

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

Discussions of power are difficult because it takes so many forms and is hidden within virtually everything, but in very specific ways. Learning to use every form of power available is thus also a challenge of learning to respond to the world in a wider range and diversity of ways.

More often, discussions center upon perceptions of either the availability or the scarcity of power---perceptions which are usually preoccupied with a very narrow approach to the resolution of a challenge and ignorant or unwilling to consider other approaches.

If we can let go of attachments to specific forms or ways of acting (without losing our souls or our integrity), an abundance of power and new ways of resolving challenges can often be seen.

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

Power Assigned

Even before Lord Acton uttered the words, "Power corrupts and absolute power corrupts absolutely," human history was saturated with examples of individuals who had very poorly managed the power assigned to them by whatever twist of fate. Whether by democratic elections, inheritance, military accomplishment, or association, power unaccompanied by genuine love has virtually always been a bad thing.

Genuine love is that which perceives the interconnectedness of all things and somehow understands that, to appropriate a phrase of Benjamin Franklin, "Either we all hang together or we all hang separately." If I love someone and bless them at someone else's expense (especially someone who has not consented to the expense), the gift is an imbalance within the overall dynamics of life which will not rest until it once again finds a sense of balance. Stolen goods must be returned, victimized peoples must be psychologically and emotionally healed, and depleted resources must be replenished. If I love someone, I will not involve them in a circumstance which is attempting to

rebalance itself, thereby encouraging them to experience a future loss when the rebalancing occurs.

On a different note, assigning power to someone who does not actually have the specific power assigned to them, is also an unbalancing and often an expression of some sort of woundedness within the assigner of the power. "You could have prevented this!" I might protest, brushing aside any possibility that specific information or higher wisdom somehow advised against such prevention, as well as the possibility that other dynamics and conditions unknown to me stripped the accused of a genuinely loving ability to do what I insist he or she could have done. "You could have loaned me the money I needed," someone might insist, unwilling to consider that perhaps the person to whom he or she is speaking is just as financially limited as the speaker is, though perhaps in different ways.

I suggest that by God's design, power exists within all things and that also by God's design, power within all things is interdependent and equally in need of the omnipresence of love. The real challenge to interdependent relationships, therefore, is not the unequal distribution of power but rather the unequal and inadequate practice of love.

As convenient as it might seem to be to heal or satisfy my need with someone else's apparent power or resources, the distribution of power, love, and relationships remains very complex and uncertain because of the huge number of conditions and participating persons and issues involved.

The only power which does not corrupt and the only power therefore worth having, is the power of love and consequently the power to heal. Thankfully this is something God has placed within each and every one of us to some degree or another, continually inviting us to employ this God-given resource toward the healing of the world--one person at a time.

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

Power Denied

I recall reading many, many years ago an explanation which I've never had the opportunity to confirm but which makes good sense to me just the same, regarding the training of circus elephants. Essentially, when the elephant is very small, it is chained to a three-foot stake. Although the baby elephant pulls and tugs and fights to be free, it is small enough and weak enough for such efforts to be unsuccessful. By the time the elephant has grown, it has given up all belief in being able to escape--even when it is then trained to assist in the raising of circus tents, lifting support poles of enormous size and weight into their proper places. Essentially, obviously without realizing it, the elephant has denied the reality of its own power.

Similarly, individuals or groups may complain of having no power to manipulate political or ecclesiastical authorities, simply because they cannot directly tell the senator or bishop what to do in response to various administrative issues. There may, however, be other ways to persuade senators and bishops to behave differently--hundreds of ways, in fact.

On the other hand, children's power to be self-determining or to make certain choices may in fact be completely limited or negated by contrary parental opinions. Does this mean that children have no power? Absolutely not, but making effective use of the power they do have may require more knowledge and intelligence than most of them possess--a comfort to parents perhaps but a problem for children faced with parents who are in some way abusive.

Similarly, many people around the world are victimized by churches and governments with selfish agendas. The fundamental purpose of churches, in my opinion, is to nurture spiritual growth and divine relationship. In contrast, the current reality is that for many churches, the focus is upon maintaining and expanding the particular system of institutionalized religion. In many but thankfully not all cases, the power of the particular church is derived and constituted from power that has been taken from the individuals who have identified themselves as members by regular attendance or other forms of support.

Instead of being an ever-changing combination of the contributions of each unique individual present, the institution instead takes on a personality all of its own which depends to

varying degrees upon conformity prevailing and questioning being diminished. Whether this or that person gets his or her spiritual needs met is thus no longer a concern, but rather all individuals are expected to make whatever sacrifices are necessary in order to support the ongoing life of the institution.

Parallel to the denial of individuals within such contexts to be spiritually self-determining, to be the primary agents of their own choices and spiritual progression, is the reality that God is also thereby limited or at least discouraged from doing anything in new and unconventional ways. "Oh, God would never do that!" such anomalous individuals may be told. Yet it is a part of accepted biblical record that the apostle Peter really did see a vision of a sheet lowered from heaven which was filled with all of the things considered unclean by Jewish law and that he was instructed, "What God has cleansed, no longer call unclean."

Those who have been the healers, musical composers, and visionaries throughout human history have (at least according to human standards) more often than not been people unsuited or unqualified for the experiences and ministries which God nevertheless bestowed upon them. In most cases, the larger human population discouraged rather than supported their contributions in virtually every way possible and thereby denied opportunity to the creative and ultimately divine power working within them.

Has your power been denied in some way or another at various times? Mine certainly has, but recognizing God's power working through me from time to time is nevertheless not an occasion for selfish pride. I am the servant of the work rather than its master. I may bring a certain expertise or simple audacity to the particular task, but if God is not in it, then all of my best efforts will be for naught.

When power seems to have been denied, it is essential to remember how little of the larger picture and reality of life we see. On countless occasions, while I was experiencing frustration, God was making all things new. While I saw only my own personal and immediate failure, God empowered others to see deeper qualities of the spirit within the ways in which I respond to life. While I saw only my own experience, God drew out of my struggles, the birth of something new and wonderful.

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

Power Given

It has sometimes been said that we cannot give what we do not possess. How is it then, that I have occasionally been inspired by the thoughts, words, and actions of others to demonstrate courage, initiative, and love in ways that the channels of such virtues have not themselves been able to demonstrate?

How is it that even when I do not feel either loved or loving, that I am still able to express love toward someone or something other than myself? How is that each and every one of us can by God's blessing be a wounded healer?

In a perhaps deeper and more pervasive sense than humanity is currently generally able to grasp, it seems that God has given power to all things. Among the challenges of life and growth is the process of coming to terms with the specific forms and amounts of such power and of coming to ever greater understanding of the holy and good place and application of each form of power within the interdependent web of life.

In this better sense of power, that is, the sense in which power exists to allow for the flow of love and divine spirit throughout creation, we each have the ability to bestow power upon everyone and everything around us, sometimes in subtle ways of which we are quite unaware. We can create a garden in which flowers can bloom, in which lives can experience degrees of fulfillment, and in which greater positive potential can be realized. Ultimately, we can leave the world a better place than we found it.

Obviously we can also abuse such power, giving it to things such as economic exchange, poorly structured governments, and inadequately developed or comprehended agendas, which have neither the wisdom nor the love to heal rather than harm everything that is thereby touched.

Some have responded by insisting that "it is not I who give it but God within me," but this

"The world is a shared space within which truth is not limited to any one person's perception, but rather is sufficiently vast to encompass all."

--Sister Who

statement can also be abused, especially in those instances in which it is neither truly love nor God that originates the gift but rather a weak human agenda to selfishly manipulate or control, which seeks authority and credibility by illegitimately claiming a more esteemed authorship.

If God loves me and chooses to work through me and others respond with praise, I can find within such compliments inspiration to further nurture my relationship with the true source of the gifts which I bestow upon others. To deny ownership ("...it is not I but..."), however, devalues the vessel God has chosen to use.

If God has honored you by choosing to work through you, do not disagree with God by suggesting that some error exists within God's choice of you for the task. Similarly, if God has so honored you, do not forget that the power and the honor were given and not self-created.

Giving power in its best sense is synonymous with giving love. Giving power in its worst sense is synonymous with the creation of disease and imbalance. Food can be nurturing, but gluttony separates us from our best possibilities and greatest experience of life. The accumulation of possessions can function as a well-equipped tool chest by which to meet every challenge or as (in the words of a friend to me several years ago) "conspicuous consumption" which reduces the ability to give to those in need.

We have all experienced being in need. If we were given the power to overcome the challenges of such times, we may now have the ability to give to others. If we were denied the power to overcome, we may have been shaped in ways which can never be undone, but there is no event, circumstance, or action which can effectively prevent us from ever being given power at a later time.

Just as (in words I read many years ago) "there is not enough darkness in the entire universe to extinguish the light of a single candle," there is also not enough apathy, disregard, or hatred to prevent all future gifts of love or healing power. There is no place so weak that the introduction of power becomes impossible. There is no place so lonely, that meeting a new friend becomes impossible. There is no place so faithless or evil, that God cannot be found. When God is found, power is given. When power is respectfully received, love is not far behind.

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

Power Claimed

Whether by reckless driving or rudeness in conversation, the power to affect another's emotional and psychological state is widely available. To say that one has no power is therefore nearly always false. Overpopulation, however, similarly requires collective resolution.

Certainly I could complain about not having specific forms of power--the power to go shopping and buy what is needed instead of what is affordable, to travel without restrictions, or to immediately tear down my problem-saturated house and build a new one with no such problems.

I fail to claim my power and impoverish myself further, however, if complaining about problems effectively prevents me from seeing other possibilities. Thus it is that (when I have the strength to do so) I respond to rude people with a smile, I respond to reckless drivers with a better example, and I respond to witnessing callous insensitivity with generosity. I am thereby claiming my power to increase the quotient of good energy in the universe rather than weakly submitting to the more common impulse to reflect back (and thereby increase) every negative thing that ever happens to me, in exactly the same or in an even more destructive way.

I don't answer a frown with a smile because the frown inspired good feelings within me; I answer a frown with a smile (whenever I have the strength to do so) because I want there to be more smiles in the world.

If I respond with full awareness of the dynamics of what I am doing, I am not pretending everything is alright when it is not but rather sowing seeds of love and kindness by which things can perhaps become better than they are. Over time, I will hopefully become better and better at sowing such seeds in ways that will be more and more effective in bringing the power of love and healing to everyone and everything I meet.

By claiming my power to choose a more positive response than anything negative I receive or experience, I may even begin to inspire others to more fully claim their power to join in healing the world, one person at a time. Working together, we could even begin to claim humanity's power to live in mutual respect and peace with one another.

That is most definitely a power worth claiming and a dream worth pursuing.

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

On a Personal Note

On a positive note, thanks to the Internet phenomenon of Paypal, I have succeeded in adding online purchasing capability to my website, for those who wish to thereby acquire a copy of my CD of eighteen original songs or prints of any of the fifty different photos and quotes of myself (many of which appeared within past calendars).

With regard to video production, numerous frustrating setbacks and challenges have been encountered, but perhaps just because I'm too stubborn to give up, attempts to create a new and better introduction to my television show continue. The support of your prayers and positive thoughts for effective assistance and support from individuals and equipment is very much appreciated.

As to my pursuit of a master's degree in theological studies at Iliff School of Theology, I have now completed six of eight quarters and plan to finish all remaining course work between now and late November.

In other news, for the production presented in the weekly Chapel service on March 15, 2006, at Iliff School of Theology, which was entitled "A Circuitous Journey," I recently received the R. Allene Sather award for demonstrating interest and ability in innovative worship. A DVD recording of this service is available by request for \$3 (to cover production and shipping costs).

Finally, the support of your prayers and positive thoughts is very much appreciated for two areas of concern. The first is the quickly approaching trip to Montreal in late July and early August for the first World OutGames. The second is for the vocational and financial circumstances of my life following the completion of my studies at Iliff School of Theology in November of this year. In both cases, please pray with me that adequate resources, effective ministry, and wise guidance will become characteristic for me in meeting the daunting challenges ahead.

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

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