

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

Finding my Center

Perhaps Murphy was an optimist who liked to plan ahead and not the cynic everyone seems to suspect. His famous law, "Anything that can go wrong will and at the worst possible moment," tells us to be prepared, to be deliberate, and not to be sloppy, because if we are sloppy, we create an open invitation for trouble.

I love my dogs very much--which is why they are not allowed out of my fenced yard without being either on a leash or inside of an automobile. They do not understand the dangers of moving vehicles, untrustworthy people, or other animals which may attack or kill them, given an opportunity.

Training a dog to walk on a leash, however, takes great patience, understanding, and determination. Gerath, for example, avoids vehicles passing anywhere within fifty feet of where he is standing. Galahad is intent upon cataloging every smell within a hundred miles and is therefore constantly distracted and mostly unresponsive to my commands, just as soon as the gate to my yard, closes behind us. Tristan is not so concerned with cataloging every smell as he is with actively engaging every dog, cat, squirrel, person, and bird we encounter along the way and announcing himself to each and every one of them, the very first moment their presence is detected.

The ideal goal of teaching my dogs to walk on a leash at my side, is that (someday) we will move smoothly and peacefully along the street, without the slightest tug on the leash. By occupying a certain point in space at my right side and keeping pace with me, the leash becomes only a mostly unnoticed instrument of guidance and an insurance of safety. Within that space, each dog is free to look around, to sniff, or to interact with whatever presents itself, without experiencing any struggle whatsoever. Because I love my dogs, I allow and sometimes encourage them to explore, to greet, or to investigate whatever is encountered, to the extent that it seems safe and wise to do so. If extreme danger presents itself, the leash allows me to quickly pull the particular dog to me and lift it off of the ground completely, if doing so seems to

increase its safety. This happened a few weeks ago, when while walking with Galahad, we encountered a very large and unfriendly German Shepherd breed dog, which had escaped from its kennel and was running loose in the street. Thankfully, the dog was unwilling to further challenge a tall man with a loud and commanding voice (me).

Though perhaps not the most appealing metaphor, I am thankful that God has me on a sort of leash, steering me around and through various challenges, some of which could otherwise destroy me; steering me toward interesting things to discover, new streets to explore, and times of simply enjoying each others' company. Similarly, when I am able to remain within the center of that space at God's side, I do not feel the tug of the leash at all.

Although a further goal is eventually understanding a master's voice so well and being so attentive that no leash is needed, I barely accomplished this with only one of all of the dogs I have ever owned. I imagine God finds me to be similarly frustrating. An additional curiosity of this challenge, is that the most intelligent dogs are often most difficult to train.

I found myself wondering recently, whether perhaps I have been so busy demonstrating that Sister Who can do anything that I haven't given enough thought to specifically that which only Sister Who can do. Have I been wasting my time and energy upon things that really aren't necessary for Sister Who to do? Then again, there have been many times when some new aspect of an activity or subject was revealed, specifically by Sister Who's presence and participation.

Hopefully newsletters, television shows, and a distinctive approach to nurturing others' personal and spiritual growth are all activities which are on track with what Sister Who is intended by God to do. Regardless, I will continue to do my best to be faithful to God's calling to be the best me that I can be.

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

Finding my Edges

I saw a poster many years ago with a phrase of unspecified authorship, which simply said, "Only those who will risk going too far, will ever find out how far they can go."

The truth of this phrase has been and continues to be demonstrated within the lives of every pioneer, explorer, inventor, and innovator humanity has ever known. It is a challenge which is equally extended to each and every one of us, the alternative to which is choosing to be blind, deaf, or somehow stagnant, rather than to be fully alive and growing in whatever ways we can.

This is not a contradiction to the old adage, "look before you leap," but an encouragement to look, prepare, and then make one's best leap to a place beyond our past experiences and perceptions. The principal place in which all such leaping occurs, is at our edges.

When faced with a challenge and willing to surrender to the truth that I simply don't know for certain what a particular answer is, I have not thereby conceded defeat nor become a person without adequate faith to continue. I have not become a cynic, a failure, or a person without hope. What I have become is an honest person.

At such times, I then have the opportunity to decide whether (for whatever reason, some of which are perfectly legitimate) to retreat into what is familiar or to prepare to leap into being or doing something greater than I have ever been or done.

"Finding my edges" is at best a vague term, since the edges of experience and understanding are more often areas in which everything appears in shades of gray rather than in easy to recognize black and white contrasts. Ultimately, based upon perception, intuition, or what seems to be divine guidance, I must make my best guess and leap (or not). "Finding my edges" is thus a question of being willing to live within a place of new and uncertain challenges, a place of more or less continual redefinition of who and what I am and of what I am capable, and a place of distinguishing between that which is familiar and that which is not, by the most immediate and precise of details--because I am standing nose to nose with that which is unfamiliar, staring it in the face.

The additional challenge of personal "edges" is that (at least within those are engaged in personal or spiritual growth) they are always changing. Certain convictions I held quite firmly during my teenage years have been replaced by

deeper understandings which were quite beyond my reach at that time. My hope is that the same is true for everyone else around me, that we are all developing and learning in various ways, ever so slowly growing into more effective ways of loving and of collaborating with each other and with God, to create beautiful expressions of life which were most likely impossible for previous generations.

Idealistic? Of course, but it makes no sense to me, to aim for anything other than the center of the target, when shooting arrows on an archery range. During the few opportunities I have had to literally do so, I experienced an intensity of concentration as I pulled the string of the bow back to my ear and for a moment saw only the target: its center, its rings, and its edges. Then I let the arrow fly and returned to awareness of a world containing more than just the archery target.

According to this metaphor, finding one's edges requires a certain deliberately chosen point of concentration. Such concentration does not generally devalue or negate anything else, other than momentary attention to other things. The hope which follows is that I (and consequently the world around me) will be better in some way, for the effort and concentration I am expending.

When we allow each other opportunities for such focus and concentration, we thus also nurture and encourage each others' involvement in improving ourselves and the world in which we live in some way or another. Among such possibilities is the tool of taking a personal spiritual retreat.

A personal spiritual retreat is not about running away, but about going to a place of clarity, focus, understanding, and concentration upon spiritual growth. It is not about becoming a religious weirdo. It is about becoming a more complete and healthy person and therefore encouraging the development of a more complete and healthy community.

As with every other accomplishment, a personal spiritual retreat requires our best effort and most focused concentration. Unlike other pursuits, it may masquerade as another activity--as the creation of a painting, as regular additions to a spiritual journal or diary, or perhaps even as enrolling in an extended program of graduate study, such as the one in which I am now engaged. Considered from this perspective, I am encouraged to be patient, persistent, and attentive to the academic challenges I am now facing.

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

Finding my Spaces

As a student at the American Academy of Dramatic Arts some years ago (goodness, has it really been that long?), the understanding of acting or theatre which I was taught, was that the primary two ingredients are an actor or actress and a space in which to perform. Sets, props, costumes, and even an audience are more or less optional.

I have occasionally heard it suggested that every artist is, on some level, creating first and foremost for him or her self; that the artist is somehow working out the conflicts, questions, and challenges of his or her individual life through the resulting creative work, so that the artist may grow beyond such things, toward greater things which follow. To the extent that these are somehow and to some degree shared by others, the artist is given an opportunity to bring the rest of humanity forward in some way, along a journey of simultaneously individual and collective growth.

In speaking with a Dianic Wiccan high priestess several years ago, I described complimentary ideas of feminine and masculine energy and suggested that while masculine energy forms the lines, feminine energy fills the spaces.

Perhaps some of you have heard me speak of these ideas in the past. To reiterate, masculine energy I define as that which directs, orders, instigates, requires, coerces, defines, and structures interactions, expressions, and

perceptions. Feminine energy I define as that which fills, nurtures, colors, listens, persuades, watches, gives, receives, and gently molds interactions, expressions, and perceptions. Within individuals and communities described as truly healthy, the two are in balance and their ongoing expressions harmonious.

Returning to the metaphor of basic work in the world of the theatre, a performance begins at the intersection of an intention to speak or move in a specific way and a space in which that speech or action can occur. Relating this to the unfolding of daily life, it is not enough for me to have something worth saying or doing. I must also find a space in which to say or do it. Anything less, leaves the expression unexpressed and internal emotional or psychological pressure destructively high. "Finding my spaces" is thus a response to internal pressure to speak or act in a way that is constructive rather than destructive.

A further consideration is that I must find the spaces that are appropriately mine, rather than imposing my performance upon someone else's space. Considering the problems of overpopulation currently facing the humanity, I imagine there would be little agreement, but I continue to believe that God has in fact provided a space for each person who successfully enters the world in which we all live. This leaves us with the individual and collective challenge of continuing the search, of continuing to strive to find the perfectly appropriate space and activity for each person God has given to humanity's already abundant population.

Considering all of that, I suggest we value each new life which is born, even more than we do. If God knows that each new life has something so valuable to contribute that it is still the right decision to add yet another person to an overpopulated planet, then it would seem that these new arrivals must be valuable indeed, to our collective future.

Thus we are individually and collectively engaged in a great treasure hunt, searching out the tools and aptitudes God has placed within each of us; searching out the best location and situation in which the gift of each person can be nurtured and utilized for the benefit of one and all and everything; searching out the love and peace and godliness to which we can be legitimately proud to sign our names; searching out the spaces which God has created for each of us to fill.

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

"Communities may encourage independence and individuals may seek to be independent, but individuals and communities nevertheless inescapably exist within symbiotic relationships and each must therefore reliably support and nurture the other."

--Sister Who

Finding my Lines

During my childhood, my mother insisted upon a large vegetable garden, which was mostly weeded by myself and my siblings. If the rows planted were not straight and parallel, it was difficult to distinguish the desired plants from the weeds. In fact, one of the ways some plants escaped being eaten or forcibly removed, was by imitating the appearance of other plants. A weed that looks like rhubarb, for example, may be avoided by animals because of the bitter oxalic acid contained within rhubarb leaves, or allowed to remain until it becomes obvious that no delicious rhubarb stalk will ever be produced.

Similarly, just as for every desirable plant there may be a weed which can be mistaken for the same, for every rule there is an exception--for example the principle of sowing and reaping (i.e. that what you sow, you reap; what you give, you get, etc.). A possible exception can be found within the biblical admonition against "throwing pearls before swine." When I take my gifts, my special contribution, and give where it is neither accepted nor appreciated, I do not get appropriate recognition, validation, or reward. If I cast seed into the river or onto an asphalt highway, with very rare exceptions, it would not grow. It is not a question of the quantity nor of the quality of the seed, but of the inherent characteristics of the asphalt, which render the effort a complete failure.

Being mindful of the quantity and quality of seed I sow is a place to begin, but the accomplishment of a good harvest is not so simple that the mere distribution of seed is enough. I must pay close attention to many other environmental conditions, which surround the seed I choose to sow. If I am the caring and wise gardener I might claim to be, I will do all that I can to either find or create the conditions my seeds need; I will not simply abandon them within a hostile environment and expect them to produce a harvest anyway.

Some of the weeds which sprang up within my mother's vegetable garden, were actually quite beautiful in their own ways, which gave me occasionally difficult choices to make. For example, nearly every year, thanks to redistribution by birds, a sunflower would spring up somewhere within the garden, where according to my mother's pre-arranged plan, no sunflower was supposed to be. Usually the more unique appearance of the sunflower plant made it easily

recognizable and it was allowed to grow--as long as it had no negative impact upon nearby rows of other vegetables. Other weeds were not so lucky.

A perhaps obvious distinction which must be recognized and understood within this discussion, is that the line between weeds and other plants is marked only by whether or not the particular vegetable or species is valued by the person tending the garden.

So what lines shall I value? What anomalies shall I tolerate? Which plants will I choose, recognizing that every plant has something to offer? In the search for lines which are genuinely mine, what new connections or distinctions will I add to my life? Which will I erase, to remove boundaries between myself and something I now need to explore?

What about the line which forms the border or edge of the mirror in which I am looking, seeking to see what would otherwise be invisible to me? The line which forms the edge of the mirror places a limitation upon what the mirror will allow me to see, unless I change either the mirror's position and angle or my own. A mirror may be dutifully reflecting light, but it will not show me anything I am simply not in a position to see.

As Sister Who, I am a mirror, exploring the shape, color, and location of my own lines as well as encouraging others to do the same. Each event, experience, and involvement of life is also potentially a mirror, allowing me to see the shape, color, and location of the lines which explain and guide how and why I perceive and understand things as I do.

Peering down upon the garden from a tree-house I'd built in a willow tree nearby, the rows and sprouting leaves formed a picture which suggested specific details about the harvest to come, the rewards for the long hours of labor invested there. What sort of harvest does the tree-house view of the garden of my life suggest? I'm still climbing the tree, but when I finally get to the tree-house, I'll let you know.

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

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