

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 certain interpersonal dynamics which have apparently existed within virtually every human community, since the beginning of recorded history. A difficulty with challenges that have been around that long is that, after a while, the details and deeper understandings begin to fade out of sight like fine details in old sun-drenched wallpaper. In rediscovering such details, however, long-forgotten stories can re-emerge, allowing not only the rediscovery of details, but also the rediscovery of each other and of ourselves.

This month's essays offer four perspectives on certain dynamics of human relationships. Far too often, our relationships play out as if they are far too much grounded within our fears and far too little grounded within our love for one another. It is my distinct hope that these words will give strength to your resources of love and wisdom.

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

Intellectual Bullying

As easy as it is to say that bullying is essentially internal fear in combination with external violence, it is a bit more difficult to deal with being the particular bully's current victim. From a different and perhaps more godly perspective, one might be inclined to respond to the situation with compassion and try to communicate to the bully that it's okay to feel afraid; that fears are not often so much intent upon destroying us as they are intent upon educating us.

Speaking from experience, it seems to me that interactions and conversations with bullies are rarely as intelligent as the suggestion of the previous sentence. I wish I could say that my experiences of being bullied and even violently attacked were confined to my elementary school years, but in fact I encountered the dynamics of bullying almost as often within my graduate school masters program.

In the latter instance, in retrospect, it seems the internal fear was the all-too-familiar fear of the

unknown. Whenever I would ask a question that seemed unanswerable, or made an observation that inadvertently created holes within a particular professor's ideology, the intensity and the violence of the response was quite bewildering to me. Weren't we after all engaged in a search for truth? Apparently not, but my innocence and lack of familiarity with graduate school settings left me ill-equipped to realize this until, time after time, it was too late to prevent another terribly wounding experience.

I thought I was in the presence of persons who believed in being Christ-like. Had these people not already been identified as future spiritual leaders? Yet because of some unnamed fear (of the unknown, the unfamiliar, the uncertain, or God only knows what), I encountered verbal, psychological, emotional, and even social violence that was so completely unexpected, I was like a sand castle on a beach when the tide comes in: washed away in seconds and wondering what happened.

I have no doubt that the human intellect is a divine gift, intended both to empower and to integrate with faith, hope, and love. Making the intellect subservient to small-minded fears is a disgrace and an insult to the embodiment of greatest wisdom and love (what I call God) that I credit with creating our brains in the first place. To use the intellect constructively, therefore, can be considered an act of gratitude, of praise, and even of worship. Considering the intricacies of the human brain and the obvious indications of untapped potential, we may as a species be considered quite juvenile, but for all essential purposes our potential development is unlimited.

Intellectual bullying, however, can impede our progress and is perhaps the least intelligent activity that does so, specifically because it is the intellect lying even to itself.

In this too, the timeless wisdom echoed within biblical text (but found in other places as well) is once more confirmed: "you shall know the truth and the truth will make you free."

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

Social Bullying

At the heart of bullying is the paradoxical dynamic of inner fear masked by outer violence. The mask often goes undetected, however, if the violence does not in fact look obviously violent. When such a mask passes through any room, however, like footprints in the snow, one can trace the path by the losses that are left behind.

When snow falls, especially here in Colorado, it is light and airy. Considering the composition of the molecules of air contained within the snow, one might even say that it contains a tiny amount of the breath of life itself. When an animal of any description crosses the snow, its footprints drive that breath of life out and leave hardened ice in exactly the shape of the foot that violently compressed the tiny white crystals.

In a similar way, social bullying walks across public relationships, carrying the weight of various fears, and crushing the breath of life out of everything beneath its feet. Often, somewhere near the top of the list of fears that the particular bully carries, is the fear of not being loved enough to survive. Specifically because of this fear of isolation, of being left alone to die, a pathological hunger grows that inspires hoarding, greed, and endless acquisition—but it is impossible for any individual to accumulate enough resources to survive without ongoing relationships.

Survival, ultimately, is dependent upon continuous cycles of exchange, of interaction, and of inter-relationship. Social bullying is the fear of a breakdown in these cycles of exchange, interaction, and inter-relationship that is erroneously answered by a strategy of hoarding what the relationships would otherwise provide. Social bullying is both the result and the cause of the destruction of trust, without which essential love cannot be transferred from one person to another—and without love, we die.

More essential than even food, water, or air to breathe, love is also the nemesis of that inner fear upon which all bullying feeds.

Yet fear is not a demon that must be exorcised. In fact, I sometimes think of fear as a guardian angel with a shrill voice who has an important message to deliver—but I create a terrible conflict if I cling to that angel and interfere with the completion of its mission.

If when the angel of fear comes to me, I am too busy screaming to listen, the message cannot be heard. If when the angel has delivered the

message, I disregard the new information or insight and remain fixated on what came before, the message may have been spoken but it has not been communicated—because I failed to hear it.

When I allow fear, joy, love, anger, and every other emotion to teach me, I have within my hands the ability to forge new relationships of trust and collaboration. No matter how many times my trust has been betrayed, the introduction and persistent presence of love can create the new beginnings that allow life to go on. The question is whether or to what degree we are each willing and able to be that channel of love for those around us.

I do not believe that love asks more of us than we can do, but I do believe that love often knows before we do, that we can do more than we think we can. Love sees where no human eye can look and waits for us to rediscover our strength.

I recall reading many years ago about the training of circus elephants. The article reported that a fully grown elephant has sufficient strength in its trunk and legs to extract a telephone pole from the ground, but that it is generally restrained by having one of its legs chained to only a three-foot-long metal stake. The explanation given was that baby elephants, who obviously do not have the strength of their parents, are chained to a similar stake. After weeks of unsuccessfully straining against the restraint of the chain and stake, the baby elephant resigns itself to the limited range of its chain. Years later, the same elephant, now grown many times larger, has no knowledge of its dramatically increased strength—at least, not in relation to the chain between its ankle and the metal stake.

The social bully clearly has something in common with the circus elephant, imprisoned and restrained by that which does not inherently have the ability to do what it nevertheless does.

The circus elephant has the strength to be free, but is restrained by believing a lie. So it is with the social bully who believes that survival would be impossible without the violence of squeezing the breath of life out of others.

An alternative that is very much available if we are willing to give it a chance, is to come to an understanding that it is by the preservation of the breath of life within others, that a greater strength can be realized, than any single individual could ever contain; that as we love and support each other, many others love and support each of us.

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

Emotional Bullying

Perhaps it is a bit confusing to speak of emotions of emotions, but this may also be a recognition of how complex a human being can be—of how many possible degrees, flavors, and combinations of every emotion can occur. An angry fear, for example, may be more outwardly violent. An anxious joy might be hesitant and tentative. A contented sadness could be the result of a necessary sacrifice that recognizes the simultaneous occurrence of loss and gain.

As a combination of inner fear and outer violence, emotional bullying opposes allowing ourselves to feel whatever we feel and avoids the inner fear by seeking to eradicate an intolerable outward emotional expression—an expression that is intolerable specifically because of its invitation to compassionately and wisely embrace inner truth which the bully does not wish to embrace at all.

What would happen if every inner emotion were embraced—not all at once, but in a deliberate, wise, and appropriately paced manner? To attempt to feel everything all at once—at least for a human being—would be—in most cases—overwhelming. To avoid ever feeling certain emotions simply because they were labeled unpleasant, negative, or difficult, however, would leave one incomplete.

Emotional bullying, therefore, is about ceasing to grow; making a speed-bump into a permanent road-block; and rewriting the truth of the universe into the lie that there is nothing more to experience, to discover, or to learn.

Emotional bullying—like all bullying—is about ceasing to be truly alive. It is not surprising, therefore, that for some the metaphorical and figurative termination of life is projected into a literal and physical termination of life through acts of suicide. When witnesses to such acts later search for a cause, an instigator, and a villain on whom to pin this heinous crime, they may be unable to find one because the bully who is responsible may be the person's own inner voice.

*"We cannot disregard
another's basic humanity
without losing
some of our own."*

-- Sister Who

Within even the most sane and psychologically well-adjusted person, there may in fact be many inner voices—some that constantly rant and rave judgmental accusations and condemnation, others that invite curiosity in ways that may or may not be wise, and still others that spend great amounts of time wondering which answers are correct.

One of the challenges of dealing with the basic pattern of bullying within our institutions, our communities, and our immediate circle of social contacts, is that we must also deal with this dynamic within ourselves. Until we have dealt with the bully inside of ourselves, we will never be completely able to deal with the bully who is outside of ourselves. The bully within, however, is often the least noticed and consequently the most destructive, prompting all sorts of reactions, choices, and decisions which wreak havoc upon not only the soul but also upon virtually every one of our relationships.

Once again, it seems, the best resource we have is each other. Miracles can happen when an entire community comes together to oppose a bully—not by exerting a force of greater violence but by exerting a force of love greater than any inner fear the particular bully may have. What no individual within the community has the strength or the resources to do, the entire community acting according to principles of wise consensus can do.

When one person's grief, fear, or anger becomes too much for any other individual to bear, the community as a whole can construct an effective bridge between the present brokenness and the future healing.

Does this actually happen within the current world of humanity? Not nearly as often as it could, but I for one am not willing to label such consensus "impossible." Just because something is neither common nor popular, does not mean that we do not have the ability to do it. Just because something has never been done before, does not mean that you or I cannot be the first to demonstrate that action for all who will follow.

We live within a most transitional time in human history. The possibility that humanity will run from its fears into the false security of emotional rigidity is real—as is the possibility of rising up to embrace and learn from fear, shrug off violence, and move forward into loving consensus, feeling whatever we feel, every step of the way.

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

Spiritual Bullying

Someone recently asked me whether I thought humanity would ever evolve beyond fear. As I pondered the possibility and the ways that I have avoided demonizing fear, in the manner I have sometimes observed in others, it became clear to me that among the various ways of thinking of fear is that of considering it an emotional equivalent of pain.

Should anyone live in constant pain? No, of course not, but to lose the ability to feel pain would be to lose the ability to know when something is wrong—when a toe gets cut on a piece of broken glass while walking barefoot outside in the summer time, when infection or disease is somehow encountered, or when a cancerous or anomalous condition develops. Without pain, no corrective response would be triggered within our brains. Similarly, without fear, from where would the invitation, the recommendation, or the inspiration for corrective action come?

Specifically because bullying is a dynamic associated with inner fear concealed by outward violence, spiritual bullying may be understood as an unhealthy response to dealing with one's own doubts—the surface expression often being violently oppressive dogmatism that acts against the true freedom of genuine spiritual health.

Instead of facing doubts and allowing them to be instructive, the spiritual bully retreats into attempts to eradicate the sources from which the doubts arise. Such actions unintentionally place a choke-hold on the very spirituality that could empower humanity individually and collectively to be more abundantly alive.

Metaphorically speaking, if we ever want to see the beauty of a sunrise, we must be willing to ready ourselves for this within the darkness of the night—journeying to a vantage point, waiting patiently in the cold, and maintaining faith in the future occurrence of this wondrous event.

Similarly, to see the light of God appear within another person, we may have to make a journey to a vantage point from which we can truly and honestly see the other person, we may have to wait within a dark and cold state of not knowing when or how the light will appear, and we may have to keep believing while everything around us insists that such a transformation is impossible. Have faith, my friends, the dawn is coming.

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

On a Personal Note

Episode #200 of "Sister Who Presents" has now been recorded and is ready for editing. Significant progress was made this week within my ongoing doctoral writing (an especially difficult chunk of ideological and philosophical construction). Last weekend's conversations at the semi-annual Metaphysical Fair within the portable chapel were both mentally exhausting and encouraging, because of the depth and intensity the various discussions included. By all appearances, participation within that event was a complete success.

My motorcycle is unfortunately back in the repair shop due to a very minor incident, but the cost of repairs is estimated to be quite minimal in comparison to all preceding exchanges between myself and that particular business. For those wanting more details, I was turning a corner, a car approached rapidly from the opposite direction, we both stopped in time, but the angle of the cycle caused it to fall to the pavement and the brake fluid reservoir on the handlebar broke. In any case, there were no injuries whatsoever and no vehicular collision—just another repair to do. Sigh.

It would appear the worst of winter is past and the prospect of a major increase in yardwork is pending, but this may be the first summer that I will not have to deal with all of it alone, thanks to a couple of friends who have expressed willingness to help in certain very significant ways. I am also hopeful that the last of the work on exterior siding will be completed soon and that the house may even finally (after seven years) be painted entirely in a single color before the beginning of August. Little by little, progress is being made.

With regard to God Space Sanctuary in particular, the member of the Board of Directors who also acts as Treasurer needed to resign in order to deal with health issues, so prayers for both his challenges and for a new Board member/Treasurer are most appreciated.

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

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