

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

As is the case with many things, in and of itself tolerance is inherently neither good nor bad. Such distinctions can only be made once some awareness is gained of specifically what is being tolerated.

The goal then is better stated as making the tolerance (or intolerance) which we express a good thing in relation to all that is thereby affected. Tolerance of another's uniqueness as well as intolerance of the abuse of another encourages the development of a world in which we can expect to be similarly blessed, should anyone ever direct such things toward ourselves.

Yet this is only the beginning of the formation of an extended family which includes all of the diverse inhabitants of the shared world in which we live.

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

Tolerance of Liberation

I learned many years ago that virtually every discussion or debate has a minimum of two perspectives which can be presented with supporting evidence and convincing arguments, leaving the listener to decide which of the two sounds more correct. On certain subjects, however, additional administrative forces intervened.

As one of many examples of this, parents are not always perfect with regard to the ways in which they socialize their children and there is usually no effective way (at least not within my childhood family environment) for a child to strongly disagree.

Right or wrong, the parent's decision stands and the child's freedom or liberation is limited. It must also be remembered, however, that parental wisdom stands between a child who may not be able to yet discern important distinctions and the exaggeration of freedom into self-centered behavioral patterns that are ultimately enslaving.

As time goes on, however, the clarity and effectiveness of this parental relationship is diminished and eventually every parent must

tolerate the liberation from their control, which accompanies a child becoming an adult.

Within virtually every individual or collective circumstance in which liberation successfully occurs, tolerance of change is its immediate companion. If we do not tolerate change, certain forms of liberation will not occur.

Running closely parallel to this is the fact that many forms of slavery exist mostly undetected even within the most apparently free environments. To test this, simply do the opposite of what everyone else is doing and see what reaction is received.

Tolerating liberation is in any case a daunting challenge. In allowing for such, we must accept responsibility for the consequences of our words and actions. We must be attentive to the needs of this new, unexplored liberation which offers us a world in which to live which is somehow significantly different from the one we have always known. Most especially, we must tolerate the loss of predictability and certainty because of the inherent loss of certain boundaries and definitions within the liberated ways of being with which we are deciding to experiment. In responding to this loss, we must accept the task of writing new definitions, selecting new boundaries, and embracing new ideas of ourselves and of those around us. We must learn about a new world which has possibilities our previous world did not.

We must also be tolerant of the blessings, the prosperity, the music, the creativity, and the joy which liberation brings. We must be good stewards of whatever increase in material and ideological resources liberation brings. We must remember that God has not gone away and is just as concerned about us within this development as within any previous one.

God loves us. If we love God and each other, tolerating liberation is simply a matter of discovering the best within ourselves, within each other, and within the vast and diverse universe God has given us.

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

Tolerance of Abuse

Why would anyone tolerate abuse?

Actually, there are many reasons.

Abuse is not always recognized as such, nor its costs, nor its (for lack of a better word) benefits.

Yes, we are all at different stages of personal development in different areas of ourselves and of our lives. Nevertheless, allowing abusive language and behavior either because the person "doesn't know any better" or because the person "doesn't mean anything by it" is nothing more than postponing a constructive response to a problem while it is still small. As with weeds in the garden, the entire root must be removed in order to prevent regrowth and this is much easier to do when the weed is small than when it has grown. The moment to calmly, proactively, and effectively insist that a specific form of abuse will not be tolerated is in response to the first incidence of it.

Reasons for such response are an awareness of what the abuse is costing us as well as of both what we think the abuse is providing and what it is actually providing. The costs may be physical, mental, emotional, social, or spiritual, perhaps coming to us as unhealthy diets, encouragement of negative self-esteem, repression of healthy and empowering emotional expression, isolation from friends and supportive groups, or forceful objection to opportunities of spiritual renewal and growth. Within all such cases, the recipient of the abuse is coerced into living out someone else's opinions, beliefs, and values and disregarding those given by God.

Curiously, by living out what God has placed within the self, one is drawn into more positive relationship with others. In contrast, in living out others' expectations and demands, one is rendered unable to give any community what it does not already have, while simultaneously strangling and suffocating one's own soul.

If tolerance of such abuse were providing the nurture and support we each need to realize and manifest our God-given potential, then the sacrifice might actually make sense. In reality, what we receive for tolerating abuse is as false as the artificial happiness induced by consumption of various drugs. (Please note: This statement does not apply to any case in which a specially trained physician is treating a person with a pre-existing and verifiable brain chemistry imbalance. Medicinal substances exist to treat disease and

injury and not simply to make us feel good--especially when the healthy choice is to constructively respond to any negative emotions we may be experiencing.) Once again, we are faced with the choice between a perceptual illusion and the real living of our own lives.

Another reason for tolerating abuse is that we are sometimes so afraid of the unknown that we would rather cling to familiar troublesome relationships than explore unfamiliar ways of being which while they may have great blessings to offer, may also (we think) have even greater troubles than those we are now experiencing. Then again, it must be remembered, they might not. There's at least as much chance of a reward as there is of greater troubles.

Finally, within the very limited discussion of this article, we may understand the tolerance of abuse as the cost of having some other blessing in our lives and be unable to conceive of a way in which the blessings can be experienced without the abuse. Certainly there are many examples of this within each of our day-to-day lives. For example, wealthy spouses who although physically or psychologically abusive, provide expensive cars, luxurious homes, and glittering social events. Inept educators who automatically issue passing grades. Immoral and tyrannical legislators whose misdeeds serve our personal economic interests rather than the common good.

Deliberately overlooking an area of trouble in order to embrace an area of blessing, pushes ourselves and others into living as fractured people, expressing ideas such as "As long as I don't bother anyone with my financial troubles, they will allow me to attend their social functions and thereby escape the painful loneliness and isolation I would otherwise feel." In effect, this makes a serious area of concern into the so-called "elephant in the livingroom" which cannot be openly discussed or jointly resolved. Within such a system, everyone either lives or dies alone rather than as a true member of any community. While this may facilitate superficially peaceful societal interaction, true community and anything approximating genuine love is completely absent.

If I am not loved as who and what I am, then I am not truly loved at all. It may be, in fact, that the signature characteristic of abuse is the absence of genuine love--and thereby, I would argue, the absence of God.

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

Tolerance of Change

Although a necessary companion of tolerance of liberation, tolerance of change has a number of considerations mostly unique to itself.

Tolerance of change includes an openness to the struggles of others and an honest appraisal of my own struggles as well. Specifically because all of life is interconnected, "it's not my problem" is never a genuinely legitimate excuse for ignoring anyone or anything around us. Specifically because "The one who wants the muscles must lift the weights," however, there is no recommendation within having a tolerance of change of taking on someone else's quest for self-development or empowerment.

Tolerance of change, therefore, is very much about holding our collectively created "status quo" accountable to be within the reach of all citizens affected thereby. More directly stated, within tolerance of change we become aware of how well our societal systems are--or are not--working and require them to appropriately adapt to the needs which any citizen is experiencing.

Tolerance of change is also about trusting God and expressing this by valuing each unique and perhaps even anomalous person God sends to humanity. Tolerance of change is about living in the midst of the ongoing and forever uncertain struggle to decide how much pain should be endured and when it would be truly merciful and appropriate to put an end to pain.

Living in this age of medical miracles, I am very worried about the ability to discern potential (so-called) "birth defects" and to consequently offer the parents the option of terminating the pregnancy. What if there is something very important about life which can only be learned through a differently formed child who is about to be born? Shall we forbid God to speak to us in this way? What if parents had the ability to choose the orientation or gender of their children in

*"It is important to remember;
nevertheless,
being wedded to the past
makes us widows in the future."*

--Sister Who

advance? Is human wisdom adequate for the long-term implications of such decision-making?

Considering that we can't even manage to create a world in which people cease from killing one another, I very much doubt that humanity has the wisdom to decide who should be allowed to live. When circumstances have dictated that such decisions nevertheless be made, the values and faith of the participants become starkly obvious. In far too many cases, however, it is not unconditional love which is demonstrated, but rather an intolerance of life-affirming change.

Tolerance of change is about being willing to understand as much as anyone can, the perspective and experiences of another. In opening myself to real and honest perception of another's struggles and to valuing that person enough to change my personal plans for success into plans that dictate success for everyone around me as well, I find a glimpse of the generosity of God who gave us the world and all of its limitless possibilities--in spite of knowing how many failed attempts we would make before we finally (someday) understand and practice the divine qualities which God intended all along.

Tolerance of change means that someday, somehow, we really will move beyond our current obsession with economic exchange which severely limits life for millions of people, into a world within which everything is valued simply because it is alive.

Tolerance of change means that someday, somehow, we really will choose love and true community over self-interest and competition, so that instead of winners and losers, every individual and individual's community are winners together.

Tolerance of change means I am happy to give up what is familiar within my ongoing pursuit of what is good and true and wise and loving.

Most especially, tolerance of change means that I am open to the anomalous, contrasting, and frequently unpredictable elements that interaction with other human beings will bring--all of which could impress upon me the need to change myself and my expressions in various ways.

Finally, in the words of a liturgical dance in which I participated a few months ago, tolerance to change means that I'm open to the mystical expression of God within my life, praying each and every day, "Use me for the purpose(s) that Thy wisdom chooses."

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

Tolerance of Maintenance

I apologize that I do not remember the author or context, but I recall reading many years ago the statement that "the problem with life is that it's so daily."

Among the disciplines which I have assigned to myself at present is the twice-weekly watering of all of the trees and bushes I have planted in my yard. From one time to the next, there is no obvious reward for my diligence.

Similarly, I have assigned to myself the task of exercising in specific ways six days out of every week to prepare for participation in the bodybuilding (physique) event at the First World OutGames in Montreal, Quebec, Canada, during the first week of August.

In both cases, from one time to the next, there is no obvious reward for my diligence. In comparing photographic records taken a year or two ago, however, the difference is dramatically obvious.

The tolerance of maintenance, therefore, requires an acceptance of delayed (rather than instant) gratification. I must be willing to forego seeing the direct or cumulative effects of my actions, if I am to receive future rewards.

More importantly, I must find within the apparently mundane motions of daily life a blessed potential and perhaps even a subtle connection with the divine energy of life itself. One could even say that the tolerance of maintenance includes the tolerance of positive relationship with a God who is frequently mysterious and unpredictable yet also unconditionally loving.

As stated within one of the photo-quote combinations available within my website, "Within the cathedral of the heart, we join hands with God and miracles begin to happen." It is in the maintenance of daily prayer, the maintenance of a daily relationship with the Divine, that subtle almost imperceptible changes begin to occur which result ultimately in all sorts of miraculous transformations.

How do I know this to be true? Because the tree in the yard is larger than it used to be. Because the size and definition of my muscles has increased. Because I find God's loving and wise presence within my life, even within the most frustrating or tragic moments, to be absolutely undeniable and consistently sustaining.

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

On a Personal Note

A third failed attempt (once again due to uncooperative equipment) to record a new introduction for my television show, "Sister Who Presents..." has persuaded me that now is not the time for this to happen. I do not think, however, that no further production should occur so I am planning to try again in late August or early September. I know of a professional videographer who I'm certain could handle this project for me, but his rate is \$1300 per day and I'm inclined to think two days should be budgeted for this project (which would obviously require more money than I have available at present). Oh well. I trust God will make it possible by some means or another when the time is right. As I said to a classmate while preparing a recent presentation, "We will do our best and trust God with the rest."

With regard to my pursuit of a masters degree in theological studies from Iliff School of Theology, it is hard to believe that I am very close to the end of seven of eight quarters and will complete all coursework before late November of this year. In retrospect, the time seems to have gone by so very quickly. What occupation, income, or circumstance will follow, is yet unknown and the subject of constant prayer.

In other matters, I have begun regularly praying for the healing of my house and car, in whatever ways God knows to be best, since both now provide as many afflictions as they do blessings, due to the long list of repairs for which funds are not presently available to me. Within all of these things, I strive to be the best steward of the materials and resources available to me that I can possibly be. Your prayers on my behalf for wisdom and provision are much appreciated.

Whether or not the work is well-funded, however, I am committed to continuing the ministerial work of Sister Who as long as any ability to do so remains. Those who have been helped in the past are all the reason I need.

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

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