

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

Appearances are inherently distracting--or at least they try to be. To be a person of faith is to be aware of how much what is seen is affected by what is invisible to physical eyes.

As individuals and as communities, we exist in relationship to all that is around us and must therefore tend to its health as well. The mountain's summit may be a desirable accomplishment, but the summit cannot occupy its lofty perch without every bit of stone, sand, and dirt in its foundation.

Becoming aware of our foundations is a beginning, but nurturing those foundations so that they can endure means we must not only be aware of them, but also interact with them in supportive ways. To be effectively supportive, however, requires also that we strive to truly understand. To do that, we must dare to love. To love, we must dare to truly live. May these words support and nurture your efforts in such directions.

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

Interpersonal Communication

From one perspective, life would be a lot easier if we all lived in complete isolation. Gone would be every need to understand another's perspective, history, preferences, language, or beliefs. Gone would be every need for civility and finding peaceful and mutually respectful ways to disagree. Gone would be every need to make room within my world for someone who will never be able to think, act, speak, dress, walk, or be just like me.

Unfortunately, gone also would be every nourishing thought, substance, and interaction by which I live, grow, and breathe, each and every day. Gone would be all discovery, imagination, newness, possibility, and innovation by which I am moment by moment becoming more than I have been. Gone would be any suggestion that persons, experiences, and landscapes beyond my current perception both exist and live, growing and developing in whatever ways are individually appropriate to them.

I am more and more convinced each day that the first requirement of interpersonal communication

is that kind of humility which allows us to genuinely look and listen without agendas or prejudices (literally, preformed judgments about who or what a person is, believes, or intends without any verifiable supporting evidence). Inversely, this would be the assertion that no one exists beyond whichever categorical classification has just been stated. If, for example, one says that all white people are prejudiced against all black people, what happens when one meets a white person without such prejudice? Logically, they would be treated badly and never really understand why, instead of building a collaborative friendship by which both persons involved could come to a better understanding and practice of both themselves and the world in which they live.

The second requirement of interpersonal communication is that it is a dialogue that moves beyond simply talking at each, to become an exchange of perspectives and ideas presented by talking with each other. We must accept that each person speaks the truth of his or her perspective, whether or not that truth is also true for each of us. If we wish to become allies and friends, however, we will also need to either integrate perspectives in mutually respectful and healthy ways or excuse ourselves from the particular conversation. To abandon civility because the ideas are personally unacceptable, is to lose all possibility for a collaborative relationship--and when all is said and done, humanity needs everyone's best contribution in order to not only survive but also thrive.

Similarly, if we are to have any chance of an interpersonal conversation with God, we must first believe that this is even possible--even if we ourselves have never directly experienced it. Allowing the possibility of such, we must then find the courage to present ourselves to God for conversation, to speak our minds honestly but respectfully, and to allow God to respond as God chooses. Does any other constructive relationship require anything less?

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

Cross-cultural Communication

In daring to engage in something as complex as communication, which is too often done ignorantly and awkwardly, we may not only find the possibilities of resolving every problem and challenge, but we may also find ourselves within a classroom shaped to some degree by the others' overall life experiences. Usually, this is not considered to be cross-cultural communication, but upon closer inspection, it most certainly is.

A first step toward understanding in this area is to identify some of what makes any particular culture what it is. Within my undergraduate education, for which I eventually received a BA in Humanities, the elective areas included religion, history, language, art, music, and theater. In beginning to look at various people groups through each of these modes of creative expression, I began to get a general sense of the common threads which pointed to the distinct mentality expressing itself through these modes.

In a similar way, there is a distinct mentality, a distinct system of values, beliefs, definitions, and thought processes which lies at the invisible core of every cohesive group of people. To go one step further, one could even say there is an individual culture within and around each person, which is defined by a personal system of values, beliefs, definitions, and thought processes. There is a certain way, therefore, that an individual or group would write a play or compose music or organize language or create a work of art, that reveals the fundamental values, beliefs, definitions, and thought processes of that individual or group. Perception of the "common threads" which guide these expressions could provide valuable insight by which understanding and true communication could be accomplished.

When we speak of cross-cultural communication, therefore, we are embracing the challenge of communication between systems with differing values, beliefs, definitions, and thought processes. When such communication is effective, positive cross-cultural relations result. When such communication is not effective, varying degrees of disconnection, avoidance, or conflict result.

On a more individual level, there is sense in which everyone is always doing what he or she thinks is best, within each moment. What makes each action into the one that seems best, are the values, beliefs, definitions, and thought processes

(especially memories) from which the action comes. Obviously when something (perhaps new information, insight, or empathy) changes those values, beliefs, definitions, and thought processes, the actions change as well.

A first step toward cross-cultural communication, therefore, is to become more aware of why I say and do what I say and do; to become more aware of the actions, thoughts, and interpretations which I do so automatically that I often fail to see them for what they truly are. A caution to bear in mind at this point, however, is that there are countless people in the world who would love to tell me what they perceive to be the truth of myself, but I must remember that they do not have access to all the information necessary to make such a judgment. They may be sincere, but they ultimately do not have the ability to know any more than what can be interpreted from the information available to them.

Considering the myriad of obstacles, how can clear and accurate communication ever happen? Yet sometimes it does. Considering the obstacles to the continuance of human life, how could anyone expect the world to go on even one more day? Yet somehow it does. Perhaps this is the first miracle for which to be thankful because it is this miracle which gives us yet another chance to learn, to grow, and to "get things right."

Why do we keep trying? I suppose there are many possible reasons, but among them is simply that we sometimes succeed and those moments of success are so precious, so powerful, and so beautiful that it is worth almost anything to experience them again and again, as often as we are able to do so. If for one moment we learn by experience what it is to be truly alive, no one need ever again persuade us that the experience of life is worth whatever effort is required.

When cross-cultural communication does occur, we can discover unimagined new dimensions of ourselves. We may find that the universe is an even larger and more wonderfully mysterious place. We might find that life is forever reinventing itself to meet new challenges and experience new forms. We could find that love and wisdom are more expansive and pervasive than we ever thought possible--in the past, present, and future as well as in timeless realms of the soul. In various ways, we could even find more of ourselves, of God, and of each other.

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

Cross-paradigm Communication

Does everyone know what a paradigm is, since we all live within one or another example of such? Metaphorically, a paradigm is like the physical world in which we all live. There are regions, climates, languages, and details of every sort, but underneath it all are certain basic perceptions and principles.

An example of the current earthly paradigm, is that humans breathe air and must have it available to them at all times. Fish, with certain exceptions, must be submerged in water if they are to survive. Such understandings are so automatic, that someone falling into water is regarded carefully, to act against the possibility of drowning. A pet fish somehow jumping out of an aquarium is met with similar concern, for a similar reason. Part of our current paradigm, therefore, is that life is precious and should be preserved.

A paradigm is the complex combination of millions of such details into a sort of wholeness, similar perhaps to being able to view the planet earth from outer space. Most of the details we experience every day are not visible from outer space--but that does not make them less real.

When we speak of communicating across paradigms, we place ourselves in a position of respecting that for someone or something, the particular combination of basic rules and definitions of what things are and how they operate, is significantly different from the particular combination immediately familiar to each of us.

This becomes especially relevant when we speak of spiritual communication or of prayer. From that broad, outer-space perspective of the world of prayer, I define prayer as communication between what is human and what is spiritual; between what is human and what is divine.

For some, prayer may be words formed within the mind but not actually spoken. For others, prayer may be a series of actions which sometimes include the use of physical objects to which particular symbolism has been assigned.

"The body
cannot complete
what the spirit
has not begun."

-- *Sister Who*

For still others, prayer may be a quiet mental and emotional focus upon an ideal, a feeling, a perception, a literary passage, a belief, or a person. At its most basic definition, prayer is an act of communication between a person and what is somehow beyond that person.

What makes this an example of cross-paradigm communication, is that we are conveying a request, a comment, an intention, a question, or a state such as surrender or openness, to something or someone greater than ourselves. Whether the object of our communication is a divine person or a universal principle, the limitations and dynamics of the usual paradigm of human experience generally no longer apply.

Using one of my own experiences as an example, it is clear to me that God is not limited by time or distance. I awoke in the middle of a hot summer night with a particular person's face in my mind. Not knowing why this occurred, I simply mumbled a simple request that divine intervention would assist or protect as needed--and I went back to sleep. When I saw the person the next day, I asked what had happened and she reported that she had suddenly awoken at exactly the same time at which my simple prayer had been uttered, to discover that the electric fan in her window had overheated and was beginning to smoke. Pure coincidence? You decide. My point is just that the usual paradigm of life had no explanation to offer for this occurrence.

Reports of paranormal activity are common within human history and experience. To bring such occurrences within the realm of communication, we must take a step of faith that even without full comprehension, some sort of positive interaction can still occur. To deny the reality of all such reports stretches credibility beyond its breaking point. Clearly the current human paradigm of reality and life is unable to encompass all that is apparently real--which confronts us with the necessity of faith.

Faith can make a positive difference in the outcome of the particular situation, but it is difficult to separate faith from love and wisdom. To proceed without faith, sadly, is to have nothing more available to us than the capacities of the physical human body. As wondrous as those capacities may be, they are "the tip of the iceberg" in comparison to the gifts that the soul and the spirit are within each moment we live. May we be faithful to use these gifts with wisdom and love.

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

Cross-dimensional Communication

Growing up Roman Catholic and developing friendships with Protestants, I was sometimes questioned regarding the practice of "praying to the saints."

After a lot of thought and reflection, I concluded that it was a bit of a conundrum, but also either harmless or potentially helpful.

Can communication with deceased saints (or any other person, for that matter) really happen? Perhaps; it's mostly unverifiable. In most cases, it seems to be a one-way communication line, the effects of which can only be inferred, interpreted, or speculated. For most people, consistency of results becomes the measure of the integrity of the practice. The more convinced they become of their own results, however, the less understanding they tend to be of anyone who engages in a similar practice but does not receive similar results.

Being judgmental toward others simply because someone does not receive the same results or because someone is at a less developed stage within his or her personal growth, however, is a step away from the unconditional love and wisdom that is inherent to good character, honor, personal virtue, and godliness.

Our communal and personal goal must ultimately be to bring out the best within each other and within ourselves. The processes which accomplish this are quite possibly as complex and as unique as each individual person and moment.

An additional challenge within this, is maintaining a positive relationship with the Divine, who exists in dimensions of love, wisdom, thought, and being which no human language can fully describe. It is specifically this relationship with the Divine (to which I often refer using the mystical word "God"), however, which gives us the reasons we need to nurture aspects of the Divine within each other. Like a horizon receding before our advancing footsteps, God beckons us ever onward toward valleys, mountains, and landscapes yet undiscovered--never revealing all of God's self, but allowing enough of a glimpse to keep us moving.

Similarly, we may catch a glimpse of the multi-dimensional soul of another, but we will never achieve a complete understanding, because every person we meet is also a vast landscape with multiple horizons, waiting to be discovered.

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

On a Personal Note

In some ways, this particular column is the most difficult to compose each month because of the ways that events, decisions, actions, and ideas blur together in retrospect. I often lament that there is only one of me to accomplish all that needs to be done, so I'm usually the first one to be surprised at how much has been accomplished.

Nevertheless, I am extremely thankful for those times when the essential assistance of others makes certain projects possible. Of immediate significance are the friends who are assisting me in the videotaping of new episodes of "Sister Who Presents" and the construction of new copies of my ritual clothing. Considering that this work has been going on for more than seventeen and a half years, occasional replacement of clothing and upgrade of equipment is clearly necessary and I am happy to nominate all who have helped in any way, as being guardian angels of greater merit. Thank you, thank you, thank you.

The most significant pending event is the debut of the portable chapel at the Labor Day metaphysical fair at the Denver Merchandise Mart August 29-31. Additionally, I will be presenting a free one-hour session there on Sunday at 11am entitled "Rediscovering Ritual and Making it Personal." For those of you with Internet access, further information regarding this event is available at <http://www.celebrationfair.com/>. Please come.

In other news, I have made some progress toward the third album of original songs, "Steps Along the Way," and my doctoral studies are also proceeding quite well. The current composition before me is entitled "The Development of Symbiotic Community." Renovation of my home has also been progressing in spite of limitations. After the incident of a recent storm pouring about fifteen gallons of water through my roof into my living room, I have finally made some headway in getting the leak sealed. Now if I can just get that insulation in place before winter gets here...

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

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