

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

I do not remember a time when I believed that nothing existed beyond what I taste, touch, see, hear, and smell. Understanding all that transcends those five modes of perception, however, has proven to be a life-long quest. Yet within each moment is God and myself. Beyond that, specific qualities of communities, relationships, and experiences have fluctuated wildly. While I have no regrets, I do not say this easily and it does not mean that I would have the strength to do it all again, were the choice ever presented to me. More importantly, all of the times of my life seem mysteriously interwoven.

As a member of one of my television production crews once said, "It may be that our bodies are the only part of ourselves which exists within (and is therefore limited by) time." As I continue to find that both my soul and my fate remain within the hands of God, these words seem more true with each passing year.

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

Being Past

I have occasionally heard the expression, "living in the past," which although actually impossible to do is an attempt to describe a specific combination of perceptions and expectations by which someone may choose to be guided. Being the past in some way or another, however, goes one step further, actively encouraging diminished perception, awareness, and involvement with all that is present and future.

In its better forms, this offers the surrounding world a sort of nostalgia and appreciation for something otherwise lost to the continuous winds of time. By being reminded in this way of certain aspects of what has previously occurred, we may receive new inspiration and insight by which to relate more positively to whatever is occurring now. As the chorus of a song I wrote many years ago expresses it, "Tomorrow is yesterday--still here in our hands." What we shape and form into our

experiences of today and tomorrow becomes what we will eventually remember as yesterday.

In its more negative forms, however, being the embodiment of the past gives life and continuance to wounds and problems which might have otherwise died of old age. If we define ourselves according to what we have experienced or remember, we can never be more than we have been and we also escalate our wounds to a place of prominence within our personal identities that devalues every moment that has ever gone wonderfully and perhaps unexpectedly right within our lives.

Again and again, I am persuaded that the most helpful and empowering basis for one's identity is one's own best qualities. If I am not the embodiment of some specific aspect of the history of myself or of some group label I choose to apply to myself, I can be (or become) more than simply another victim of historical tragedy. For example, if instead of defining myself primarily as a member of a marginalized and oppressed group, I introduce myself as someone with unusual and abundant creativity who experiences genuine love with other men, new resources become available to the unfolding of my life and to present and future experiences of everyone and everything around me. I do not have to deny that tragedy has occurred; I simply need to remember that it is not all that has occurred.

Being my past, however, can also additionally be interpreted as bringing deep insights from my past into my present and future, which were discovered only during deep reflection long after the incidents themselves occurred. In this third and last sense, being my past is a way of being a combination of all of the best qualities I have ever consciously or unconsciously exhibited. It is a recognition that I am more than just that part of myself which is currently consciously known. I am a vast territory extending in all directions through time, waiting to be explored and discovered.

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

Being Future

The remark "I'm too set in my ways" is often used as a way of dismissing a possible conversation, suggesting that no further discussion or investigation has any way of being helpful. From a different perspective, however, it is also a cry for help; a plea for something new.

I believe that by God's design and perhaps even as a sort of evidence that the expansive spirit of God lives within each of us to varying degrees, there is a restlessness within each person that wants to create in the same way that God creates: giving freely, expressing wholeness and interconnection, and maintaining at least the possibility of positive relationship.

In being the future that is forming at the leading edge of the present moment's sweep through time, it is extremely helpful to remember the inherent interconnectedness of all life and being. The struggles and misfortunes of another may be my own someday and the greatest insurance of my survival during that future possibility is the formation of mutually supportive relationships within the present. If I sow love, concern, and support toward others within the current time, I can reasonably expect to reap the same within the future. To the extent that I tolerate the existence of another's pain without offering any response whatsoever, I tolerate the very real possibility of painful struggle which is ignored by others within my own experience of the future.

Why doesn't God do something about all of this struggle going on? Because to do so tears the opportunities from our hands of us being the ones to do it. I can never express love, compassion, respect, or wisdom if I am not allowed to encounter apathy, disregard, rudeness or stupidity within the world around me.

Unfortunately, however, I am a limited human being and thus likely to miss or botch many of my encounters with such opportunities. If the devil is truly a distinct spiritual entity sabotaging the life of humanity on earth in every way available, I suspect that one of the methods which is ultimately very effective but also very prone to going unnoticed, is the element of distraction, which can assume more forms than a thousand newsletters just like this one could ever list.

It is very easy to become so distracted by present demands for money, power, and even basic survival, that I neglect my ability to be, to become, or to form whatever the future for myself

and the world in which I live ultimately is to be. Phrased another way, it is quite easy to become so preoccupied with making a living, that we never get around to making a life. If we also collectively create a world in which costs have risen too high while wages have remained too low, the devil becomes quite unnecessary to the defeat of humanity; we've taken quite good care of accomplishing that without any such help. In such cases, not only have we made it virtually impossible to find the time to nurture the best parts of ourselves, we have thereby also made this form of self-destruction a general requirement for virtually the entire population.

In being the future, however, we can choose another trajectory. When people say, "it's just how things are," we can immediately answer, "But it's not how they always have to be."

If the immediate response is, "But I LIKE how things are!", we must remember that not even in death does change cease to exist. We can celebrate a moment, but we cannot eternally and with any integrity be a specific moment or experience. Moments, by their very definition, pass, leaving us only to regret or fondly recall the memories which thereby accumulate.

When we invest life and ourselves wisely into moments as they pass, however, these moments begin to transcend the limits and boundaries of time. As has been said in various ways by many poets and writers before me, a single act of love or kindness may reverberate into eternity, like an echo which never fades but rather carries its message far beyond its point of origin.

Each one of us can be the future of humanity in general and of those around in particular, by choosing what memories, insights, contributions, and education we will impart to them. All too often, vast quantities of wisdom and understanding are allowed to die with individuals for no better reason than that the wisdom and understanding were neither expressed nor shared in any way.

God wishes to form the future through us. Daily prayer in any of the myriad of forms in which communication with the Divine occurs is but one of the ways in which we become effective collaborators and empowered participants in the ongoing unfolding of life. We can indeed be the future and must therefore decide what sort of future we will be--one moment at a time.

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

Being Absent

For myself and I imagine for everyone at times, there are days when as it is commonly described, I am simply "going through the motions" of whatever that particular day's activities include. Whether due to weariness, sadness, frustration, or some other emotion or condition, I am neither fully present nor even the least bit interested in what I am nevertheless doing.

That such moments occur, I can accept. That I occasionally fail to see anything disturbing about the occurrence of such moments, sufficient to provoke a response, is positively alarming.

When a fire alarm begins to sound, it is imperative to get out of the particular building and to address the flames and danger in every way available. When awareness and involvement have faded from my life experience, similar proactive response is vital to all life which follows.

"Going through the motions" while being mentally, emotionally, or even socially absent, enables whatever problem is being experienced, to continue, perhaps indefinitely. Even if the response is to take a break, engage in spiritual meditation or prayer, or create new focus in any of a hundred other ways, the shift toward healing of whatever is struggling is in its own perhaps small way a powerful transformation and alteration of life's course through time. Sometimes a change--even a very subtle one--is all that's needed to put life back on a more positive track.

Considered from another perspective, being absent is sometimes a coping mechanism; a way of being physically present while engaging in mental and emotional analysis or preparation for a positive change which will hopefully soon follow. If an adversary is seeking to overwhelm me, it may be that the most effective thing I can do is to be unavailable psychologically and emotionally to the involvement the adversary is demanding.

In light of this contrasting perspective, like

***"Trusting God
is not an excuse
for negligence."***

-- Sister Who

most things, being absent is not inherently good or bad. The more important question, rather, is from what am I being absent and to what am I being present. If I cannot answer this two-part question at all, I suspect I am being absent from a full awareness of my own life.

If the answer to this two-part question is that I'm being absent from my soul and present to the busy-ness and distraction of life, the situation is serious indeed. If, on the other hand, I am being present to my soul and to the spirit of God within me, I may need to wisely allow for a certain absence from or within the mundane daily activities of life.

Taken one step further, however, I may eventually learn to be both fully present with God and my soul even within the mundane activities of life, such that the moment becomes multi-dimensional and includes more than would be obvious to anyone standing nearby.

Is this silly? Perhaps, but if so, I think we could all use more of just such silliness within our lives. For example, when I sweep the floor, I whisper prayers for the cleansing of my soul and of the world in which I live. When I pull the blankets and sheets back into place on my bed each morning, I send up prayers for those who may be struggling with inadequate warmth or rest in their lives. When I feed my dogs each morning and evening, I pray that my own sustenance will also continue to be provided, in the amount and timing which is most healthy for me.

How am I being absent within such moments as these? I am being absent from the temptation to view myself as somehow having dominion or control over everything around me. I am being absent from any suggestion that I am not in dynamic relationship with other creatures, elements, and routines of life. I am being absent from the disconnection so prevalent around me, which imposes upon humanity an epidemic of meaninglessness and despair.

Being absent or being present, while perhaps never completely under anyone's control, is a dynamic place of choice within our minds and souls, in which we live within the tension between all that is and all that may be; a place in which we are empowered to direct the very best of ourselves and to channel the very best of God--collaboratively--toward all that we encounter, experience, and create.

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

Being Present

We are inherently multi-dimensional. An absence of awareness will not make us less so; it will only diminish our contribution to our individual life experiences and to the world around us.

Just as my ears exist in spite of my inability to directly see them, my soul remains even though I am momentarily more concerned with balancing my checkbook. I remain a multi-dimensional being, in reality as much spirit as body in the totality of who and what I am. I can be present in many ways.

I can be present physically. As has been noted in various ways by many authors, the first important thing in life is simply to show up. I can not make a contribution nor have an experience if I simply am not there, in some way or another.

I can be present emotionally. I am surrounded by births, deaths, adversarial exchanges, and constructive interactions. If I feel nothing, I remain blind to the significance and miracle of each moment, person, or thing I touch and my life takes on a similarly limited appearance and experience.

I can be present psychologically. If I do not understand what something means and also fail to inquire, a whole dimension of life experience is omitted and numerous opportunities and possibilities are discarded.

I can be present socially. By listening as well as speaking--not in haste but with depth and wisdom--my presence becomes a blessing and a force of healing to all that is around me.

I can be present spiritually. God is the greatest mystery of all, forever beyond complete human comprehension, but God is also the relational reality which allows all of life and myself to be and to become more than would otherwise ever be possible. The paradox of intimacy and reverence within such relationship makes life unpredictable but also magical and more valuable than anything else I could name.

I and all of us can be present to ourselves. Once again, I am inspired and at times guided by the words of Emily, in the stage play, "Our Town," when she asks, "Does anyone know they live while they do it?" With just a moment's reflection--a brief pause in the busy-ness of life--such awareness and empowering relationship is available to each and every of us.

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

On a Personal Note

Transitions, transitions, transitions--whew! Just when it seems I'm getting past them, the spectrum of possibilities widens even more! It is both an exciting and a terrifying place to be.

In only another week or so, I will begin the final quarter of my education at Iliff School of Theology, culminating in a master of theological studies academic degree. What will follow is shrouded in mystery. Had I the funding and the time, I have more than enough to keep me busy well in excess of forty hours per week. Newsletters, the 2007 calendar, scripts for future chapel performances, composition of spiritual retreat and workshop experiences and of other educational presentations, the construction of a portable chapel/tent to be used at local and regional fairs and festivals, the long-awaited book Re-Inventing the Sacred Clown, video recording of new television episodes of "Sister Who Presents...", a second album of original songs--yes, there is definitely plenty to do. Never before have I had this many ministerial creative possibilities asking for my attention.

Equal to all of the above, however, are the challenges of finishing graduate school and locating an income adequate to the financial responsibilities which will follow. Goodness! Obviously I can use all the help I can get, but I also recognize that this is a very formative time for me and that, much like the year and a half I spent preparing for bodybuilding competition, I must be dutiful in doing the stretches and lifting the weights each and every day, if I am to develop the body and the capabilities which all that follows will require. It is both exciting and terrifying; inspiring and paralyzing.

Of equal and vital significance, however, are the guardian angels--the new friends and loved ones--whom God is bringing into my life along the way. Once again, we are all each others' guardian angels. Thank you for being mine.

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

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