

sister who's perspective

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Overview

Consistency is from within; homogeneity is imposed from without. This month's essays attempt to bring greater insight and awareness to similarities, differences, and connections between the inner and outer selves. As an autistic, I have difficulty being more than a single self, but I do understand that my experience is not universal. Either way, I strive to make whoever and whatever I am, into the greatest blessing imaginable.

If it Must be Said, it Might Not be True

I have occasionally been the audience for someone declaring an opinion so strongly, that I finally asked, "Are you trying to convince me or yourself?" In some cases the focus was even an opinion I already shared. I could only interpret that he or she had recently been attacked for holding that particular opinion and had erroneously and probably subconsciously slipped into thinking that the adversity recently experienced, was somehow typical of humanity as a whole.

Within Christian evangelical social circles of my past, a related idea was that if others couldn't tell by one's actions that one was indeed a Christian, adding words would serve no constructive purpose. Whether in matters of faith or something else, whom one is and what one truly believes, are generally more apparent within one's actions and presence than most people might wish--which has inspired the witticism "Your actions are so loud that I can't hear what you're saying." A similar primary goal of all personal virtue is that one should first truly be any particular description before publicly claiming it for one's self.

In actual practice it seems (for example) that there are many persons who would like to be considered [by others] to be generous, yet without giving anything away; it's a lie.

A different but common problem within human interactions is speaking generalities that are incapable of being literally true. At its core, conversely, reality is always specific; no individual is the embodiment of a category and no experience is completely normative--specifically because of the fact that every moment is overdetermined by being the convergence of an incomprehensible number of variables, contributions, and influences.

So why would anyone feel that such inescapably untrue generalizations must in fact be said? Perhaps because there is an honest internal need to re-establish hope and faith in whatever life experiences follow. As immaterial as they may be, hope and faith are often more essential than breathable air.

It is not as if, however, dishonesty were the only available means to maintain these immaterial requirements within times of crisis and pain. Equally available is a shift to larger perspectives; empathy with all who have suffered in a similar way--who can now be helped specifically because the experience has become one's own--offers a new calling in life that can guide future activities toward more noble and even heroic proportions.

That is, as long as ego is not allowed to occupy the driver's seat (metaphorically speaking). Acting from one's own empathy is a matter of service rather than of any sort of hierarchical superiority. It is in investing what one has felt and now understands into the lives of others--without any trace of judgment or hidden agenda or condescension--that our lives are no longer just about us or just about our words, but rather become relevant to a much larger and ever-expanding community.

The African idea of ubuntu is essentially, "I am because we are and because we are, I am." The goal is thus ultimately that any contrast between actions and words diminishes, leaving only divine wholeness.

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

If it Cannot be Said, it Might be Essential

When I first discovered myself as being a gay man, the central relational dynamic was described by some as "the love that dared not speak its name." The number of men and women jailed, imprisoned, and murdered for loving someone of the same gender is virtually incomprehensible. What is actually central to this silence, is the dynamic of societally imposed self-censorship.

From a certain perspective, the very existence of gays and lesbians calls into question the ways that gender and gender roles have been societally defined. Rather than reflect upon the virtue or error of its particular practices, many human societies have opted for oppression and even physical extermination. Trans and Intersex people have similarly become whistle blowers within the current era of human societal evolution, about certain forms of narrow-mindedness.

If I cannot openly be all that I am, then I will not be able to give humanity all that I could potentially give. That being said, I am nonetheless responsible to bring the greatest eloquence, intelligence, and awareness that I can, to whatever I ultimately say. Doing any less would constitute actions of trivializing, devaluing, or even sabotaging myself.

Reaching for excellence within as many areas of life as possible, seems to be a valuable dynamic that is tragically less and less valued within the current time. It was not that long ago that speaking of holistic health and empowered possibilities was much more common than current societal practices. Even within grocery stores, I have noticed a conspicuous absence of health-oriented products I regularly purchased throughout the past several decades.

My point, however, is not to lament how the world around me has changed, but rather to encourage all of us to re-engage in the ongoing conversation of humanity about how oppressive limitations and circumstances can gradually be resolved and better forms established within our lives. If the only reason such blessings are no longer common is that they were taken for granted and neglected, the shame rests on humanity

alone. This is not a problem, however, if humanity is willing to constructively respond.

Part of responding is noticing what is missing; of which it has perhaps become societally taboo to speak, because of the ways doing so makes people uncomfortable, and deciding that a little discomfort might simply be the path back to living with blessings previously possessed. This is not, however, an encouragement to wallow in nostalgia or oppose future growth, progress, and development, but rather a plea to reach for deeper understanding and awareness of what made those past blessings into the benefits that they were and how their forms might be updated for current and future times without losing the integrity of their essence.

During the early years of the AIDS epidemic, a saying developed that "silence equals death," because as uncomfortable as this reminder of human mortality and medical limitations was, an absence of conversation contributed enormously to how vast the problem became before constructive and empowering response became a societal reality. "Someone needs to do something," finally began to be heard, but needed to be followed by countless individuals awakening to the realization, "Hey, I'm someone!" What could not be spoken within the shell of past forms because of its threat to surrounding rigidity, was in fact the process by which the metaphorical chick would emerge and grow into being a beautiful new bird.

As essential as a shell is to embryonic stages of development, it is equally essential for that shell to be broken when the time is right for new life to emerge. Whether applied to personal principles, governmental laws, or societal norms, embryonic stages need to be recognized as such--along with realizing that the time will come when the shell must be broken and left behind; when remaining married to past limitations will result only in death. Finding one's voice is as essential to life as every other kind of development.

Censorious silence can never justify life remaining less than what it truly can be.

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

If it is Too Often Said, it Might be Trivialized

As much as saying something all of the time may identify it as a fundamental element within every moment of life, it is equally imperative that one retain awareness of what one's words mean and be careful to avoid saying anything one does not. Going through the actions, so to speak, without remembering the meaning, nudges life toward "cruising along on auto-pilot," during which innumerable discoveries along one's path might be overlooked. This is just as important within conversation as within any other active engagement in life.

I recall a Disney television show many years ago in which a grandfather teaching his grandson about flying in a small biplane responds to the young boy's comment about the beauty of the landscape by saying, "jets fly too high." Having flown in such aircraft on numerous occasions, I have to agree that virtually all of the landscape and life unfolding below is basically invisible while passing so far above. One could even say that the ability to empathize with the struggles and life-conditions of others is severely limited by this lack of perception.

It is not that triumphs and tragedies are not happening, but rather only that one is unaware of them and consequently unable to love those who are experiencing them. As literal as the distance between the land below and a passenger jet is, words used lightly and carelessly have a similar ability to create distance between ourselves and others. Granting that too much awareness is overwhelming (thanks to autism, that is something with which I am very familiar), too little awareness is similarly disempowering.

I am reminded again of the remarkably concise advice to, "Say what you mean and mean what you say, but don't say it mean,"

"Little is more disappointing than the one living in comfort, responding with apathy toward those who are not."

-- Sister Who

which emphasizes the potential power of spoken words while simultaneously noting their ability to be hurtful when awareness of that power is neglected. It should mean a great deal for someone to say, "I love you," but I suspect we have all been in situations in which such statements were incongruous with whatever actions followed--leaving one to wish that the words would not be said, if they are so weakly believed.

To be more specific, after my intense survival-oriented experiences of the last few years, I'm finding it increasingly difficult to tolerate casual friendships, because these are the people who stood by and in most cases did nothing, even though they did in fact have the resources to make a major and positive difference in the course my life would take. While reflecting upon this caused me to wonder if there were times when I could have done more for others in need, I have made a point for so very long of doing all the good I can in response to any and every opportunity, that I found little justification for self-judgment. I do not derive from that, however, any sense of superiority, but rather an awareness that frequent self-reflection and self-monitoring is a good practice to maintain in support of humility.

I suppose at the heart of this discussion is the internal reality of having principles by which my life is ordered and guided. I have always believed in doing whatever good one can, because opportunities are not always available. In a similar manner, mistakes should always be followed by apologies rather than any sort of defensiveness.

In summary, it is considerably more difficult to maintain meaning and value of persons, places, and things throughout life if one is not mindful of them within each interaction. In allowing such to be trivialized either by overuse or neglect, life as a whole begins to be trivialized as well--your life, my life, and ultimately all life. The awe-inspiring possibilities of each moment which are thereby neglected, beg for the better effects that arise whenever one wisely responds.

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When Said Without Words, it Endures

In putting thoughts into action, a certain kind of threshold is crossed that creates a new reality. Specifically because of the resulting influence of such actions, it is all the more important to make our thoughts and choices as well-informed and subject to review as possible. Mistakes are a common part of the human experience, which is why clarifications and apologies must be also--but this must not stop one from continuing to try.

Perseverance in making an effort can thus be a demonstration of courage, of hope, and of faith in one's self, in others, and in life--nurturing the belief that positive potential still exists and must be supported and guided into actual existence. One could even say that by persevering, one bestows the ability to endure upon the focus of one's efforts. The question of whether or not something will last is thus answered by one's own action (or lack thereof).

All that being said, what is neglected does not always wither and die. More directly, problems that are ignored do not always go away and anomalous individuals with which humanity has been blessed may survive all attempts at censorship. Either way, responding specifically and wisely creates even better realities.

It is once not only a matter of vigilance, but also of a willingness to act. It is also not a matter of comfort or convenience, because self-sacrifice is often the seed through which life can be reborn. Within sometimes wordless actions of becoming, like a snake shedding its old skin, new and better forms become the definition of life experience.

Arguments about the alleged superiority of preceding forms are pointless--unless they are simply the raw material which is being constructively reshaped. Worries in and of themselves are not bad, if they are utilized as the raw material from which constructive response is created. Seasons of loss are never truly so if they can be transformed into a chrysalis from which a new butterfly will ultimately emerge and take flight.

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

On a Personal Note

Thanks to the assistance of an artist I met within the local community, Sally Vanderford, the 2018 calendar is now freely available on the Internet at www.SisterWho.com. One can also request copies in desktop and wall-hanging forms by postal mail, but please include a small donation to cover printing and postage costs.

The biggest shift of recent and future weeks is moving my residence from Trinidad, in extreme southern Colorado, to Longmont, just north of the Denver-metro area. The plan is for this to be completed just before the Thanksgiving holiday with the assistance of one or two friends. I'm trying to avoid feeling overwhelmed, but am nonetheless thankful for this very promising development.

Responses to new episodes of the ongoing public access television series, "Sister Who Presents..." have been predominantly very positive and have come from as far away as Asia, Italy, Poland, and Norway. One commented that the show is instrumental in learning to speak English and another expressed interest in being a guest, if the obstacle of geographical distance could ever be resolved. My response was simply that I will go wherever opportunity and resources allow, in service to personal and spiritual growth. Through it all, I myself am amazed, encouraged, and thankful that my creative offerings are helpful to others.

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