

Recommended Reading:

The Lorax by Dr. Suess. I think this is just about my absolute favorite work by this author, but I am at a loss to understand anyone who insists that the works of Dr. Suess are purely children's books. Then again, perhaps the most precious treasures of insight and understanding must first be presented to children, because adults have more often than not lost the ability to receive such treasures.

This tale relates with remarkable eloquence the tragic consequences of

Recommended Movie:

E.T. Considering its ultimate success, that this movie was first widely rejected by film companies seems as strange as the physical appearance of the title character. I suggest, however, that the deeper reason for the ultimate popularity of the movie is the absolutely profound mirror of ourselves that can be found within the characters and events portrayed.

Only in a mirror do I begin to see the shape of my own face, and with each passing year I continue to discover new forms of mirrors. Perhaps what our subconscious minds realize when viewing a movie such as this, is that the story that unfolds is ultimately our own.

We have all been (at some point or other) the alien looking for nothing more than a friend and a way home, developing heart connections with the most unlikely people along the way. We all take turns being the one in need, and have therefore both needed the kindness of strangers as well as been the stranger extending kindness to someone else. Since the perception of Beauty and Love is a remarkably solitary experience, we have also stood in the divine light of these and found ourselves surrounded by people who just don't understand.

And somehow we have this undying need for happy endings, especially to our own stories. Therefore, the story is not over until we get to the happy ending. Because I believe in God, I believe in happy endings and new beginnings. May one and all and

ignoring the interconnectedness of all things for the sake of pursuing what only appears to create wealth. The philosopher Socrates said thousands of years ago that "the unexamined life is not worth living" and time after time the title character of this story pleads for a little self-evaluation, a little awareness of the impact of one's actions upon others and upon the world in which we live.

As with the conclusion of this story, what we must realize most of all is that the only hope humanity has, lies within each of us. What sort of New Tomorrow will we individually and collectively build for ourselves? We hold the only seed we need within our hands and hopefully also within our hearts. May one and all and everything, blessed

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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.

Birthing a New Millenium

This is the last issue of this newsletter of the millennium in which each of us was born. In only a few weeks we will cross into a completely new era--at least, as far as most of our calendars are concerned. Someone recently told of a bumper-sticker that said, "On January 1, 2000, the sun will rise."

Somehow I believe that each of us will be different in some way, just for having lived to see that sunrise; each of us who strive to see when they look, hear when they listen, and feel when they touch.

Several friends and I were joking about having a "Fart Into the Universe" party instead of a Thanksgiving Day celebration, specifically because of how very oppressive the last year has been for nearly everyone we know. Yet I find myself unable to go through with such a rude response to even the most awful experiences of this last year. Something deep within me knows better than to conclude that unpleasant experiences are nothing more than unpleasant.

I think God is big enough to understand and compassionately allow for human anger in the midst of struggle and pain--even when the anger is directed specifically at God. Giving in to angry, hurt emotions may be a necessity within certain limited contexts, but anger always includes a certain degree of self-imposed blindness and must--(like any other vision-obscuring storm cloud)--eventually fade away again.

As much as I absolutely don't want to hear such things while in the midst of intense difficulty, I always find in retrospect that God hadn't lost control of the universe and that in ways I couldn't possibly have understood at the time, everything was proceeding according to a very good plan.

In sifting the ashes of times my own anger burned much too intensely, the box of matches I usually find lying somewhere very nearby are the conscious and unconscious expectations of the particular place or thing. More and more, I strive to greet new experiences and opportunities with no expectations--to simply let the feeling or thing be whatever it truly is. But the more undesired the qualities of the experience or opportunity are, the more I feel the heat and the burning of my own expectations and preconceptions.

Similarly, I've found that very few things are inherently good or bad, but are labeled such mostly according to whether the particular thing was what I wanted or not. To use the metaphor of shopping for a new pair of shoes, the last year (for me, at least) has been spent sifting through shoes I liked that weren't the right size and other shoes I didn't like that actually did fit.

To be more specific, I moved five times trying to acquire a nurturing and adequate place to call home (no, I have not yet acquired it). Economic difficulties

often left me without enough food, in order to take care of other financial responsibilities (and still do at times). Dozens of people insisted on identifying themselves as my friends, but refused to be actively helpful (and I'm still receiving many opportunities to learn from experiences of loneliness and perceived isolation). When I prayed for guidance the only answer I ever received was "Just do the ministry of Sister Who," yet more often than not I've lacked the necessary resources and tools to do what I understand the ministry of Sister Who to be. What is particularly striking, however, is that the majority of friends and strangers with whom I've spoken have had basically the same life-experience.

In the midst of good deeds not being rewarded, prayers for needs to be met that go unanswered, and radical extremes of disconnection everywhere, the only divine guidance seems to urge a greater commitment to personal integrity.

Another pattern I've noticed repeatedly throughout the last year, could be represented by the word "almost." One project or accomplishment after another would require great amounts of organization, preparation, and determination. Then, just when I was about to put the final piece into place, the entire project would suddenly be torpedoed by forces beyond my control. Initially I was very angry, but I made a point of allowing for both the expression of my human anger as well as the possibility there really was--in spite of my personal unique emotional experience--something good in what had just happened. Perhaps the difficulties were for timing, preventing me from arriving at a pivotal moment in my life until all the best ingredients were finally present. I could just be angry, but I decided I had more to gain from trying to learn whatever lessons such frustration might be trying to teach. I don't want my own feelings of frustration to interfere with divine communication, with hearing

God's voice, but they often do.

More often it's not a case of God being adversarial toward me, but rather of my inability to understand why God does whatever God does or doesn't do.

About a year and a half has passed since my life-partner and I conceded that we were growing in different directions and finally let go of certain vows to each other, in order to allow a situation that just wasn't working to end. We'd tried long and hard to improve communications, deal with conflicts, and resolve social challenges, but ultimately the best and most loving choice left seemed to be to give ourselves a new beginning in new directions. We remain very good friends and never had any nasty final argument or bitter negotiation over the division of property, but we both know that neither of us can live in the other's world anymore. This too has made the last year that much more complicated and difficult to manage.

Now a new person seems to be entering my life and though past experience makes me very cautious, I find myself happier in his presence than I've been for a long time. Still, as with any relationship, there are a myriad of diverse qualities to bring into harmony. We have both noted, however, that if we'd met each other a year and a half ago, we probably wouldn't have liked each other.

The last year has been a time of tremendous growth for many, many people; perhaps even a time of preparation for the unknown and unformed first years of the new millennium.

Sometimes what happens to us isn't so much a product or ingredient of our own lives, as much as it's simply an indication that we're standing very close to a much larger change. The earth has no malicious intention toward humanity, when major shifts are needed, but standing too close to the epicenter of an earthquake can

nevertheless be a fatal experience. Many of my friends and acquaintances have been speaking of changes through which the human race as a whole is now passing, changes which will also obviously affect individual experiences.

In a biblical story, Jesus's disciples bring to him a man who was born blind, and ask for whose sins the man's sight was taken from him, from the very first moment of his life. They interpreted the disability as a divine punishment and that idea was the first thing Jesus dismissed in his answer to them, even before turning to give the man the gift of sight. Those of us born with the gift of sight, too often forget that it is in fact a gift and not something to be taken for granted.

I still encounter people who think of misfortune as punishment, instead of being just another characteristic of individual experience that is inherently neither good nor bad. I've tried very hard to remember this while going through the struggles of the past year, that poverty, wealth, hunger, abundance, and a long list of other things are neither rewards nor punishments but simply a unique experience with something to teach--if I am able to listen and pay attention.

I'm opposed to people keeping their needs secret because of some ridiculous notion that stoic endurance of pain is somehow commendable, but I've been slowly learning that sometimes I fail to speak of a difficulty because I've accepted it as being nothing more than a current experience and also that no emotional or moral judgment of

"Individual experience is necessary to describe and direct us, but it will never be able to completely define us; we are all parts and reflections of each other." ---Sister Who

the experience is either needed or even helpful.

I may be responsible for the specific details of neither my own nor any other person's life-experience, but I believe that I'm still responsible to myself to live with integrity. I'm responsible for being the sort of person I believe that it is best for me to be. I'm responsible for acting in ways that demonstrate the qualities of my personal character--my commitments to honesty, generosity, wisdom, compassion, and peace. I'm responsible to myself and to God, for shining my light into every place, time, and situation in which I find myself to be.

A story told by Jesus within the New Testament section of the Bible describes a final judgement in which God divides sheep from goats, invites the sheep into heaven, and condemns the goats to hell, according to the past actions of each towards others. "In doing it to these, you did it to me," God explains to both the condemned and the exonerated.

Too often we think we know what God looks like and fail to notice the other faces the Divine sometimes wears. Too often we wait for someone who "looks like God" to show up, and complain when nothing seems to happen. Too often we think we know what times of true prosperity and utopia would look like and how they would feel, and we wait for them to arrive, only realizing in retrospect that numerous such times and situations have come and gone right under our noses.

Considering the possibilities of miscalculation in the origination of the current calendar, the moment of transition into the next millennium may have already happened--but even if it did, it continues to reoccur day after day, in hopes that we will eventually notice just how special each and every day is. May one and all and everything blessed and loved ever be. Amen.