

Sister Who's Perspective

Sister Who's Perspective, Issue #63, September 2004, copyright

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

Two Diverging Roads

Robert Frost's poem, "Two Roads," has long been an inspiration to me, but it has not escaped my notice that the poem does not say which was the inherently better choice, only that all of life since that point has reflected that choice.

We are rapidly approaching a time of national decision-making in America, and I do not believe the Divine will protect us (collectively) from the consequences of whatever choice is made. My earnest prayer is that individuals will nevertheless be protected, if it later turns out that a wrong choice has been made, but considering the magnitude of the choice before us, virtually nothing about our individual and collective future is certain--except of course, that we have the opportunity to collectively choose a road to follow.

I have close friends who associate with the so-called Democratic political party as well as close friends who associate with the so-called Republican political party, though neither party offers a particularly good example of what a democracy or a republic is, according to the definitions offered within any dictionary of the English language.

I hope that I will always have close friends within each group, however, because of the ways that each empowers me to have a more complete understanding, by doing a better job of perceiving each others' short-comings than either does of perceiving its own. In the dialogue and exchange between the two adversaries, I find the best available understanding of the daunting challenge of governing a nation of unprecedented diversity and an incomprehensibly vast population.

I am very concerned, in any case, at the discouragement and perhaps even growing apathy I have seen and heard within both groups, expressed in many ways but among them, that all political candidates are more or less equal and that it does not matter who wins the election.

To some extent, I am inclined to agree that what makes the difference, are the ways in which the people of the nation require their leaders to do their jobs well.

Therefore, if the people do not insist on some sort of change, current circumstances and policies are the patterns by which the future will also unfold. If current circumstances and policies do not adequately provide legitimate ways for people (individually and collectively) to meet their needs and we, the people, fail to not only insist upon but to require constructive change, then we sow the seeds of greater troubles, usually beyond anything we might have imagined even within our darkest moments.

From decades of observing human behavior and reading countless books concerning human psychology, it is my conclusion we can either respond to people's needs with love or we can expect an expression of people's needs more characterized by anger and violence.

These, then, are the two roads I see before us: healing love or violent anger (neither of which is necessarily synonymous with any particular political party).

As a young man in high school, I first heard the words, "Nature abhors a vacuum" and understood that this had nothing to do with an aversion to cleaning the living room rug. Rather it was a very serious warning that societal, psychological, emotional, and spiritual emptiness will not tolerate remaining empty. Either we can fill such spaces with love or they will be filled with less desirable things.

I assisted with a fundraiser just the other day which raised hundreds of thousands of dollars for AIDS-related organizations. The assumption seemed to be that the majority of those present identified with a particular political party. Within the thousands of happy upbeat people, however, was one young man carrying a sharply contrasting political sign.

Virtually no one would approach, speak to, or even remain within a distance of ten feet from the young man, so he was like a small bubble of space moving through the otherwise

very dense crowd. I, however, accepted the opportunity, feeling a little sorry for him, even though his isolation within the crowd was a consequence of his own choice.

His understanding of his political sign was severely lacking and every response was an obvious attempt to escalate an argument between us. Perhaps because I refused to argue, he moved on after only a very few minutes.

Reflecting upon our brief dialogue, wondering what exactly had just happened, my conclusion was finally that the young man was not concerned with the text of his political sign but with identifying himself as a political dissident.

Peeling back yet another layer by asking, "yes, but why?", I suspected that he was but one more of the thousands of young people growing up within our current generation, who have (for whatever reason) not received the love and nurturing parental and societal guidance they need.

What makes this generalized need so frightening to me, is that it is perhaps the primary characteristic for which white-supremacist, terrorist, and hate-oriented groups look, when seeking people to add to their membership. By providing a profoundly unhealthy solution to a legitimate need, an intense loyalty to such groups' goals and a response pattern of quick rejection of contrasting ideas, is quickly forged.

That this generalized need is already in existence is a profound challenge to all of us, because there is no quick and easy solution to undoing the damage of years of neglect.

Beginning to listen and to love at the first opportunity, however, may allow us to avert widespread societal disaster.

Being the embodiment of our highest ideals and most divine aspirations, may allow societal healing instead of catastrophic societal breakdown to characterize the road ahead.

Remembering to listen and to love instead of being irritated, annoyed, or offended, may empower us to build bridges of understanding and true community by which our road will lead to a golden sunrise (a beautiful day ahead) instead of one washed with red (a coming storm).

If we are to be our best, we must maintain open communication with those who seem to be adversaries, so that weaknesses can be eradicated before they can be used against us.

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

Balancing Faith with Hope

I recall within my early experiences with pentecostal expressions of Christianity, encountering an approach to prayer that a skeptical college professor whom I met years later referred to as a "name it claim it" style of theology.

The approach was almost exclusively based upon a very literal and superficial understanding of the biblical verses contained within the gospel of Matthew, "Jesus replied, 'I tell you the truth, if you have faith and do not doubt, not only can you do what was done to the fig tree, but also you can say to this mountain, 'Go, throw yourself into the sea,' and it will be done. If you believe, you will receive whatever you ask for in prayer.'"

The focus of this passage seems to be on the power of faith to change circumstances, rather than on being compassionate or understanding of a tree which for whatever reason had been unable to appropriately bear fruit.

The negative fallout of this passage within the experiences of myself and others at that pentecostal church, was to blame ourselves for not having enough faith, if what we asked was not immediately (or even eventually) granted.

Regarding the mysterious and generally unpredictable nature of answered prayers, I am most fond of a quote attributed to Kathryn Kuhlman, a noted faith-healer (of the early twentieth century, I think). "I don't know why God doesn't heal everyone, but I'm very afraid of those who say they do."

This is not, however, a purely Christian dilemma. Every system of spirituality I have encountered has duplicated the same challenge using individually unique terminology. In every case, I also seem to "rub people the wrong way" when I suggest that the interaction of the material and the spiritual is much more complex and mysterious than any simple formula could encompass.

Please accept my apologies and know that I welcome an ongoing dialogue, if I am about to step on anyone's toes, by what I say next.

For perhaps the last ten years or so I have heard people discussing Feng Shui as if it were the new science of manipulating energy by the placement of objects within one's home, the end result being success and empowerment in every conceivable area of life.

As measured by my experience, this Asian

system of interior decorating promises more than it delivers. Not everyone has the same experience as I do, however, much like the way that some people's prayers seem to be answered more than others'.

I am adamantly opposed to classifying people as having great faith or not enough. If faith were essential to miraculous events happening, to use a biblical illustration, Moses would never have succeeded in leading the Israelites out of Egypt, as depicted within the biblical book of Exodus.

It is my contention that miracles happen not because people have enough faith, but rather because the Divine is very real and chooses from time to time for whatever reason, to intervene.

In terms of Feng Shui, the deeper current to which I want to relate, is to learn to live in constructive harmony with the flow of life in all of its forms, all around me, reminding myself as frequently as I can to be aware of "what's really important."

Placing this or that object in whichever specific part of one's home, may or may not bring a specific empowering manifestation to one's life, just as a prayer for prosperity may or may not be positively answered.

Nevertheless, blessings happen, often in the most unexpected times, places, and ways.

I recently replaced the bathtub in my home with a larger one. Being a tall person, it seems I am all too often bumping my elbows on every nearby wall, when in small enclosed spaces. I'd never done this before but step by step, I figured it out and am glad now that I did not give up just when I felt overwhelmed by the complexities and details of the challenge.

The reason I mention this now, is that as I was constructing the new arrangement of plumbing, it seemed I did not have the correct fittings to make all of the necessary connections. "Ugh. Yet another trip to the hardware store," I thought to myself. I discovered after assembling a couple of main parts, however, that the pipes did not line up the way I'd anticipated.

When I finally finished adjusting the path of the pipe using the fittings I had on hand, I found that the "incorrect" fittings were what made completing the job possible. When all was said and done, in spite of my prior intention to do the job differently, I found I had exactly what I needed--no more and no less. Just don't try to tell me that when I'm busy being frustrated by something that

isn't going according to plan, because I am not always particularly receptive to such mid-course alterations.

The point of the above illustration is that sometimes it really is better not to panic or presume that a situation is bad, just because we are unable to understand how all of the current pieces will fit within the larger finished picture.

At my former residence, which I basically rebuilt after stripping the structure all the way to the basic frame, I would not have finished installing the necessary insulation before winter, had I not been unemployed for several months during the preceding summer.

This is why when my day-job ended just over three months ago, I immediately began looking around to see whether there might be some task which needed to be completed during this time of being away from offices and more usual day-job situations.

To return to the examples of unanswered prayers and ineffective Feng Shui arrangements, what offends me deeply in both of these and all other such cases, is the extension of false hope to those in need of real solutions.

It is absolutely cruel to tell someone that deliverance from his or her struggles is close at hand, only to leave that person like the two principle characters in the play "Waiting for Godot," anticipating something that has no guaranty of ever happening.

*"If I do not maintain
a good, healthy,
ongoing dialogue
with my adversaries,
I will not
discover my weaknesses
before they can be used
against me."*

---Sister Who

It is an abuse of that person's trust and even more so an abuse of their faith, that everything really will work out somehow.

Sometimes the Divine heals, things go magically right, and love prevails. Sometimes it does not. While it makes good sense to do everything we can to nudge life in a positive direction, empty promises are like hot air balloons which deflate unexpectedly and plunge people to some sort of disaster.

"If you just believe enough..." What a very tempting phrase to someone in need, yet I can recall countless occasions when I believed so strongly that it took me a long time to get past the shock of an unexpected loss.

All that being said, however, I still brush my teeth every day in hopes of avoiding the need for more expensive dental work. I also arrange my house, as much I'm able, in ways that are consistent with basic principles of Feng Shui. After more than three months, I am still without a reliable and adequate source of income, but I still do what I can to encourage potential employers to find me, when they finally have an opening within their company for which I would be a good choice as an employee.

One must, in a sense, put out the welcome mat for good things to happen. To do otherwise, is to discourage blessings from ever ringing my doorbell, so to speak. If I wish that someone would behave in a better manner than he or she has behaved toward me in the past, I must at least provide an opportunity for that person to do so.

The invitations and opportunities for blessings to enter my life do not, however, need to include complete self-sacrifice. This is why I am not going to spend all of next month's mortgage money on placing Feng Shui "cures" all around my house. This is also why I am not going to pray to win the lottery and then go sign contracts for real estate purchases which I cannot honor unless I do.

When all of the superficial appearances are set aside, what is more important than any success or failure I experience within this lifetime, is that I do in fact retain (by whatever means) some sort of faith and some sort of hope which have integrity, substance, and positive potential.

I know that much greater ministers and writers than I have endured much more tragic circumstances than I have thus far experienced. Even Jesus, whom one would think had more faith than anyone else who ever lived, experienced a life

which we could describe as impoverished and repressed by the society in which he lived. Would his life have been so much better if he'd just been careful to place a flute in the back left corner of his home or perhaps a fountain in the front yard? Perhaps his life was simply about something much more important than the pursuit of any kind of material wealth.

Perhaps our lives could also be about something more important than material wealth, a successful career, or societal prestige.

As much as I encourage the creation of a personally empowering home environment, the home must serve the life and not vice versa. Though I've said it before, it bears repeating, sometimes even each and every day: "We must live for something greater than ourselves if we are to avoid becoming small and petty."

Each morning when I get up and gaze out at the rising sun and each evening when I sit on the swing on the back porch and gaze out at the rising moon, I feel a sense of profound peace and I am glad that all the struggles of the day have failed to eradicate such peacefulness from the world in which I live. Yet I know that if I allow myself to sit within that moment and to also stifle the compassion which moves me to interact and communicate with each person I meet each day, the result would be an ingrown situation which would leave me blind to the unfolding of life.

The peacefulness of such moments is, in a sense, a divine artistic creation and like every other artistic creation is not complete until it is shared. Thus it is that I compose newsletters, songs, paintings, and stories, striving to convey the tiny finger of the Divine that I am sometimes allowed to touch.

How easily we forget and imperative that we remember, that life at its best is ultimately about relating positively to every person, thing, and event; not simply as an external action but rather as the expression of who we truly are: sons and daughters of the Divine.

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

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