

# 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

In explaining the movement of muscles within the human body, flexing (contraction), it was explained to me many years ago, is the only action that any muscle has the ability to do. The muscle can then relax, but it requires a contrasting muscle pulling in the opposite direction in order to return to its original state. For movement of certain joints of the human body, a very large number of muscles must collaborate and act harmoniously.

Similarly, the many dimensions of who and what we are must act collaboratively in order for us to do any of the actions of life. Accomplishing work, expressing affection, and shifting perception from one target to another, all require collaborative and multi-dimensional relationship and interaction. May this month's newsletter offer some new possibilities to consider, of ways this may even now be happening within you.

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

## Flexing Physical Muscles

I suppose to some, it may seem odd that I am occasionally also a bodybuilder. Then again, others may question whether I have ever been a bodybuilder, because my genetic body type tends toward tall and thin, my height is over six feet (most bodybuilders are considerably shorter), and I have always been completely drug-free, accomplishing whatever muscles I have by means of exercise and nutritional choices. Unfortunately, these three qualities are rarely rewarded within the subculture of bodybuilding. Perhaps, as with virtually everything else about me, it is simply a matter of not being typical (I often joke that I've never been normal, but I think there's a lot of truth in that statement).

So I am apparently not a typical bodybuilder. Perhaps the first component of my unique approach is that I have given a lot of thought to the question of why I do bodybuilding at all, preferring deeper and more philosophical, psychological, and spiritual answers—and considering no particular answer to be the final answer, as my life continues to unfold.

Somewhere near the top of that list is the recognition that what is important is often not what I do, but who I become by doing it. A close corollary to that is the very helpful question, "What kind of person will I show myself to be?" Regardless of whether the response I receive is positive, negative, desirable, undesirable, manageable, or overwhelming, what kind of person will I show myself to be?

This is just as relevant to flexing physical muscles because, as noted by one of my high school art teachers, the outer form reveals the inner structure. The way in which I flex my physical muscles to music while onstage and the sequence and manner of the poses I do, reveal subtle clues about many things—how I feel about myself; whether I practiced the routine adequately; how well I'm following the music. The size and definition of muscles also reveal recent personal choices of diet and exercise as well as the genetic predisposition which may aid or hinder my development.

For those who do not see the whole, multi-dimensional, integrated human being, however, true understanding is virtually impossible to achieve. My most recent attempt to participate within an amateur international bodybuilding event was further influenced by my history. Relevant recent events of my life included a serious auto accident, a financially disastrous medical emergency involving one of my dogs, and various attempts to second-guess America's currently paranoid security practices.

What is perhaps most noteworthy, but stands quietly in the background, is that I didn't withdraw; I persisted in my intention to participate until I had in fact done all that I could.

Although judges, other participants, and various audience members were too short-sighted to notice and although it was painful to me to once again be regarded as invisible, what my flexed muscles demonstrated, was the reality of a man with aspirations, determination, and faith. These I hope to always retain.

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

## Flexing Ethical Muscles

Each of us is born and grows within a societal context, sometimes choosing conformity and sometimes choosing contrast in comparison to those around us. Most often we are encouraged to "fit in" because that will spare us from struggle, conflict, and pain. When circumstances arise within which disagreement, non-compliance, and civil disobedience are the more virtuous options, however, such encouragement is problematic.

I recently participated in a bodybuilding event in which the organizers made the choice to encourage divisiveness and adversarial actions between participants. Though less overtly violent, it was an emotional and relational echo of spectators within the Roman Colliseum being entertained by death struggles of various animals and persons. As a modern example of such, these actions were absolutely wrong.

I failed to remember within that moment, however, that I still had the freedom to act in a contrary manner. Had I that moment to re-live, there is no question in my mind that I would quietly, deliberately, and immediately turn and walk off of the stage.

All too often, when faced with ethical dilemmas, we forget the ability to say "no." There may, in fact, be no substance to any threats made. "If you don't... then I'll..." Really? There may be nothing they can do or the alternative action they threaten (which they might not ultimately do) may be preferable. "If you don't do as I say, then I won't be your friend." Well, as bothersome as that might be, I think I could survive the challenge of finding new friends more easily than I could survive doing something I might regret for the rest of my life.

In the words of J. Vernon McGee, "Those who do not stand for something, will fall for anything." This does not need to infer dogmatism or rigidity, however, since one may also take a stand for open dialogue and careful discernment, when addressing unfamiliar topics.

Flexing one's ethical muscles is exactly that: taking a stand for ethical words and behavior within public and/or personal relationships. One does not need to take a public stand specifically for civil rights for gays and lesbians, for example, if all that needs to be said is simply "This is unacceptable public behavior."

If I do not stand for something or if I fall for anything, my ethical muscles are apparently

weaker than they need to be and it is high time I exercise those muscles so that they are ready for future challenges. If I cannot step forward to hinder or discourage a bully, an oppressor, or a murderer, it is highly questionable whether I really believe in anything at all.

There is equally (usually) no specific need to become a bully, an oppressor, or a murderer in order to oppose one. Having ethical muscles to flex suggests that there is generally no specific need to be anyone's door mat, to be a sacrificial martyr for whichever cause, or even to become loud and violent while become an obstacle within the path of an oppressive circumstance. A single concrete block sitting quietly the middle of the road can do enormous damage to any vehicle which fails to alter its course.

I'm reminded of an amusing story (which may or may not have actually happened) of a group of naval ships heading westward across the northern Atlantic ocean, who received a radio transmission that they must immediately alter their course. The commanding officer responded arrogantly that he spoke on behalf of a naval force including battleships and other vessels of war and that the other party should immediately move out of the way. A second radio transmission simply said, "We're a lighthouse. You decide."

A challenge which remains for bodybuilding competitions and all other stage presentations of allegedly ideal human form, is careful consideration of what is being recommended. More and more often within bodybuilding competitions, I have noticed a prevailing attitude of ambivalence about the use of steroids and other artificial enhancers of muscle development. I have also noticed increasingly unnatural appearances and colors, sometimes even to grotesque extremes—resulting in competitions that less often display human beauty and refinement and more often display new versions of Frankenstein monsters, rightly to be shunned.

If the general public looks to the particular competition to show what humanity's ideal is, then the competition bears a certain responsibility for encouraging humanity toward unhealthy, self-destructive, and counter-productive forms. If such objectionable qualities become the societal standard, the participant may win a gold medal, but humanity will have lost a little more of its ability to survive in a form that is healthy and virtuous.

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

## Flexing Sensory Muscles

If we never take the time to look, our ability to see may atrophy. If we never take the time to listen, our ability to hear may diminish. If we never take the time to touch, our fingertips may go numb. If we never take the time to taste, our tongue may forget the purpose for which it was created. If we never take the time to sniff the air around us, reports of beautiful fragrances will seem like delusional nonsense.

If we are never willing to get our hands dirty, we may never be part of the blossoming of a flower or the growth of a melon on a vine. If we never venture out socially because we don't know what to say, we may never hear the wisdom of others which can be added to our own. If we are never willing to look our problems in the eye and call them what they are, we may never learn what they have to teach and be thereby empowered to transform them into something better.

If we cannot bear any report of another's misfortune, we cannot expect to be invited to the celebration when a great blessing is later received. We can also expect to fight our own battles completely alone. If we cannot respect and comfort another's tears, whether or not we understand those tears, we isolate ourselves from any laughter which may follow. If we have no ability to endure the "dark night of the soul" (our own or someone else's), the sunrise and the new day which follow will not be for us to share.

If we do not know the smell of the rose along the path, the smell of a spring thaw within a rural countryside, or the aromas of a Thanksgiving feast, an entire dimension of experience will be unavailable to us and our lives will lack a certain depth they could otherwise have.

*"Frustration is an exercise regimen for the soul, inviting maintenance and development; the absence of which allows mental, emotional, and spiritual muscles to quickly atrophy."*

--Sister Who

If we cannot look upon the ruins which linger after the disaster of a house-fire and sift the ashes for any treasures that survived, the rebuilt home will have less value and the sacredness of life within its rooms will be unable to constructively shape and mold us, in the ways it might otherwise have shaped and molded us.

Sometimes, when I don't know what else to do, I close my eyes and listen. At first, I listen for whatever sounds around me might have thus far gone unnoticed: a clock ticking, a car on the street going by, one of my dogs chewing on a bone. Then I turn my attention to feelings and thoughts within my heart and mind for any reminders or insights they might have to share, which can only be heard within quietness and stillness and never within the more frenetic activity of life.

Then I begin to go through my senses, one by one, consciously noting how the chair on which I'm sitting feels against my skin, whether the air in the room smells fresh or stale or fragrant, whether the taste on my tongue is neutral or whether it yet holds an echo of the flavors I enjoyed at the conclusion of my last meal.

When I open my eyes again, I generally feel more centered, grounded, calm, and ready to respond intelligently and calmly to whatever challenges I am currently facing. Unfortunately, when I am feeling stressed and rushing to satisfy demands and deadlines, I do not always remember to pause for a moment and just breathe, perhaps using some of the possibilities of restoring focus which I've just described.

Perhaps the most important thing to remember about flexing sensory muscles is that to do so is always a beginning that leads to something else (usually something beyond one's self) and is not a conclusion or destination beyond which there is nothing more to discover. In restoring my relationships to my surroundings, however, I often find that I often simultaneously restore my relationships with myself and with all that my spirituality includes.

External circumstances can be obstinately adversarial, but there is no doubt that such adversity is less effective when my sensory, physical, ethical, and spiritual muscles are ready and available to respond the particular challenge. Communal resolution of problems is certainly preferable, but if there is no one there but God, the muscles we've been given may still be enough.

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

## Flexing Spiritual Muscles

By their very nature, problems are very distracting. Within such moments, however, I continue to work on making it a personal instinctual reaction to pray; to consciously and deliberately invite positive collaboration with whatever unseen forces of love and wisdom may be available. This is the easier initial action available to each and every one of us within each and every moment of our lives.

A perhaps more difficult but nevertheless available response, is to craft a ritual that materially demonstrates or creates the positive change or effective coping I am seeking. I generally leave the selection or creation of such rituals to my intuition, since it seems to have a much better understanding of my subconscious mind and spirit than my conscious mind does. On countless occasions in the past, I have intuitively selected a ritual and later marvelled at how multi-dimensional and effective the particular ritual turned out to be.

Flexing spiritual muscles is more than just interaction with the Divine; it is also interaction with my symbols and my understandings of specific symbols. Failing to even consider the meanings of all that surrounds me each day, generally leaves me feeling empty and weak, much like failing to engage in regular exercise in order to keep my body strong. If I can also find empowering meanings and interactions, I immediately begin to once again feel strong and confident.

Am I unique in finding inspiration and strength within conscious awareness of constructive meaning? Perhaps, but I suspect there are many more people who would find themselves stronger in a variety of ways, were they to nurture similar awareness within themselves—were they to flex their spiritual muscles as often as possible, like one of my dogs stretching its muscles after waking from a revitalizing nap.

Specifically because I do believe in a personal Divine (who is also beyond the limits of human comprehension), flexing one's spiritual muscles is also a way of nurturing a relationship with one who is always watching, listening, and feeling each moment of my life experience. By the blessing of love, the flexing of muscles renews the persistent pulsing of life—for me, for God, for all.

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

## On a Personal Note

Fifteen hundred hours of preparation, fairly strict adherence to a healthy diet, and an enormous financial investment accomplished by great sacrifices made over the course of the preceding eighteen months were unfortunately not enough to produce any noteworthy success within the recent bodybuilding competition of the Gay Games in Cologne, Germany. I did my very best to demonstrate what kind of person I am and the organizers and administrators of the competition did likewise, but there was no particular agreement between the two, upon which to create or build better future opportunities or collaboration.

For me, considering the enormous personal investment, the loss was quite painful. Perhaps it is amazing that I completed participation at all, considering that recent weeks have included an auto accident, a veterinary emergency, and other high-stress challenges. The three principles described as foundational to the Gay Games— inclusion, participation, and personal best—were evident within my experiences there only in the sense that I made certain that I was included, I actively participated, and I created a new standard of personal best for myself. Therefore, it was not I who failed, but the Games that failed me.

Regardless, I am back in Colorado and doing my best to get back on track with more familiar challenges—doctoral writing, home renovation, spiritual center development, and video production, for example. A less-familiar challenge looming over me is that of convincing a municipal court judge next week, that the cause of the recent accident was mechanical failure.

Financial resources remain inadequate, but I am surviving and responding to opportunities as well as I can. Although the recent journey was difficult and I am very weary, no additional misfortunes were encountered. Your positive thoughts and prayers for healing and empowerment are very much appreciated.

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

### Subscription Information:

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