

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

The challenge of anything which is common is that we may become so accustomed to its actions that we forget its meaning. The "Serenity Prayer" is probably one of the most well-known and oft-repeated of any, outside of the contexts of institutionalized religion.

In order for this (or any) prayer to come from the heart and therefore be a prayer of power and integrity, it is imperative that we understand as much as we are able, exactly about what it is that we are speaking--in this case, the three elements of what I cannot change, what I can change, and the discernment necessary to distinguish these two from each other. Discernment, however, is clearly a life-long activity, coerced by constant change and the introduction of new persons, experiences, resources, contexts, and perceptions (even of God) with which we must find relatively harmonious relationship if life is to continue at all.

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

Serenity to Accept What I Cannot Change

Are we living within a good time or a bad one, a time of stability and comfort or a time of radical and often frightening change? The answers to these questions seem to vary widely according to the immediate experience of the person speaking. Could it in fact be that all of these times coexist simultaneously and are not always receptive to constructive alteration for reasons beyond our limited perception and comprehension? If so, can we still form lasting and empowering friendships between radically different experiences of life--and what does all of this have to do with the daily practice of unconditional love?

In reflecting upon such possibilities, I quickly find myself throwing up my hands and protesting, "Information overload! I cannot possibly respond with any effectiveness to so many variables and so much overwhelming need within the world around me--which is when I have often heard the remark, "Choose your battles wisely."

I'm not convinced that it is helpful to always view life as a battle, any more than it is helpful to always view life as a game. These metaphors, like all others, have points at which their helpfulness breaks down. Finding serenity within such multi-layered and interwoven chaos is a formidable challenge indeed.

An effective response can begin with the question, "What sort of person will I show myself to be, within this situation or circumstance?"

If someone is angry, I must allow that person the space to be angry and listen to understand as much as I can the reason that this person is angry. There may be very helpful and even essential information on the other side of the emotional expression. If I can also interject unconditional love and genuine respect, however, it might just make a positive difference.

If the world is at war, I must allow it the space it needs to sort out its relational issues. If I can also humbly and gently interject some more constructive alternatives, perhaps by the grace of God the world will eventually embrace better ways of resolving its conflicts.

The five stages of dealing with any difficulty or loss have been identified as denial, anger, bargaining, depression, and acceptance. Genuine, lasting, and recommendable serenity only accompanies acceptance.

It has often been said that life is not a destination but rather a journey. That being the case, serenity begins with accepting what is and then applying one's self to the cultivation of the very best possibilities of whatever is. We cannot directly demand serenity any more than we can order a plant to grow to its full flower and fruitfulness within a single day's time. Such an indirect approach, however, is especially challenging for human societies accustomed to being proactive and capitalistic.

Only after such acceptance and never before, will constructive change and growth begin to happen.

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

Courage to Change What I Can

In preparing to act with courage, I must first acknowledge the reality of my own experiences and life circumstances and then acknowledge that these are unique to me--that others' experiences and life circumstances may be quite different.

Courage, ultimately, is about stepping across the gap between those differences.

This is challenging because it is sometimes not myself and others on different sides of the gap, but rather various parts of myself. On one side, for example, may be my past and everything I have known, while on the other side may be all of my undiscovered and unexpressed potential. This same dynamic is mirrored, however, within interpersonal and global relationships as well.

For some, the answer has been to face away from the gap so that awareness of that undiscovered and unexpressed potential is not so disturbing. Some call this "playing it safe," yet I've often heard elderly persons reflecting upon their lives wish they'd taken more risks.

The first step of courage, therefore, is to turn around and face both the gap and the positive potential on the other side.

Having done so, one can now begin to name the things which fill the gap--things such as dysfunctional distribution of resources and opportunities, basic and widespread ignorance, and disregard for the interconnectedness of life.

Within myself, this might mean facing the possibility that I am more creative, more capable, and more essential than the world says that I am. Within interpersonal relationships and group situations, this might mean asking the opinion of the one sitting quietly in the corner, rather than allowing any single voice to dominate. Even the most anomalous of perspectives may be used by God to teach us something more about ourselves, thereby removing ignorance and allowing us to proceed with greater wisdom.

Within myself, this might mean being willing to take on more leadership responsibilities or to decline additional tasks because I am verifiably operating too close to my limits. Within interpersonal and societal relationships, this might mean acknowledging the limits of a particular dysfunctional societal system and working to improve or replace a particular system in ways that are better able to meet everyone's needs.

Within myself, this might mean acknowledging that the work I do within my

garden, my workshop, or my place of employment is very interconnected with the attitudes, words, and thoughts I bring to my prayers and spiritual life. Within the world, this might mean acknowledging that liberals, conservatives, those living in poverty, and those living with an excess of financial resources all share an interconnected ever-unfolding fate in which everyone's best interests must be considered. Only by working together and valuing every part, will the delicate balance of human civilization be empowered to survive at all.

Maintaining awareness of such interconnectedness is a daunting task which also requires careful discernment each step of the way, because it is never enough to simply be aware of problems, any more than simply knowing that the Titanic was sinking empowered any of its passengers to survive. Could everyone on board have been saved if they had all worked together to find an effective solution? We will never know because that's not what happened. I strongly recommend that we do not repeat their mistake, fighting each other instead of the common problem, as the ship sank lower and lower into the cold ocean depths.

The final challenge to acting with courage is the fact that I will never know for certain whether the decisions I've made were right and there will always be someone to insist that in fact I made a big mistake. I still have days when I wonder whether I should have stayed in New York City some twenty-five years ago and (hopefully) become a successful actor or whether I should have remained with my now ex-lifepartner (with whom I remain very good friends), rather than forging a more solitary path in response to circumstances at the time of our separation.

Life remains a very mixed experience in more ways than I can name. Whenever I need reassurance regarding the choices I have made, however, I only have to remember the countless times since those decisions when love triumphed, when new accomplishments were achieved, and when life nevertheless became bigger and more positively interconnected than it had ever been and most likely than it could have ever been, had I followed the other path. As Robert Frost remarked, "Two roads diverged in a yellow wood..." It's a poem well worth reviewing on a frequent and regular basis.

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

Wise Discernment

As I child, discernment was sometimes described as "knowing the difference between right and wrong." I recognized early that whether something is right or wrong is very much dependent upon its particular context and circumstances. What made such situations frustrating, was how seldom the adults within my childhood world were willing to acknowledge and discuss this dependency. For most, it seemed, whether right or wrong, the rules were the rules.

A full comprehension of discernment requires moving beyond rote application of rules, to nurture--with a thinking mind--the relationships thereby affected. This ideal has inspired judicial systems within every societal organization humanity has ever created, although only a few have been successful at embodying this in a living, evolving, adaptive way.

The practice of this ideal, however, is hardly limited to judicial structures. Rather, the practice of this ideal, which is synonymous with the practice of discernment, imposes itself upon each of us every day. What remains to be seen is whether we will dismiss the struggle for a truly right response by slapping a poorly fitting rule across its face or instead be willing to engage in a process of healing the victims, assigning appropriate consequence to the perpetrators, and causing our own personal growth.

I am reminded of a very complex story originally written in German, the title of which has been translated, "The Tin Drum." The focus of this story is a small boy who upon perceiving the treachery and vileness of the adult world, decides to remain a boy and thereupon ceases to grow and mature. In a very real sense, this story offers a metaphor for the ways in which countless adults

and even entire countries have chosen a path of simplistic rules rather than mature and wise discernment, in responding to the ongoing and evolving challenges of human life on this planet.

Caught between worlds of infancy and maturity, wanting the rewards and abilities of adulthood without any of the costs, an amazing number of individuals, corporations, and political entities are in desperate need of a hunger for true wisdom and discernment. The line which must be crossed, however, is the line between the world governed by poorly fitting rules and the world governed by the moment-to-moment application of wisdom.

Similarly, I have often encountered men and women who seek a relationship with someone special, but who simultaneously want a relationship which does not cost them anything. If the witicism is true that "you get what you pay for," then a relationship which costs nothing is hardly worth having. Similarly, a societal or communal context in which to live, which costs us nothing, is probably also not worth having. Indeed, a church or religious community which provides us with moral and spiritual instruction, support, inspiration, and encouragement, which costs us nothing, is probably not worth having.

The double-edged sword of discernment also notes, however, when the cost of a particular relationship or inclusion is inappropriately high. Remaining within a relationship which is abusive, for example, because one is more afraid of being alone than of being abused, is wrong. As difficult as the trek across a desert of loneliness may be, there is a very reasonable and realistic hope of finding a better relationship or community on the other side--and of developing a much healthier and more empowering relationship with God and with one's self along the way.

There are certain things which no one can do for us; which God has assigned for each of us to do for ourselves. Discernment is one of those. No one can learn our lessons for us, nor develop our bodies by vicariously performing our exercises for us, nor do anything to express the mysteries and treasures God has hidden uniquely within each one of us. Those are all part of the universally applicable divine commission to fully and powerfully be the individually unique and communally interdependent persons whom God has made each of us to be.

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

**“Owning a Stradavarius
will produce no music
if one has not also learned
how to play the violin.”**

--Sister Who

Wholistic Living

As if wholistic living were not difficult enough, it seems we are often given the challenge of doing so within extremely fractured and dysfunctional constellations of relationships. Even mere comprehension of the myriad of pieces and parts involved seems overwhelming. It is easy to see why some would retreat to the artificial "safety" of systems of rules, polarized judgements, and addictive/escapist behaviors.

It is too easy to merely say the words, "unconditional love is inherent within the answer to our relational problems," but I believe this to nevertheless be true.

Such love builds bridges of understanding where even faith that an answer is possible, is conspicuously missing.

Such love understands that some are too wounded emotionally and psychologically or too unfamiliar with even its existence to provide the healing and empowerment that a particular challenge may require.

Although we may have to search long and hard for it, like finding a particular box of sentimental memorabilia within an over-stuffed garage or storage shed, unconditional love is very much within each person's reach. If the practice of such love were easy to acquire, however, costing us nothing in the process, the love we would give would be equally without value and unconditional love would not be the treasure that it is.

Unconditional love understands that everything is interconnected, interrelated, and interdependent. If our efforts are directed toward having more for ourselves rather than having the ability to positively contribute more to the networks of life within which we are included, we inadvertently begin to sever our interconnectedness--resulting in a more fractured, wounded, and ultimately wounding life experience for many others around us.

Wholeness within one's body refers to the integration and harmonious interaction of many diverse parts. Wholeness within our world refers to the integration and harmonious interaction of many diverse people. Wholeness within our spirits refers to the integration and harmonious interaction of prayers, persons, and contributions to the ongoing unfolding and evolving life of human, Divine, and everything else that is thereby perceived, experienced, and shared.

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

On a Personal Note

Regarding Iliff School of Theology, another phase of my life has ended. All that remains is for the registrar to send an official piece of paper early next month, declaring me a recipient of a masters degree in theological studies. It is my hope that this degree will give me more credibility in the eyes of certain others when the most aggressive phase finally begins, of the construction and operation of the interfaith spiritual retreat and conference center I have envisioned. Because I have yet to find an employer who sufficiently values this academic accomplishment to pay me the cost of living for my ongoing contribution, however, I have applied to Pacifica Graduate Institute in California to pursue an MA/PhD in Depth Psychology. Whether this will define the next major phase of my life is yet unknown.

Recording of all of the audio necessary for touring performances of "A Circuitous Journey" was successfully completed on Friday, April 13, thanks especially to Ron Byrne of Naked Ear Recording Studio. I cannot recommend him enough, should anyone ever need affordable and excellent audio-recording services. It is truly a joy to work with such a competent and caring technical professional. Individual copies of brochures promoting this production are available free upon request. If you know of any church, organization, or individual whom you think should receive this brochure, feel free to send me a name and postal mailing address and I will do so.

A limited number of requests have been received for DVDs of "Sister Who Presents," my television show. Hopefully such requests will increase within the near future, as well as requests for my CD of original songs, "My Soul Knows its Face." Both of these can be purchased online through my website, www.sisterwho.com.

Many thanks also to a few of you who have sent in financial contributions for this work to continue. Your generosity means a great deal.

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

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