

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

It seems that whenever something happens that is not what we would prefer, not what we expected, or not what we immediately find empowering, there is a wide-spread tendency to assume an adversarial relationship. If we can step back from the feeling of having just been slapped in the face, however, we may find that life was trying to wake us up to some important alternative.

This month's newsletter offers some alternative ways of perceiving limitations, which hopefully empower you toward transforming limitation into empowerment, obstacles into opportunities, and failures into the ability to fly.

Within the ongoing challenge of discernment and choice, my hope is that you will find yourself stronger, wiser, and more loving than any corner by which would otherwise feel limiting.

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

The Burden of Human Limitations

I am sometimes reminded by circumstances of how vulnerable and limited I am. Within such moments, my optimism, proactive attitude, and confidence is displaced by feelings of helplessness, of being overwhelmed, and of needing some other person or community of persons to be there for me but frequently finding that none is.

Why is this necessary? Is it to retain awareness of humility, respect, and the interconnectedness and interdependence of all life? Is it essential that I and others must occasionally suffer loss so that others can be reminded to "be there," to stand up, and to speak up for each other to prevent terrible things from happening?

For me one such example is the discovery that my roof is once again leaking--very badly. The wood floor in my living room was so saturated after a storm about four weeks ago, that I estimated the amount of rain which had come through the roof to be about five gallons (based upon the amount of rain I had collected in buckets during a particular storm of the previous summer). Short on funds and

desperate for a solution, I spread a large tarp across my roof and spent about an hour tying bricks to the grommets around the edges.

When another storm came up suddenly one afternoon about two or three weeks ago, however, there were not enough bricks and the tarp began convulsing violently in the wind, sliding off the roof and threatening the windows with the bricks. There was not even any time to put on shoes. I ran to the ladder and climbed onto the roof barefoot as an abundance of thunder, lightening, and rain was unleashed overhead. A dozen times up and down the ladder, I carried large cement blocks up onto the roof, trying to find some way to secure the tarp and keep the rain out, the aluminum rungs of the ladder biting into the arches of my feet with each ascent. None of it seemed particularly effective at the time, although in retrospect I note that the living room did stay dry. Please note: a roof that doesn't leak is nothing to take for granted.

Obviously I was not struck by lightning nor did I slip on the wet surface and fall off the roof to my death. Whether my actions were heroic or stupid depends upon one's perspective and opinion, but one who has never faced such a dilemma is hardly qualified to render such a judgment. I was within that moment, in any case, not willing to do nothing in response.

What remains, regardless of such discussion, is that no matter how expansive my spirit may be, my body is defined by limitations, needs, and certain abilities which are far from omnipotent. Somewhere within this combination, however, I continue to find a miraculous, mystical, and awe-inspiring hint of God's vision both of what I am and of what I could become. I suspect the same is true for everyone else as well, that God continues to wrap the miraculous within the mundane and the opportunity within the challenge--hoping we will discover that deeper treasure within even the most adversarial of experiences and value it even more because of the cost of its discovery.

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

The Blessing of Human Limitations

In considering our limitations, it is easy to imagine that we have been out of harm's way because we did not have the ability to be otherwise; that we did not, for example, have the ability to fall off of a mountain because we did not have the ability to climb it in the first place.

What is perhaps a bit more challenging, is to consider the ways that our limitations encourage us to share our individually unique qualities and resources with those around us--driving us, in a sense, toward relationship rather than isolation. Within a particular moment, one person has a need or an inability and another has a resource or an ability. At another time, the dynamic is the same but the roles are reversed. Insisting that relationship is unnecessary because one never expects to be the one in need, is naive and arrogant. Similarly, insisting that one's resources are to be always hoarded in order to address exclusively one's own future needs, assumes that those resources have the ability to meet the unknown future needs. All too often, future circumstances of life dismiss this notion as being utterly ridiculous and all that is available to us is each other. If we have not invested in others' welfare, how can we expect them to respond to our needs within such future times?

Viewed from a different angle, there are moments when we each need to feel needed; when being able to provide an ability or resource for someone else allows us to feel valuable, appreciated, and included. The need to give is just as real as the need to receive. What is also needed, obviously, is an adequate awareness of which need (or needs) we or the individuals within our immediate environment are experiencing.

Perhaps the primary blessing of human limitations is the invitation and opportunity to love one another--sometimes involving those who are easy to love and sometimes involving those who are more difficult to love, specifically so that we may learn a little more about the depth and breadth of what true love is.

Additionally, whether or not someone is easy to love depends upon a large number of other variables. For ourselves as well, there are moments when I've had a good night's rest, things are going well, and I have the strength to endure others' failings and weaknesses graciously. There are other times when I am clearly not at my best, but still need love and relationship with others to help me toward a positive outcome.

Within each experience of gain or of loss, there is a sense in which we collaboratively act as healers and guardian angels for each other. I recall a sermon given by a Roman Catholic priest when I was a small boy, in which he described Hell as having a large banquet table spread with an abundance of delicious food and the dinner guests seated on opposite sides of the table, each with a long wooden spoon strapped to his or her arm so that bending the elbow was impossible. In order to eat, the guests had to feed each other--but they refused to do so. Heaven, of course, was described the same way, but with the opposite response--laughter, smiles, and feasting, specifically because the guests were willing to express their love for each other by responding to each others' individual needs and inabilities.

What made the difference between Heaven and Hell within the priest's story, therefore, was the presence or absence of actions of love. This seems to be true of the world within which we live also, that love is what makes the vital difference, rendering limitations irrelevant, casting out every fear of any sort of starvation.

It is not only starvation of the body about which we need to be concerned, because the body is in many ways an expression of the general health and strength of the spirit, soul, and mind which live within the body. Starving one's dreams and aspirations is injurious to the soul in ways from which some never recover. Starving one's emotions and psychological needs can result in all sorts of fear-driven attitudes and responses throughout the rest of life. Starving one's relationships can result in painful isolation that is in actuality a form of internal suicide.

When we respond to our limitations by opening ourselves to giving and receiving in ways that are consistent with wisdom and love, we are choosing life and we are choosing to live.

Even if the response to our generosity is negative--a gift that is abused, an offer that is rejected, or a genuinely compassionate smile that is met by a frown--we have shown ourselves to be persons committed to life, committed to wisdom, and committed to love. We have, in some small way, succeeded in making the world a better place by the mere fact that human history now includes one more loving action than it previously did. If we have learned within that moment how to repeat such an action the next time with even greater wisdom, we have also grown.

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

Some Lessons of Human Limitations

Self-awareness and being able to identify one's needs have been major themes of popular psychology for some time now, but it seems we are still waiting for human society and civilization to catch up. Within discussions of "what the world is or is like," I often hear descriptions which I cannot find within any actual individual person. Recognizing that each individual is more than just the embodiment of a particular societal evil, is essential if we are to avoid being blind to all of the other facets of who and what the person is. Whatever that person believes or expresses, there is a reason for that belief. One of the greatest blessings of life, however, is that we do not need to be only the sum of our individual past experiences; we can choose to be something more, something different, or even something new.

Just as I must remember that the person with whom I am speaking (who may have just said something that offends me) is more than just the embodiment of the particular offense, I must also remember that none of us has the ability to show ourselves or to be seen by others, as having the vast multi-dimensional wholeness of who and what we are, that we do. The truth is that we are more mystery than known quantity to each other, which is a good reason to avoid being judgmental.

What I can perceive of you and what you can show me of yourself within this moment, is but the tiniest tip of the iceberg of who and what you are--and these abilities to communicate are constantly changing, in response to emotions, new information, words spoken, interpretations, new understandings, and unanticipated events that invade our immediate social and personal space.

Among such changes are the ways in which we ourselves change, becoming what we never thought we'd be, doing what we never imagined we'd do, and aspiring to more than anyone may

*"Love known only superficially
is love that is not really
known at all.
In its depth and in its breadth,
the divine power
of love is revealed."*

--Sister Who

have ever encouraged us to aspire--because in spite of all of our limitations, we are alive.

Among my rather long list of favorite movies is *Short Circuit*, a depiction of a robot ("Number 5") that is given life by a lightning strike from an approaching storm. When Number Five's creator is later doing an interrogation, asking all sorts of moral and philosophical questions, attempting to confirm sentience, the robot reacts with astonishment to a particular question, asking how it could be that someone with a PhD academic degree could not know that it is wrong to kill. The scientist responds that of course he knows it's wrong to kill, but "Who told you?" Number Five pauses for a moment, searching for the correct words, and finally says, "I told me."

With all of our limitations, there are still things that we individually know without ever being told. Our limitations, therefore, cannot and do not describe all of who and what we are. We know what we feel deep inside; we know what we think, whether or not we ever choose to say it; we know that there is more to life and the universe than all that we can know, and we know we can learn.

Specifically because our limitations serve (among other things) to make it clear that they cannot contain the entire truth of ourselves, like a neon motel sign, they point toward the greater invisible and infinite potential of every person--what some would describe as having been created in God's image. No matter what our limitations may tell us, they cannot tell us everything and they certainly can hardly even begin to tell us all about the divine spark within each and every one of us, that is shaped and molded as much by everything that happens to us as by every choice we make.

All that being said, God knows me better than I know myself and consequently knows both my limitations and my potential--and is remarkably able to integrate the two. Perhaps someday I will learn how to do that too. For now, it's a daily struggle from which I am in no hurry to withdraw.

By remaining within the struggle, I believe I remain alive, awake, and aware. I also find that the struggle is not one purely of pain and loss, but rather that there are also as many moments of joy and accomplishment. While in the moment, the struggles ending in birth or in death are difficult to distinguish from each other. All aspects of my struggle may not be immediately apparent, but I know the struggle to be the means by which I grow toward ever greater love, wisdom, and joy.

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

Transcending Human Limitations

It has been said that "what is impossible and probable is better than that which is possible but improbable." It seems there is something about the word "impossible" which is irresistible to certain human beings and prompts a mysterious determination to find a way to make the allegedly impossible happen.

Negative depictions of fear seem often preoccupied with defining certain things as being impossible, when in fact a contrasting perspective recognizes that fear is in fact the signpost by which the conquest of the allegedly impossible is accomplished. Within the general world of martial arts, this is sometimes expressed as "using the greater force of something against itself."

Another way of expressing this might be the challenge of investing the mundane with the transcendent. I may only be capable of doing simple things, for example, but if I do my simple things with love, with wisdom, and with some form of prayer, the simple things may be (and often are) transformed into something much greater than I could ever have imagined.

Saint Francis of Assisi, for example, made a point giving away everything in order to remove all distractions from loving God. Indirectly, he thereby accomplished more than the wealthiest person on earth ever could. Eight hundred years later, his story is still being retold and there are more hospitals, schools, churches, and organizations named after him than nearly any other person in human history.

Whatever opportunities or resources I am given within this life, for whatever number of years it will last, the opportunities and resources are not truly mine but rather have been entrusted to my management during this life so that my soul may grow by exploring how much good I can accomplish by the wise management of those opportunities and resources.

To do less than I could and less than wisdom recommends and to thereby accomplish less growth than was possible, is to fail and dishonor the giver of life. To live life to the fullest, however, in ways that are much more than self-serving, is the greatest expression of gratitude possible. Seen in retrospect after such a life has concluded, I suspect the more likely response to the discussions of this newsletter would be, "Limitations? What limitations? I don't recall any."

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

On a Personal Note

For the first time in many years, thanks to the elders group of the local GLBT Community Center, I was honored to be included within the Pride Parade here on June 28 and, in spite of the heat and accompanied by music from the parade entry immediately ahead, danced my way down the street from Cheesman Park all the way to Civic Park. Many wonderful conversations there included a very brief interview recorded for television which simply asked the question, "What does pride mean to you today?" I responded that it is a matter of living life from a place of integrity deep within one's self, so that all the positive contributions God has hidden within me can be outwardly expressed and become blessings to the world. Indeed, integrity continues to be a primary criteria which guides the choices and actions throughout my life and especially within the ministry that I do, striving to nurture the personal and spiritual growth of others.

The cable-access television show "Sister Who Presents" is currently being shown on channel 56 at 11p.m. each Saturday evening, but for anyone with a high-speed Internet connection to a computer, virtually all of the available episodes can be seen online through the medium of streaming video. On the home page of my web site, www.sisterwho.com, in the lower right corner, there is a link which will take you to the Denver Open Media web site page, on which you may select whichever episode you would like to see.

In other news and in spite of severely limited financial resources, continued renovation of my house into an interfaith spiritual retreat and conference center continues, significant repairs to vehicles have also been made, and doctoral writing is once again progressing well. Through ingenuity, hard work, adaptability, and the generosity of others, I am surviving and the work is continuing. Thank you to each and every one, who have been part of empowering this to happen.

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

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