

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

Poor Among the Rich; Rich Among the Poor

I have commented in that past that one of the common characteristics of sacred clowns as I understand them, is an awareness of the interconnectedness of all things. The reality of this interconnectedness can be noticed on a more superficial material level, but its substance is exponentially greater on a spiritual level, which is perhaps why I gravitate toward relating to people on spiritual levels more than material ones.

I find that many are not comfortable with relating to others on a spiritual level, however, because there seems to be a certain assumption that what is not material is private and hidden; that what is psychological, emotional, or spiritual is unknown to others until such time as you or I wish to reveal it. According to my observation and study of life, this is often not the case.

I have also found that there are people such as myself, who are endowed for whatever reason with very strong personalities. For such people, I think it is all the more important to conduct one's self with humility and respect, holding one's self very accountable for not verbally or psychologically driving right over other people, as much as possible. I do not think strong personalities should pretend to be less than they are, but they do need to be especially conscious of striving to be kind and gentle toward others.

I would also suggest that such people tend to be more conscious of the less-obvious aspects of themselves referred to above--their emotions, spirituality, and thoughts. They are also quite possibly more conscious of what is shared or withheld by others in these areas. In combination with the awareness of their own strong personalities, they may avoid confronting people about these supposedly hidden things unnecessarily and be therefore misinterpreted as being uninterested in others, when in fact it is closer to the truth to say that they do not wish to impose themselves. In general, I have found that very few people expect them to know or understand

as much as they in fact do.

So if I maintain a respectful distance, I may be accused of being disinterested. If I speak my mind too freely, I may be accused of being pushy and conducting a relentless interrogation or I may (as has often happened to me personally) ask a question which others consider to be somehow inappropriate. If someone throws up a mental or emotional wall at some point, I may back off respectfully, but later be accused of being too distant. I am reminded of the biblical passage in which Jesus described the relationship of himself and John the Baptist to the religious leaders and general populace of their day, as "children who call to each other in the marketplace, 'we played a tune and you didn't dance, we sang a dirge and you didn't wail.'"

This is not about hierarchy or superiority and it is certainly not about playing "king of the hill." It is about effective communication and relationship which is prevented by one's orientation to essences and spirit and the other's orientation to expressions and material forms; it is analogous to a doctor who treats symptoms without ever researching or accurately understanding the cause of the symptoms and the ways in which the causative condition can be healed.

I do not mean by this, however, that all symptoms should be ignored. More than a few times, I have experienced a bad cold and taken strong cold medicine to allow myself to continue to function and satisfy my daily responsibilities. I have not, however, stopped at the mere suppression of the symptoms. In addition to taking cold medicine to repress the meddling symptoms, I have also altered my diet and sleep patterns to empower my body to successfully defeat the cause of the symptoms.

Within humanity, we have always had those who were considered to be wealthy and those who were considered to be impoverished. In most times and places, the two have been

intermingled in ways that created (and continue to create) a myriad of symptoms indicative of an unhealthy society. Unfortunately, in most times and places, these symptoms have been addressed in ways that more or less completely failed to address the deeper causes of societal problems.

All that being true, it remains for people like Jesus and like ourselves to find ways to coexist with relative health and safety, within the larger dysfunctional world in which we find ourselves to be.

We may indeed find ourselves to be living economically as the poor among the rich. We may experience basic needs for food, clothing, and shelter while these are more or less taken for granted by those around us, who nevertheless feel no need to involve themselves with our struggles. Few things anger me more than people whom I have met, who aggressively defend their supposed right to be unconcerned about the welfare of others.

We may also find ourselves to be living spiritually, emotionally, intellectually, and socially as the rich among the poor. In spite of experiencing basic needs for food, clothing, and shelter, we may have an unshakable faith in a higher power or in the belief that somehow everything really will turn out right. We may find happiness in viewing beautiful sunsets or hiking through mountain meadows (neither of which costs any money at all). We may be learning from everyone and everything we encounter each day, more about who we are, how life works, and what truly makes life worth living. We may find ourselves surrounded by an extended family of sorts, who in spite of having no more monetary resources than ourselves, are able to find joy in each others' company and in helping each other through our individually unique challenges.

The obsession of the current generation with the more or less endless accumulation of wealth continues to amaze me, even more so because so many (at least in America) are so committed to regular church attendance. The only reason I have ever been able to find within the bible for the accumulation of wealth, is to empower one's self to give to others in need.

What a wonderful goal, it seems to me, to create a stable situation within this ever-fluctuating world--a home for which the purchase price has been completely paid, a source of financial income which is basically dependable, and a certain self-sufficiency which denies the changing fortunes of

time the great impact they would otherwise have. From such a more secure situation, one can then embark upon a lifelong career as a sort of fairy godmother (or fairy godfather), assisting those who are still in the struggling formative stages in accomplishing a stable situation and becoming fairy godmothers too. The end result of all this would be an ever stronger community within which crime, homelessness, starvation, and poverty fade to become mere history--all accomplished by the simple and universal practice of caring for all aspects of one another's welfare.

We would look down upon parents who did not provide adequate food for their children and possibly we would also intervene. The human race is just such a family, however, except that there are no parents who will compensate for whatever we fail to do for each other. If a father spends the grocery money on a stock market investment, we will judge him very negatively. When someone who has succeeded in meeting all of his or her basic needs still reaches for the highest dollar instead of considering for even one moment, donating excess income to programs which empower people who have been less fortunate or offering financial assistance to a friend who may have recently become unemployed, it is every bit as shameful as the neglectful father described above.

Generosity is still a virtue, but I find that it is more often scorned than practiced of late, because it doesn't always yield an obvious or monetary profit. Yet it is one of the primary evidences of unconditional love and divine heritage. Do we wish to show ourselves to be people of unconditional love and divine heritage?

Do we--all of us, working together--dare to care? If so, we could put an end to being the rich among the poor or the poor among the rich. For now, it is perhaps one of God's more challenging blessings that such contrasts are seen, a divine reminder of another part of life we may have been overlooking, to our own impoverishment.

So let's finally all be rich together, opening our eyes and ears to the whispers of God all around us; opening our hearts to divine longings our minds may take much longer to understand; and opening our lives to the vast, mysterious, and wondrous possibilities the universe in which we live has to offer.

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

Stillness

In one sense, all stillness is an illusion. Physical matter is composed of atoms which vibrate without ceasing. Within mental realms, it also seems that stillness is an illusion. The removal of conscious thought requires active internal patrolling to immediately squelch any thought that may threaten to arise. Within emotional realms, stillness is about as likely as an ocean without waves. Within social realms, stillness would require complete isolation of every person on the planet, since we are all unique and any event in which one unique person encounters another, invariably requires one or the other to adjust to the new elements presented by the other's mere existence. Stillness, taken to an extreme, is the complete absence of any sort of change or growth.

Recognizing that we are not, therefore, talking about the attainment of an extreme, the stillness I may choose to temporarily pursue within specific moments of my life, will be more characterized by focus than by lack of movement.

Pausing to listen is a form of stillness, but listening is itself an action, an availability to new information. During times of meditation, I turn my attention inwards and listen for new insights and for even a temporary release from turbulent life challenges which may have become overwhelming. Without moments of this form of stillness, I will be like a dancer who continues to spin faster and

faster, beyond the point of manageable dizziness, until I lose the ability to even stand upright and collapse upon the floor.

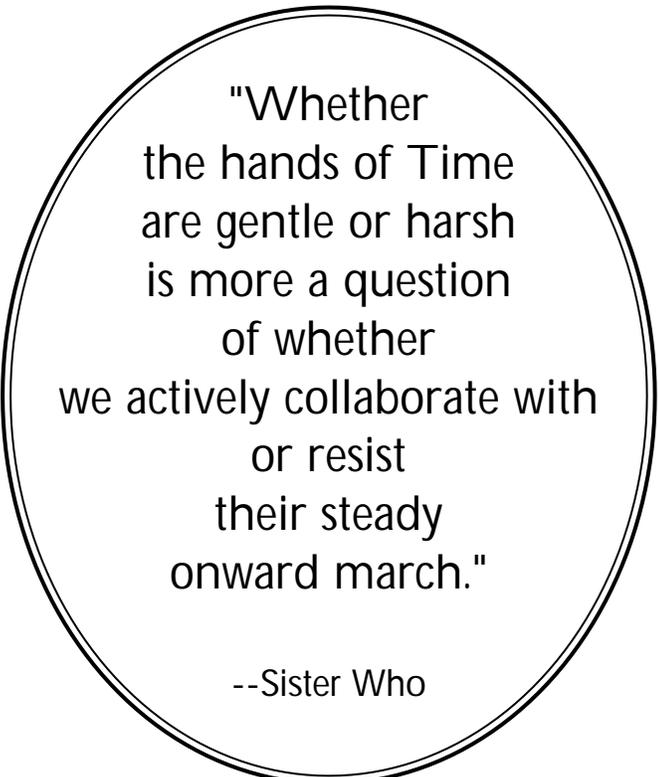
Pausing to look is also a form of stillness, but is again an action by which my perception strains to gather new information of some kind. During times of self-reflection, I turn my gaze upon my own face, actions, and life, seeking to know whether there is anything which has deviated from the holiness of my heart's true desires, from the desires of that divine inner spark which Jesus named, "the kingdom of God." Without moments of such stillness, I stand a very good chance of veering into arrogance, self-imposed blindness of some sort, the practice of all sorts of dysfunctional attitudes and behaviors, and ongoing patterns which will ultimately harm or even destroy me.

Yet the resistance of stillness is also sometimes a very holy and divinely motivated thing and we become frustrated if we cannot remove it from our lives.

Having listened and looked and come to a better understanding of a problem within our own life, within our community, or within our world, the heart is unable to rest until a response of some sort is given or demonstrated. When we have practiced stillness in some form for as much time as is helpful, our bodies begin to ache with longing for proactive movement.

Having determined that our world, our community, our friends, or ourselves are lacking in vision or the active practice of love, for example, we cannot return to stillness without acting in some way. Perhaps we will organize and facilitate a weekend workshop at a local church or community center, which attempts to raise awareness or educate others on effective ways to address the challenge. Perhaps we will write a letter to the editor of the local paper. Perhaps we will throw a party for all of our closest friends and family members, which includes games and activities which will deepen relationships and the feelings of love between them.

Having determined that a particular friend has struggled too long with various problems, perhaps we could organize a group of people who are willing to be a sort of personal army for that person, allowing the person to delegate any and all activities which will effectively resolve the specific problems. If they are facing a legal matter, perhaps one of the group has a relative who is an attorney who could be persuaded to help. If employment is a problem, perhaps we could facilitate aptitude tests, wider and more thorough searches for an available



"Whether
the hands of Time
are gentle or harsh
is more a question
of whether
we actively collaborate with
or resist
their steady
onward march."

--Sister Who

position, or job retraining programs. If affordable housing is a problem, the group could assist in finding something that is not only affordable but also a good fit for the personalities and idiosyncrasies involved. It would hardly be helpful to find an apartment which is affordable but which is managed by someone with whom it would be difficult to carry on the rental relationship. Having located a good match for the person, the group could then all show up on a Saturday morning to help move all of the person's possessions to the new location.

Time and time again, it has been proven that if we care about each other enough to put our heads together and persist as long as necessary, we will find a solution to every problem. The real question which must proceed all of this, however, is whether we love each other enough to do this.

If we love each other that much, we arrive ready to serve rather than with a perhaps hidden personal agenda to stamp out that person's problems because of how uncomfortable the existence of their challenges makes us feel. Instead of arriving with assumptions about how to solve their problems, we recognize that we are engaging in a collaborative action which will result in our own personal growth because it will demand that we think in new ways, of new ways to solve problems. It will demand that we value the person in need enough to accept direction from them, as well as offering whatever feedback may be helpful to them, in a supportive rather than competitive way.

And when the job is done, when the problem has successfully been resolved, we can again gather in a circle, hold hands, and find a more

empowering stillness and love within the smiles on each person's face, than we had the ability to experience before any of the voluntarily accepted struggle was embraced. In the truest sense of the word, we will have reaffirmed our individual and collective identity of being winners in the truest sense of that word. By taking a moment's pause for rest and self-reflection, we will solidify the personal growth which was accomplished almost without anyone noticing, while we were each too busy dealing with the problem in whatever ways we could. We will also have become more than we were, ready for the next challenge.

Is it really our job to solve each others' problems, to care about one another, especially when the person in question does not seem to be ready for his or her problem to be solved? Certainly we cannot be a "personal army" for someone who refuses to lead, but if we do not voluntarily enlist in such causes, we have reduced ourselves once again to the early chapters of the biblical book of Genesis. With Cain we are once again protesting to God, "am I my brother's keeper?" We are all each others' keepers, each others' guardian angels, and each others' family. Our world is one world and we are all in it together. The problems we face individually and collectively are all the evidence anyone needs, that we have been shirking our God-given duty to each other for far too long.

Let us begin again, today and everyday, with the positive and proactive practice of divine love, the most consistent expression of that place of stillness within each of us, which is in the truest sense the kingdom of God.

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

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--S.W.