

that shift the weight of the body back onto the heels rather than onto the ball of the foot, behind the toes. Let's experiment a little, shall we, and see how you feel in some other types of shoes."

First they tried a pair of shoes with very high heels. "This feels very awkward," the woman responded.

A pair of tennis shoes. "They're very comfortable but it feels far too casual for the formal office settings in which I'll be working."

A pair of stylish dress shoes, the latest corporate style--or so the magazine advertisement said. "It doesn't feel like me. It feels like someone who's more of a twenty-year veteran in the corporate world rather than the new manager."

A medium-height heel with a higher style that encompassed and supported the ankle. The woman walked back and forth a time or two, from one end of the room to the other, then glanced at herself in the mirror.

"I notice you're holding your shoulders much more squarely, one might even say walking with a sense of authority," the clerk mused out-loud.

"I do feel differently," the woman confirmed. "Something about the way it affects my posture, I think."

"The shoes obviously won't solve the problem completely," the clerk began.

"But they may remind me the confident attitude I need to project with every step I take," the woman finished the sentence with a smile. "Thank you," she said, looking directly at the clerk with an even bigger smile and a new light in her eyes. "You've been very helpful."

The apprentice who'd been unpacking new stock in the back room all morning but who'd finished and watched this last exchange from across the room, stepped up to the counter as the clerk finished the sale and the woman left the store.

"Shoes can remind people of attitudes?"

"Shoes can remind people of who they really are," the clerk corrected. "The challenge of new opportunities sometimes encourages us to forget that the real power to deal with any and every situation comes from within the person who fills the shoes. All I did was provide a tool to let a little more of that power out."

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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.
---Sister Who

Holiday Snowflakes

I understand that there are people who live in warmer climates who have never seen, touched, or tasted snow. Even as I shiver on a cold night, listening to the wind howling outside with such force that it sometimes shakes the house and causes the oil in the bowl of my lamp to sway, I feel a tiny bit sorry for them, that such people may never know the magic, mystery, and wonder of these tiny crystals.

Each one, viewed with great magnification is a work of perfect engineering and precision. Though incomprehensible in number, each is unique. No one (not even God) demands that they conform to any specific pattern, beyond the basic element of hexagonal construction. When acting together in the form of an avalanche, large buildings can be torn from their foundations in seconds. When arriving singularly, they land so softly as to perhaps not even be felt.

In our forms, we usually have two arms, two legs, two eyes, two ears, one mouth, and so on. Our lives sometimes go unnoticed by others, while at others are part of great changes in the human landscape. We are unique and beyond a certain basic aspiration to some form of divine image, God has granted enormous freedom and a myriad of choices by which we shape ourselves, our appearances, and the events of our lives.

Snowflakes hold the most essential element of Life as we know it: water. Their life may be seconds, before their substance through heat is given up and assumes a different form, a form which specifically nurtures others forms of life. Some

snowflakes have lived for thousands upon thousands of years, somewhere at the bottom of a glacier in polar regions. I wonder if they have memories of all that has transpired and evolved around them.

Do they have feelings or thoughts, conscious awareness of any kind? Because we shall never exhaust the possibilities of communication, there is no way to know. They may have a language too foreign for us to ever speak.

What is the point of these rhetorical questions and musings? When I take a moment to ponder such things, I am struck by how inundated we are within each and every moment of our lives, by complexities, forms of life, and beauty and how little of this we ever perceive. I am struck also with how similar our struggles, questions, and concerns seem to be--to survive for as long as we can, to be a member of a community, to make a valuable contribution or to create something which will outlive us, to leave the world a better place than we found it, to reach our maximum potential, to leave with as much as gracefulness as possible when the time comes to travel on to another form of being.

Perhaps it is only specific individuals within humanity that engage in such deep reflections, though to insist upon this is ridiculously arrogant and not justified by the great limitations of our perception and understanding.

In any case, this is (among other things) a season of rest and reflection and of going deeply into our roots, like the aspen trees in the meadow, now barren of leaves. We know that spring and the warmth of the sun will return in

time, but perhaps the duration of winter is an attempt to underscore just how important it is to take times of reflection and personal retreat, times of paying careful attention to one's roots and seeking within them the pattern for new branches, sometimes by imitation and sometimes by deliberate contrast.

I have often felt that the reason I believe so strongly in effective communication is that it was the thing most missing from the family of my childhood. Each time I respond with sensitivity to someone in need, it is in some sense an attempt to negate every past experience in which I found myself in need and no one responded to my cries for help.

Within my own awareness, I often see myself as a single quiet snowflake drifting toward the ground, not knowing how long I will live or what effect I will have upon the world around me. Yet I hope that the tiny drop of divine life crystallized within me will be released at the proper moment, in the perfect place, to nurture life in someone or something else. Just as the snowflake receives the divine commission when leaving the heavens, of bearing a drop of life-giving water to earth, I pray that I too will fulfill the divine commission of bearing that spark of divine life within me to its most effective destination.

Along the way, I dance upon the wind, or beat a song upon a window pane, fluttering wherever opportunity allows, doing whatever good I can, perhaps providing a bit of insulation while resting upon someone's roof, before I melt away again.

My life has generally held more questions than answers and I can only hope that its experiences and expressions somehow add to the beauty of the complete picture of life, throughout time and space.

But now it is time to return to more mundane activities and to seek to imbue them with these deeper thoughts and reasons for living one more day with joy, determination, and (to the best of my

ability) unconditional love.

The greatest tool in my possession seems more often than not to be simply my own integrity; the possession of my own soul, one might say. I have met so many people in the last month alone, however, who have confessed to giving up all their creative dreams in payment for a financial income capable of satisfying the demands of our current civilization. I have even heard people recommend selling one's soul to one's career in order to succeed, but I cannot help but believe that I would be more truly impoverished if I did so.

Perhaps the greatest wealth and the greatest gift one could receive during this season and all throughout the year, is to know the transcendent work one must do and to find within one's self the strength to make whatever sacrifices are necessary to do that work--though this is not easy to remember when the bills come due and the refrigerator grows empty.

Empty refrigerators and unpaid bills, however, will be forgotten. The poetry of our lives, on the other hand, can echo into eternity.

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

"Symbols fill every moment and corner of our lives, yet have only the meaning, significance, and power that we give to them.

The symbol which is ignored is little better than an unseen ghost in the corner of the room, offering insight but having no way to communicate it."

---Sister Who

The Allegorical Shoe Store-- Chapter Two

Two rugged-looking men came into the store one day, both wearing hiking boots, though one's hiking boots were in moderate condition while the other's were extremely worn.

"Good morning," the well-seasoned clerk began, "and with what may I help you today?"

The men's faces were a bit drawn and sad as the one with worn shoes glanced down briefly, as if embarrassed, and quickly answered, "new hiking boots."

"Right this way, sir," the clerk responded, a little confused by the two men's general attitude. "Is there anything I should know, which you've so far failed to mention?" He led the two men to a bench by a far wall.

The man removed a worn hiking boot and handed it to the clerk before explaining, "we were out hiking last weekend and our buddy--the three of us have been hiking together for years--he, well, the sole of his boot gave out on a particularly rocky traverse and he fell to his death."

"Oh, I am so sorry," the clerk responded, horrified at the news.

"His boots were even older than mine," the man continued, "but he didn't want to give them up because he'd gotten so used to them, called them his lucky boots even though the tread was all worn off and the sole of one had cracked all the way through."

After a moment of stunned silence, the clerk looked at the boot in his hand and remarked, "I recognize this brand. Didn't you buy these boots here about ten years ago?"

"As a matter of fact I did," the man grinned a little, impressed by the clerk's memory.

"They've actually made some improvements in this boot since then," the clerk brightened, "a stronger lighter-weight sole with a better tread design."

"They've served me well," the man commented, "wouldn't want to switch to another brand after all these years, but glad to hear they've been working on improvements all along." "Was there anything I could get for

you, sir?" the clerk asked, turning to the other man. "Mine aren't that worn," but I've heard a bunch of good things about a new brand I'd like to try, the one's that are advertised all over billboards and on TV of late?"

"I know the very ones you mean," the clerk smiled. "They are quite new and innovative but seem to have done well in all of the performance tests, according to our latest trade magazine."

"Don't need to depend upon them completely for now," the second man continued, "cause my boots still have a lot of good wear in them, but wanted to experiment with the new shoes a bit before the old ones have to be shelved."

"An excellent idea," the clerk stood, smiling, "it's always good to keep an open mind but also to pay attention to what you're buying. I'll be right back with the hiking boots each of you have requested."

Another day, a woman of average height timidly entered the store. "Do you have a moment to help me find some good shoes to wear to my new job next week?"

"Why of course," the clerk beamed, "and what, may I ask, is your new job?"

"Well, I did fairly well in business school," the woman said softly, "so they want to put me into a managerial position, but I just don't know. I've never done anything like this before and I think I need to make a good first impression."

"If you'll forgive me for saying so, ma'am," the clerk offered gently, "being confident and assertive without being unnecessarily aggressive, is more important than a new pair of shoes." The clerk paused a moment, thoughtfully, then came around from behind the counter and glanced down at the woman's shoes. "Ah, this might a good place to start."

"Is something wrong?" the woman shrugged.

"You're wearing flats," the clerk responded. "I may not be a psychologist, but I have observed that many people have less assertive personalities when barefoot, wearing only socks, or when wearing shoes