

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

A Final Approach

I've flown in passenger jets many times by now, but there is always a certain nervousness as the plane approaches the runway of its destination and a corresponding sigh of relief once the wheels of the aircraft are again on the ground. Similarly, the main focus of the last ten months of my life has been the physique/bodybuilding competition, for which I will be departing by plane in only another eighteen days.

One of the greatest challenges of all of this preparation has been the maintenance of daily life, including regular production of this newsletter. Perhaps it should be another corollary of Murphy's Law: just when you think you have finally succeeded in configuring, arranging, integrating, and (to a reasonable degree) understanding your computer, an upgrade will arrive in the mail, requiring you to repeat the entire process.

If all goes well, this newsletter will be available (for the first time ever) beginning with the November 2002 issue, in electronic "PDF" format. Should you wish to receive this newsletter in that format, please contact me with your email address and let me know immediately if for whatever reason it does not come through correctly. This will save postage and paper costs and allow more of the cost of the newsletter to go towards maintenance of my website and Internet connection, as well as helping to pay for the new upgrade which will make distribution in this electronic format possible. Those of you who either do not have a computer or who prefer to continue receiving a printed paper copy of the newsletter are most welcome to make that choice. For some, the electronic copy may be preferable for a variety of reasons.

But enough about that. To return to the challenge of "upgrades," which is perhaps a more appropriate metaphor of life and growth than most of us who use computers would like to admit, such challenges to grow do seem to arrive at the most odd and even inconvenient times.

As if I don't already have enough to do this month, here comes this challenge to upgrade my desktop publishing program and my entire computer as well. Don't get me wrong. I'm very grateful for the new possibilities, but it does increase my workload a bit just the same, just when I thought I was already doing as much as I could.

Thanks to my now ex-life partner, I am now also in the process of migrating all of my computer programs and files to a new computer which was assembled for a relatively minimal cost, which also has the capacity to do video-editing. More specifically, I will finally be able to produce more television shows on my own computer rather than being dependent upon the cooperation of local public access television organizations (most of which have taken a specifically uncooperative stance towards me during the last two years). My hope is that I will be able to make contact with many more television stations across the nation, allowing for much wider distribution of my television shows. In that I am finally producing shows without using any equipment owned by public access television entities, I will also be allowed for the first time ever, to sell copies of my shows at retail, profit-producing prices. To the extent that I am able to realize personal financial support from these profits, my ability to more fully commit to the work of Sister Who and to minimize the need for a day-job will increase. All prayers and

positive thoughts are appreciated, as I begin to pursue this perhaps more ambitious path more aggressively.

Most of which, actually begins next month after I return from the competition in Australia. It was my intention to get this newsletter sent out promptly at the very beginning of October and to send the November newsletter immediately before leaving for the airport at the end of October. In this case, the November issue would have focused upon all of the thoughts and insights filling my mind immediately before departure and the December newsletter would have given the report of what happened while I was there in Australia.

In that this newsletter did not come out promptly at the very beginning of October and it seems inappropriate to send out issues of a monthly newsletter only a couple of weeks apart from each other, it now seems best that the November newsletter be one of my first priorities after I return on November 10.

So what would I have said or what do I think I would say, if asked for thoughts and insights related to participation in a physique/bodybuilding competition, at the end of this month immediately before departing by plane for Australia?

First of all, it seems a little incongruous to think of preparation for such a competition as being a spiritual journey as much as a physical one, but it really has been exactly that.

The most obvious theme is the development of self-discipline and perseverance. Following closely behind this, however I also discovered the challenge of pursuing a goal without being too attached to the outcome of my efforts. Yes, I want to win a gold medal. No, I don't want to consider myself and all my efforts to have failed if don't. I am challenged to live up to my own past words in discerning (if it should happen that I don't win the first place prize) what the reward for all of my hard work is, if it turns out to be something other than a gold medal.

In every case, I am challenged to find the beauty and joy within each moment of the situation. Whether I win or in some sense lose, it is important that I do so radiating the joy and love of the divine spark within me and the beauty and accomplishment of being an active

participant in life.

This is my intention. It remains to be seen whether it will be the history which in some sense is written by me.

As much as I value being able to see the larger picture, that life existed before and will continue after this competition; and as much as this informs, deepens, and broadens, my experience of the present moment; and as much as I am more than I have ever been, simply by having made the effort to prepare myself so rigorously for this upcoming event; I still find myself looking into a mirror from time to time, wondering for just a second or two whether this is a dream and not really happening at all. Then I remind myself that "everything is real within its context."

The point and challenge of that last paragraph, however, is not to miss or somehow overlook what is right there in front of me. I received a notice recently concerning a movie discussion group which had decided to view only foreign films. As much as I really don't want to negatively judge anyone else's choices, it occurred to me that in focusing exclusively upon foreign films and failing to see what's right in front of us already, instead of enlightenment the accomplishment is merely one of the many forms of intellectual snobbery. Snobbery, a general term denoting a form a blindness, an inability to perceive many things for no other reason than that the packaging isn't what we had in mind.

Thus it is that many will perhaps never understand the essence of classics like the movie, "Mary Poppins," the book, "The Velveteen Rabbit," and the song, "This Little Light of Mine."

There is great beauty to be found in simple things, by those who are willing to truly see when they look, and willing to truly hear when they listen, and willing to truly feel when their lifepaths cross those of others.

Just as the unattractive shell in the ocean may contain a pearl, each moment may be the final approach to making contact with the most wondrous experience of our lives, the most significant exchange of divine love in which we will ever be included. Let us always be sure to keep our eyes and ears and minds and hearts open so that we don't miss it.

Doing Today

I recall a story I read many years ago as a child, of a poor homeless man living in medieval times, who went about bestowing a peculiar blessing upon others. I suppose it was a sort of gift which God had entrusted to him, unlikely choice though he might seem to be, for any sort of ministerial role.

Essentially, the man entered a village and met a poor young woman in the marketplace, where she was attempting through skillful bartering to make her tiny financial resources barely adequate to satisfy her needs. The man explained that he was travelling through the area and needed a place to stay for the night. Gazing upon his worn clothes and tired form, the woman sighed and apologized that although she did not have much to offer, he would most certainly be welcome to share her small cottage for the night and whatever meal she was able to prepare from the few bits of food she had.

He followed her home when she had finished her business in the marketplace, they shared a light supper in peaceful quietness while a tiny fire burned on the hearth, and retired to opposite corners of the room to sleep on thin straw mats for the night. In the morning, the woman managed to come up with a light breakfast for him and smiled as he stood up to leave.

***"God has
so many beautiful dreams
of what could be
that He knew
it would take too long
to do them all Himself--
SO
He entrusted a few of
them
to me."***

--Sister Who

Just before stepping over the threshold and continuing his journey, however, the man turned and said to the woman, "Whatever you do, do for the rest of the day, until the sun has faded beneath the western horizon." Then he was gone, leaving the woman to wonder what his curious words might mean.

After a moment, she shrugged her shoulders and turned to a small chest by the wall which held a small amount of leftover cloth, from some clothing she had made for herself several months before. "Perhaps if I sell the cloth, I will be able to buy more food," she thought to herself. Pulling a small stool next to the chest, she took hold of a corner of the fabric and extended her arm, grasping the edge of the cloth further along and holding it to her nose, to measure how many yards of fabric she still had left. Again and again she moved her fingers along the edge of the cloth, measuring and counting yard after yard of material. As the sun sank below the horizon, she finally reached the end of the fabric and gazed in amazement at the enormous pile next to her on the floor, unable to comprehend from where it had all come. She knew she had never purchased such a quantity of fabric in her entire life. The next day, she managed to sell all of the fabric at the marketplace, however, and lived for a long time afterwards upon the profits from the man's gift.

Word got around, of what had happened and the next time the man appeared in the village marketplace, a somewhat older, stingy woman hurried to approach him first and inform him that he would be staying at her house that night. The woman had a small amount of cloth sitting next to a chair in the corner, intending to repeat the younger woman's miracle just as soon as the man pronounced his blessing and left.

The man did pronounce the same blessing, but as he stepped over the threshold and out of the house, a small red rooster scooted past his ankle into the room. The woman frowned and grabbed her broom to remove the annoyance before turning her attention to measuring the cloth. Round and round the table the rooster ran, finally scooting out through the front door again, just as the sun sank below the western horizon.

Whether the man ever returned to the village after that, the story did not say. Suffice to say, giving love to another is never a mistake and seeking the rewards of love without being willing to do the work of love honestly, brings nothing but foolishness and trouble. May love spring from our hearts and actively bless the world today.

Seeing the Spokes and the Turning of the Wheel

In gazing upon a spoke of an old-time wagon wheel, there is nothing about it that readily identifies its purpose within the overall scheme of things. It is nothing more than a long straight piece of wood. It might just as easily be a spindle from a rocking chair, a center support for a table, or even a balluster for a porch railing.

Placed within a wheel, it has no direct contact with other spokes. At one end it is connected to a hub, a place from which comes motive force and power. At the other end it is connected to an arc which is in frequent contact with all the somewhat adversarial forces and surfaces of the world: stone, dirt, water, and every other material.

The entire life of the spoke is spent changing direction, first pointing upwards, then sideways, then downwards, then sideways, and every direction in between as well, over and over again. Even the direction of rotation changes from time to time.

Although the spoke remains a wooden spoke, no matter to what other material it is exposed, the larger world changes as the wheel continues to turn, transporting the spoke and being transported by the collective effort of many spokes to both familiar places and distant lands.

As spokes, we gaze across the wheel at others nearby, understanding that in some way we are collaborating in taking humanity one way or another. We attempt to make our best contribution, but sometimes find the wagon veering in directions we know to be unwise. At other times we are proud to have carried our precious cargo to fertile and peaceful meadows or forests filled with quiet reverence.

Sometimes we are glad that the wheel continues to turn, not wanting to remain the particular place in which we find ourselves to currently be. At other times, we almost wish to remain where we are, so pleasant and peaceful it is. All spokes and all wagonwheels which have ceased to turn, however, have also ceased to have any useful or active purpose and thereby come to the end of their lives as well.

Perhaps they will wind up in a museum, where beneath a layer of dust they will never turn again. Perhaps they will wind up in someone's flowerbed, nibbled on by carpenter ants and weathered by rain until they finally rot away into nothing.

Maybe, just maybe, however, spokes will continue to turn and pass peacefully through good times and bad, reminding all who see them of the possibility of moving to a still-better way of being.

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