

# 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

Within every moment are seeds to be sown, harvests to be reaped, and growth to be accomplished--which is much easier to say once the moment has passed.

While there is strength within such moments which comes from awareness and understanding, there is also a reminder of just how weak, how human, and how vulnerable each moment of life is.

The paradox and irony of each moment, however, is that weakness and strength can be contrasting sides of the same coin, neither being able to adequately perceive and understand the other, except by glances into any available mirror.

There are ways that our weaknesses are what provide strength within the most adversarial of moments and ways in which our strengths can set us up for unparalleled disasters.

This month's reflections are perhaps just the tiniest hint of some of those possibilities.

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

## Harvest of Fear

The world is full of diverse appearances and norms which are more frequently colliding. A recent experience caused me to ponder the heart of this conflict, in my case the definition of "respectful."

The first insight was that clothing is not the same as respect. I've seen too much disrespectful behavior within all social and economic classes, to believe that such attitudes originate within the clothes which are worn. Respect is concerned with our interpersonal perceptions, attitudes, and behavior and with our interrelational dynamics--not with our attire, hairstyle, or amount of either concealment or exposure.

Ideally, clothes which are worn as creative personal expression or as response to environmental conditions (such as cold or rain) are an honest expression of who we are, what we are feeling, or with what we are trying to cope. Choices intended to conceal, misrepresent, or impose something upon another constitute negative

interaction and arise from forms of fear rather than love. No loving, just, wise, and good society can arise from such practices. Distinguishing positive clothing choices from negative ones, requires understanding of intentions.

A controversial related subject, is that of children's perceptions and effective parenting. Shielding children from certain perceptions is bad parenting because parents are neither immortal nor omnipresent. Being a parent is synonymous with being a full-time teacher, but this is hardly obvious within observable parental behavior. If a child is prevented from ever seeing, thinking about, or dealing with this or that aspect of human experience, the child will not have the skills and wisdom to respond constructively. In effect, the parent will have sent the child into its future without the skills and preparation necessary to effectively engage whatever is there.

The idea that a child will be scarred for life by exposure to something is common but wrong. The scarring does not occur because of what is seen, but because wise instruction in ways to respond is conspicuously absent; more concisely, the child has been taught to act from fear, rather than from love.

Fear scars the souls of whomever it touches; love heals and builds bridges of understanding. Fear uses competition and builds walls; love shares whatever resources, insights, and abilities are available.

We are rapidly becoming a world of people who are afraid to truly see, touch, or be with each other honestly and this can only lead to more competition and less community, to more conflict and less consensus, and to more confusion and less communication.

This is not, however, an inescapable course of action and future. Today, as with every day, we are given a myriad of choices within which we may sow a future harvest of love rather than fear. For the sake of each and every one of us, for countless children and adults yet to come, and for the sake of humanity itself, sow some love today.

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

## Respect versus Honor

Occasionally I overhear the lament of an absence of honor and thus also an ability to respect either the self or any other. Respect and honor may be related, but they are not the same.

Respect begins with distinctions between one's self and others and subscribes to some mutually agreeable standard. It cannot be defined by only one participant without lapsing into the tyranny of dominating and subjugating the other.

Honor goes much deeper and does not require anyone else's approval or agreement, being concerned with the realization of virtue within one's soul. Cultivating virtue within one's self, therefore, is the first step to creating honor and the prerequisite to being genuinely respectful.

One of the tools I use within monitoring and cultivating virtue within myself, is to ask within the first moments of any challenging situation or event, "what sort of person will I show myself to be?" Within a particular recent experience, this became a very intense but obscure reality for me--intense because it was my experience, but obscure because everyone there at the time had a unique description of what had happened. From my perspective, I was returning home within typical highway-oriented "rush-hour" traffic and was simply in the wrong place at the wrong time.

Within such environments (which occur daily within every metropolitan area within this country), vehicles typically move at unsafe speeds in unsafe proximity to each other. Leaving a safe distance between vehicles is generally impossible because such distances create opportunity for other less cautious drivers to swerve into such spaces, imagining them to be opportunities within which to accelerate and pass ahead of others.

The result is a mass of hundreds of cars moving in mostly parallel fashion at unsafe speeds. Consequently, if one decides to suddenly brake very hard in order to avoid a collision with something in one's path, basic mathematical calculations show that the amount of time available to react to the change in circumstances, is halved for each car in the progression (i.e. the first car has two seconds to respond, the second car has one second to respond, the third car has one-half of a second to respond, the fourth car has one-fourth of a second to respond, etc.). This is why multiple-car pile-ups are so common.

The unfortunate practice frequently in place is to blame the last car in the pile-up for the entire

incident, because of the ideal which cannot be realistically practiced within such situations, that no one should follow so closely behind the preceding vehicle that coming to a complete stop before colliding is impossible.

Logically, in consideration of the dynamics particular to rush-hour traffic commuting described earlier, it makes much more sense to label such pile-ups a "no-fault" occurrence which is an unfortunate by-product of the need to twice-daily move hundreds of thousands (if not millions) of people from one location to another during a one-to-two-hour time-frame. I do not, however, know of any way to convince the auto insurance industry of the wisdom of such a change.

In my case, the blessing was that there were no injuries, but the problem was that my vehicle was declared a total loss, leaving me with no transportation and thereby reduced ability to create adequate income. The direct contributions of a half dozen friends significantly tempered the experience, but we all knew that none of them had the resources to completely resolve the resulting circumstances within my life.

For myself, psychologically and emotionally, suddenly having no transportation felt a little like having my feet cut off. The number of limitations within life with which I must daily contend, just by living where I do, exploded to nearly overwhelming proportions. For a time, I frequently lost sight of any pursuit of honor, virtue, and to some degree even respect, as the accident (yes, there's a reason they're called "accidents") replayed itself over and over and over within my mind, each time producing the conclusion that there really was nothing I could have done within that moment to prevent what happened from happening.

Have I come to terms with the occurrence of the accident and its unfortunate consequences and accepted its historical reality enough to begin transforming this event into a positive change? No, not yet, but hopefully soon. In the meantime, it seems that all I can do is wait, watch for helpful opportunities and new resources, and do my best not to lose faith in the ideal that all things really do "work together for good to those who love God" (Romans 8:28). I must confess, however, that such a practice is most difficult when standing too close to the actual experience of loss and consequently your prayers for me throughout this time are most appreciated.

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

## Being the Grown-up

There seems to be no argument that the societal systems with which we are living are far from perfect. Included within these systems are numerous assumptions and prescribed interpretations and reactions, which are really only appropriate some of the time and most definitely not within every instance. Unfortunately we must also accept that such ill-fitting patterns of societal and institutional behavior will sometimes prevail.

To argue for a better response, unfortunately, is only effective some of the time. Within our judicial systems, one of the challenges which seems to have no perfect answer, is that of what constitutes evidence or proof of the validity of some interpretation. More concisely, to know what is true is often not enough; one must also frequently have the evidence to prove that truth. Sometimes, however, such "hard" evidence cannot be found and it is then that we are given the challenge of "being the grown-up" and tolerating bad behavior and erroneous judgements within our judicial system. Why? Because the consequences of not having any judicial system at all, are much worse.

The more erroneous judgements there are which also become generally known, however, the more the general public is inspired to work toward constant revision and improvement of the system. To be involved in any direct or indirect way within such attempts to revise and improve public law and judicial processes, however, requires the ability to forgive mistakes, to assume a more mature attitude about the occurrence of mistakes, and most especially to accept that while the past cannot be undone, we can begin today to do

"If we cannot forgive  
a lack of understanding  
and instead reach out  
with love and wisdom,  
we will isolate ourselves  
from the rest of humanity  
and thereby enable  
our own ongoing  
experience of oppression."

--*Sister Who*

things in better ways which do not produce similar negative results to the ways in which things were done in the past.

A focus of on-going debate, however, is to what extent and in what ways the negative effects of the past should be addressed and, if possible, corrected. A primary question within such discussion is to what standard or configuration is it wise to return? To the best of my observation, there is no agreement among answers to this question in particular. Additionally, some answers to this question are really only thinly veiled attempts to undo what has been done and to make the world as if the negative events of the past had never occurred. Because such events have occurred, however, they are now part of us and we can no more censor, repress, and forget them than we could ignore an occurrence of gangrene within our fingertips or toes. Just as we cannot re-grow a finger or toe which has been completely removed due to such an infection, we cannot undo past historical wrongs or their effects. Literally and figuratively, we must learn new ways to walk, using whatever is available; we need to explore what is the very best we can do, either with what resources and abilities remain or with whatever new resources and abilities we are able to create.

Often, we must not only forgive others' possibly erroneous conclusions, but we must allow them to disagree and continue to hold to their own conclusions, until whatever time they are finally able to learn, to comprehend, to appreciate, or to integrate better conclusions. For some, this will mean waiting until such time as they are able to create within themselves a certain open-mindedness which will allow the perception of possibilities, dynamics, and qualities which they were quite unable previously to see.

In a very real sense, people of faith who live within a world which is horribly lacking but desperately needing such faith, must continue to be the grown-ups; waiting patiently for others to develop and embrace ever-better interpretations, conclusions, and strategies for making the world a worthy place in which to live. In words attributed to a woman imprisoned within a World War II Nazi death-camp, which I read within a comic book depiction of that particular story ("Hiding Place") during my teenage years, we must go on showing the world that love really is stronger than hate and wisdom stronger than ignorance.

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

## Ends and Beginnings

Because I have long believed that everything is alive, although not all in the same way, I have a long-standing practice of naming my vehicles, interacting with them as persons, and consequently needing to grieve their loss, which has nearly always occurred without any significant amount of warning and within only a few moments.

The initial sensation is a great emptiness; a void right in the middle of my body that shouldn't be there; and a sense of weightlessness, of someone having somehow turned off the basic gravity which we all take for granted, which generally holds our feet against the ground and keeps us from floating helplessly off into space.

I am suddenly again reminded that certain resources and persons will not always be there.

Similarly, I am reminded that Sister Who will not always be here, that this newsletter may someday end without warning, followed shortly thereafter perhaps by the removal of my website from the Internet. Will anyone remember? Will anyone care? Will anything in this world have been improved by the contributions I have made? I suppose one would have to ask those who still live within this world after I am gone, but even that would not necessarily answer such questions.

Please understand that I am not pointing fingers or wishing to shame or manipulate anyone by what I am about to say, but I continue to be baffled and confused by how much the work I do is appreciated but how little it is supported.

If we have benefitted from anything and therefore wish it to continue--whether a person, a church, a business, an organization, or even a nation--we must understand what the specific continued existence requires and do whatever we can to see that those requirements are satisfied.

When all is said and done, our fates and the unfolding of our lives are unavoidably and extensively interconnected. Disconnection and isolation may in fact be the most pervasive illusions which are generally employed, although usually for no better reason than that we still have to learn how so many diverse pieces of life can be born, live, and appropriately die, in as much harmony as possible. By the integration of love and wisdom into each moment of daily life, however, such harmony really is possible. May such love and wisdom be abundantly yours today.

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

## On a Personal Note

It is difficult, even for me, to describe the devastating and profound impact of having been in an auto accident during the past month, of sufficient severity that my vehicle was declared a total loss, even though miraculously no serious injuries occurred. More than anything else, I am stunned and confused by how unexpected was the occurrence itself and how enormous was not only the volume of legal, psychological, emotional, and spiritual questions which followed, but the quantity of paperwork and forms for which I was held responsible even though none of the forms requested ever passed directly through my hands.

On a similar note, I was blessed to finally be able to make some seriously needed repairs to the wiring of my house, only to be told that an inspection report I have never seen, was missing and that my electricity would be shut off if the report was not promptly submitted. Thankfully, the report was located and the matter resolved.

Is it just me or is there really something inherently insane about asking a person to provide what is not nor ever has been within their ability to provide? As a minister and a person of faith, I have found myself often looking upwards during the past few weeks, wondering just how much craziness I am to endure, as all sorts of threats against my welfare were being made almost daily, the majority of which were attributable to bureaucratic mistakes, negligent communication, and unavoidable circumstances.

Remarkably and by the grace of God, I have obviously lived through all of it. If absolutely nothing of any significance happens throughout the next four weeks, it will be a great improvement within my life experience. Considering who I am and the causes of wisdom and love that I serve, however, perhaps life will be even better than that. For now, I am content to interpret that I am simply standing too close, to perceive and understand God's perspective of what is truly going on.

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

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