only constant in the universe. Why then do we continue to oppose rather than to encourage its better possibilities?

Do you like what you see all around you? What part do you like and what part do you dislike? Why? If you were going to remake the world, what would you keep and what would you change?

For myself, I would create a world without money, a world in which effective distribution of goods and services, was simply a by-product of love for one another and an absence of greed or the fear of not having enough for one's self.

I would require all positions of governmental administration to be volunteer rather than paid positions, which would be granted only to those who had demonstrated adequate statesmanship to handle the accompanying challenges in ways which allowed every individual's needs to be legitimately and completely met.

A ridiculous dream? An impossible goal? Not within our lifetime? A thing never to happen?

To go forward at all, we must have something in which to hope. Even the most

ridiculous of dreams creates more forward momentum than the tiniest drop of cynicism. Unless you really like where you are that much, I suggest you find some ridiculous dream to beckon you forward.

There seems to be no argument, in any case, that the world is changing and that the changes are not within any individual person or even nation's control. Like it or not, we will have to learn to work together if we are to survive. We will have to own what we have done, but we will also have to forgive and be forgiven, in order to move on to being more than just the cumulative result of our past.

What will each of us contribute to this new world? What opportunity will we leave open, for doing things differently than we have done, in order to reap a different harvest than we have reaped?

What if we were to find ourselves some morning, within a world without cars, without grocery stores and shopping centers, without hospitals and police stations and fire departments, without money, without telephones and computers and stereos? Would we be able to function? How long would it take us to adjust? Do we have the mental and emotional capability to depend upon each other and upon God? Do we have the internal strength and maturity to avoid perverting interdependence into co-dependence?

So many questions, all of which beckon us forward to a more honest way of being, than is generally currently practiced.

It all begins with an idea, at some point becoming words, hopefully finding its way into actions, and ultimately could become the reality within which we and our children and our children's children could live--but only if we at least begin with an idea and then pursue the dream of a better world as far as we can.

All of which is wonderfully abstract soap-box preaching, which, like soap, makes lots of foam but not much substance while the cleansing is happening.

It is not the soap that matters, however, but rather the clean clothes, faces, and homes. The soap dissolves, giving itself up to the process by which the quality of life and both human and divine relationships are improved. If the soap does its job well, it won't be around when the job is done.

Soap is slippery and hard to hold and moments of life are also fleeting, but each moves us toward new discoveries and better possibilities, if we use just use them wisely and don't ever give up.

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

Just Simply Too Afraid

"Too afraid of life to live": those who take no chances, shut themselves off from the unfamiliar or unpleasant, and lock every door against unexpected opportunity. I'm told elderly people regret things undone, more than things done.

"Too afraid of Death to die": those who go to extremes to sustain life beyond the possibility of any enjoyment or happiness. Is it others' deaths or really our own, which we are trying to prevent?

The result of both is a sort of paralysis and an enslavement.

So what then does it mean to be alive?

I catch myself sometimes, pausing to recognize the tranquility and simple beauty of a particular moment, in spite of whatever problems or challenges it may otherwise include. Perhaps the reason such moments catch my attention and distract me from the frantic pace at which most of the rest of my life unfolds, is because within such moments I detect a faint whisper of divine presence and I am suddenly filled with a holy sort of awe.

Sometimes it is an inner prompting that allows me to look upon a particular person and listen to that person, as the title character within the film "Powder" suggested, "from the inside." Within his book, "The Different Drum," Scott Peck suggests something similar within the idea of looking at people "with soft eyes" (as opposed to a hard, critical stare).

I do not wish to demonize fear, since I consider it to be just one more of the diverse range

of emotions provided by the Divine for our guidance.

I also do not wish to handle this emotion carelessly, however, since it is also a very sharp knife by which social pretense is carved away and many fine distinctions are made obvious.

Neither of which suggests an inherently adversarial character to the emotion of fear. If anything, it pushes us toward uncomfortable extremes of honesty--extremes which we could also have simply chosen, thereby eliminating any need for its ministrations. This prompts the question of whether those who are more honest are also less afraid, but that's a whole different subject, to address another time.

"Modesty in all things--even your modesty!" I was once told. An occasional digression toward an extreme is therefore not a bad thing, but to live always within the context of any emotion leaves us unbalanced and therefore, in one way or another, crippled.

Too much happiness and we become what I have dubbed "the happiness cult," people who must be happy at all times, regardless of circumstances or life events which would suggest otherwise. I find them neither honest nor real.

Too much fear and we become unable to think for ourselves, susceptible to dictators with big promises, and enslaved to a group consciousness which engages in societally self-destructive behaviors.

I won't avoid the experience of fear or any other emotion. Most especially, I won't avoid the experience of my own life and ultimately my own death. I do not wish to physically outlive a coherent conscious mind. I prefer the ability to choose death, should I ever experience a terminal illness. I do not know whether any such choice would be respected, but I prefer that everyone be able to make such decisions for themselves.

All that being said, life will still go wherever it will go, with or without our permission. My greatest gratitude, therefore, is to God, who seems to have always a better idea of how the myriad puzzle pieces will fit, than I could ever imagine.

For now I am a half-time office worker and a full-time graduate student, in addition to continuing my work as Sister Who. I didn't ask for any of this, but my life is so much richer because of each curious unexpected turn.

It's quite a curious mix, but I really mean it in the most positive sense when I say, "It's okay. All of it; it's really okay."

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

*"Too much awareness
of our opposition
and we become
discouraged.
Too little awareness
of our opportunities
and we become stagnant."*

-- Sister Who

A Letter to God from a Student

I've heard of "getting out of the way of my own life" from various people over the years, but still haven't completely figured out what it means--perhaps because the application keeps changing every time the circumstances change, which is all too often. I suppose I have to believe I'm doing the "right" thing in order to keep moving forward, but of course afterwards I laugh with embarrassment at "those ideas" I used to hold about various things.

At other times, I wonder if I should emulate that earlier version of myself a little more, since I was so much more willing to walk right in and sing out loud, before I even knew whether or not I sang well. I may not have sung well and the songs I wrote then now sound so contrived and silly, but I sometimes worry that I don't sing as much as I did during those naive younger years. Yet I still believe that the true value was not in the skill, but in the participation; not in the words, but in what my heart had to share with everyone else who was there.

I find that I sometimes talk over other people's heads, using words and phrases and concepts they don't seem to understand. Does that make me too smart or just a poor communicator? Why is it that the artists with the greatest visions, seem to have also wrestled with the most severe self-doubt? Why is self-doubt so easy to find within artists in the first place? The first priority of language, it has always seemed to me, is to communicate understanding. If that's true, then whenever someone is unable to understand, I have somehow failed.

Failing to communicate is one thing. Failing myself is yet another. Failing You sounds pretty unbearable, but there still doesn't seem to be any uniform and enduring consensus of what You want--so how does anyone know for certain, whether he or she has failed?

Even if I have failed, I need not continue in failure by refusing to go further. An accomplishment could be just around the corner, just a little further along, just a little further along.

It seems like I've been traveling for so very long already. Forests, fields, meadows, and mountaintops; cities, subways, parks, and plazas; airports, arenas, buildings, and beaches--on and on it goes, each place and person unique and special in ways that I've never before encountered.

I can't help but ask what will follow when this new phase of graduate school is complete, what new doors of opportunity will open for me and how the ultimate dream of building and operating an

interfaith spiritual retreat and conference center, which was given to me six years ago, will somehow be realized.

I'm creating new friendships here at this school, people whom I most likely never would have met had I made any other choice at pivotal moments along the way. Which friendships will last beyond the years of my formal education here? Any of them? Perhaps it is as has been in the past, best to let each flower bloom within its season and fade when the time comes for it to do so. It's just that I remember so very many flowers and wish that I could gather them all into the same meadow for a joyous reunion that would never end--or even for just a brief moment. Thank You for the flowers. They help me forget the storms.

Thank you for the sunrise, which helps me each morning to put behind me the long and lonely night--though I did enjoy counting the stars until I lost track of which ones I'd counted and which ones I'd missed. Perhaps if that cloud hadn't gotten in the way.

I imagine I will meet some wounded people today, advertising their need for love by letting people see just how much it hurt to be wounded in the ways they were wounded at some point in the past. I can't undo what's been done to them, but if there's a way You can help them through my just being there, please help me to say the right thing.

Most of all, thank You for taking me in this new direction, even though I'm sure there will be times during the coming months when I will wish that I was somewhere else and times when I will even be angry with You for bringing me here. Considering what You had to do to get me here in the first place, You must have something special for me to do when my training here is complete.

Thank You for the heart and mind and hunger You have placed within me, to dance with divine and holy mystery, to sing my own heart's songs, and to embrace every beautiful experience which my simple little life can hold.

I've got to go now--too many term papers to write and textbook pages to read--but just one more thing I wanted to ask: may one and all and everything, blessed and loved ever be.

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