

sister who's perspective

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Overview

"How much one sees depends upon how close one looks." As often as the succession of one's life experiences has been likened to a journey or a path, there is still so much yet to be discovered--and even more so as this metaphor is applied to each new and diverse lived-out example.

What is central to all such applications is the dynamic of increasing one's awareness.

May these words accomplish that for you.

Discovering a Path

In hiking through a forest, one must learn to distinguish what is truly an established path leading from a trailhead to a summit, lake, or other destination, from what is merely an unoccupied patch of sand or dirt between trees. In many instances, one does not have to be very far off of the actual trail before it becomes mostly hidden from view, granting the possibility that one may wander further and further astray before realizing that one is in fact lost. Nonetheless, as true as this may be, it does not justify presuming anyone else's path to be wrong or less real.

To know an individually appropriate path, one would have to fully know the individual for whom the path is most appropriate. The added complication is that none of us have previously walked our own current paths, such that the process of sifting truth from error must remain a continuous activity along the way. Indeed, even within those times that perception is clear and precise, the added variable of choice may (or may not) integrate self-sacrifice in forms and ways intended to serve some greater good--such that one is never completely sure exactly what one will do, until the choice is both real and immediately presented.

Taken a step further, it is only after I have made certain choices, metaphorically leaving

a certain path and plunging through thick shrubbery in order to avoid a danger along the previous path, that I often discover an alternate path beyond the shrubbery, that I hadn't realized was even there. Perhaps this is why my thoughts of late, keep returning to a peculiar quote from the little-known movie, "Gryphon," starring Amanda Plummer, that "What appears to be disastrous often works out for the best, though it might not be apparent at the time." Within the mental discipline of choosing to neither panic nor jump to speculative conclusions, but instead to consider more unusual alternatives, may lie the path to true success.

It is also about maintaining faith in life to right itself when all other circumstances are truly best. A perfect answer that is provided prematurely, may be experienced as a burden or an encumbrance, because even a perfect answer needs a supportive context within which to manifest. In some more mindful moments, for example, I have prayed that my opportunities do not exceed the wisdom or abilities available to maximize their potential--which is also why I strive more or less continuously to increase the wisdom and availabilities I can provide.

Perhaps it is specifically by such personal preparation, that I am indirectly building possibilities of future paths and encouraging their timely discovery. I noticed what seems like a long time ago, that every life is blessed with more opportunities and potential for good than it will ever be able to embrace. I am, however, a long way from resolving this tension within myself--forgiving myself for paths I discovered but didn't follow because I hadn't sufficient wisdom at the time to do so, and trusting that the choice I did make, can yet show itself to be the very best one that anyone could have made, given the peculiar circumstances of its first moment.

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

Blazing a Trail

Wherever one walks, others may follow; yet where one intuitively or cognitively decides to walk may also be where no one has previously ever done so. In the case of a forest, one will also have to decide which branches to avoid, which to bend aside, and which to trim off, using whatever implement is available. A machete may be effective within a tropical jungle, for example, but may constitute violent, brutish, or unnecessary force within a northern woods.

Degrees of both self-awareness and social awareness are required as well. If I know that my abilities are above average and I suspect that average persons will want to follow in my footsteps, I will need to somehow mark or avoid those challenges which would be too much for them, even if my own abilities are more than adequate for the particular challenge. Doing what is most difficult in order to stretch one's own abilities, is not always the wisest pattern to set, without issuing the usual sorts of disclaimers (i.e. "Don't try this at home unless you are verifiably a highly trained expert").

An important quality of effective trail blazers, therefore, is being able to discern what is dangerous and what is not, within circumstances and components that are both unfamiliar and inseparable from degrees of risk. Unfortunately, even the most seasoned trail blazers sometimes make mistakes. As forgivable as doing so may be, tragic losses may still be part of the consequences.

I sometimes wonder if solutions turn out to be solutions, specifically because they are supported and nurtured in their development so much that they really don't have the ability to become anything else. Applying this to the creation of trailblazers (even if the specific example is one's self), one can recognize that it is not only a matter of how one behaves on a trail of unassuming experiences of daily life, but also of doing any and all preparatory research that one can. Within television production, I have often counseled new producers that "one cannot overstate the value and importance of pre-production planning."

It is not that one will ever be completely prepared for everything that happens, but rather that more of one's attention and energy are responsively available for those unanticipated challenges which nonetheless arise. More concisely, it is about minimizing how overwhelming the experience will turn out to be. Yet not feeling stretched by the experience, suggests there may have been even more undiscovered excellence, yearning to be brought out into the light, which was instead left hidden in the shadows somewhere deep inside.

From another perspective then, engaging in trailblazing activities is about increasing the height and distance one may achieve, by minimizing whatever limitations and/or inefficiency one can--often by building the necessary resources into one's self. As good as it may be to have talented others as members of one's team, what some have labeled "cross-training" is the ongoing task of creating whatever level of ability one can, even within those who have no inherent aptitude. Additionally, even for those with amazingly gifted aptitude, regular practice of essential skills is vital to top performance.

It is not, however, a matter of being driven toward success, but rather of being aware both of that which supports success and that which detracts from it. Among the whimsical definitions of expertise is that of making a genuinely difficult accomplishment or action look easy. Rest assured that within most (if not all) demonstrations of true expertise, the personal cost which has been paid, is often much higher than most observers would ever guess.

The definition of grace I heard early within my teenage years was that it is the "unmerited favor" of Godde. In a similar way, sharing in genuinely graceful actions of another, can very much be the gift of the expert who has paid a high cost, to attending collaborators or audience members who may not previously have imagined such actions to even be possible. Therefore, through each other, we may yet discover what life can be.

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

Following Through

I have completely lost count of the times that persons I've met have invited this or that empowering collaboration and then failed to do what was necessary for their suggestions to be transformed into realities. From one perspective, this constitutes a betrayal of trust, but from a contrasting view it could also be no more than the discovery of a limitation within the particular individual. S/he may have genuinely had the best intentions that included no inclination toward dishonesty, but may have thereafter encountered conditions and/or variables that proved to be absolutely paralyzing.

In a similar way, it is sometimes quite surprising how many people say they believe in community, but are completely unwilling to do whatever is necessary to create or maintain such a fundamentally essential reality. In nearly every case, nothing particularly superhuman or even exceptional is required. If one can do nothing more than walk up to another person, hold his or her hand, and smile, even that may be enough.

I may not have a solution to offer for that particular challenge, but if I am willing to be present as a friend throughout the search for and implementation of, any helpful resource that is found, that affirmation of life may be enough to turn tragedy into triumph. What we can accomplish collaboratively is always so much more than any possibility latent within any sort of competition. As some have said, what is most important is often the task of getting out of one's own way; that is, leaving behind self-importance and being fully present with both humility and honesty.

It is also, however, not a matter of depriving a person in need of his or her last shred of self-agency, but rather of supporting that person's ability to think and act in her or

his own best interests, with all of the wisdom, information, and love available. Truly loving is not a matter of doing what one cannot, but rather of doing whatever one can--even if what would be most truly helpful is standing aside in a way that guards and clears the path. If, conversely, love stops at the moment its words fade into silence, it is relevant only to the past moment and not to any present or future one.

One cannot expect that everything will always turn out perfectly, but the effective response to failure is persistence in the search for a solution, rather than wasting time blaming anyone for the attempt that failed. As long as failure is not the final action, neither is defeat, loss, or tragedy the final state. What will be most remembered are the ways that individuals followed through and didn't give up, until a true and complete victory was finally secured.

William Wilberforce was a white man and an evangelical Christian who argued with the British Parliament for twenty years to put an end to slavery throughout the majority of that empire. Through careful contemplation of evidence and factual reports, he forged a moral position and refused to give up, no matter how often and how persistently others refused to listen. It was apparently his life's work also, since he died three days after the pivotal law was finally passed.

At the heart of any action of following through, one knows the right thing to do and has only to wrestle with how and when to actually do it. If one does not, the roots of integrity have been attacked and it remains to be seen whether or not they will ever recover. In the absence of integrity, life really does become no more than an illusion of pretended ideals, unable to justify any inherent struggle and legitimately to be characterized by cynicism and pessimism.

Whether it is the Old Testament prophet's donkey or simply one's own contemplation, a universe of infinite possibilities of kindness and love is equally real and eagerly waiting to follow the miraculous beginnings that have already occurred, throughout human history.

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

*"Double-standards
discourage essential blessings
which often come
through unlikely persons."*

-- Sister Who

Emerging in Newness

It is understandably disconcerting to look into a mirror and see an unfamiliar reflection, which is nonetheless recognized as a new form of one's self. A time of adjustment within which everything feels a bit out of balance would be a healthy expectation, but one that cannot initially feel normal in any way whatsoever. Indeed, one could not be expected to immediately know the range and extent of one's abilities arising from this new context, without doing experiments.

In a sense, it is a matter of getting to know one's self all over again. An amusing retort attributed to a character played by the actor, Johnny Depp, explains, "I don't know how to act my age. I've never been this old before." Regardless, the assumption which is present but unstated, is that behavior which is appropriate for each specific age has, in fact, been defined.

In actuality, it has not. We are given the task of defining within each moment, right and/or wrong ways to act, speak, think, and relate to those around us. From a different perspective, we are given innumerable opportunities to show the world what sort of persons we actually are. We may choose to remain hidden or we may choose to emerge.

Until one chooses to emerge, however, the world may never know what possibilities were hidden within heart and mind. My struggle, conversely, has more often been trying to emerge and finding those I encountered unprepared and unwilling to receive what I offered. In some instances, the cost of making my contributions and myself available, has been painfully high.

I persist, however, because of the many instances within which such contributions were (or so I've been told) most profoundly empowering. Without the newness hidden within each of us, all that will be available to the ongoing unfolding of life, will be tragically debilitating stagnation. It is not difficult to see the effects of this throughout our world.

What must be remembered is that what we see now, is not all that's truly available.

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

On a Personal Note

A friend and ministerial colleague has encouraged me to revive a project initially conceived about twenty years ago, of creating a tool of personal growth entitled The Tarot of Sister Who. While the Tarot will probably always be a topic of tense religious debate, denounced by fundamentalists but nonetheless widely used by practitioners of alternative spirituality, I do feel that I can make a good contribution by creating a personal version oriented to self-reflection, contemplation, and discovery.

In and of themselves, the cards of the Tarot are really nothing more than glorified Rorschach ink blots. Points of controversy most often arise within what each individual brings to any specific use of the tool--some of which may produce personal discoveries that are difficult to accept, but essential to personal growth. Yet some discoveries may also produce profound and empowering moments of change, depending entirely upon one's response.

In any case, preparations for a total of five complex photo shoots throughout the next year, are proceeding very well. What would be most helpful at this point, are volunteers willing to do camera operation, since the friend who has most often assisted, is not always available. Additionally and perhaps most importantly, however, I invite prayers for guidance as the work unfolds.

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

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*Sister Who a/k/a Rev. Denver NeVaar, MTS
POB 16074, Golden, CO 80402
email: dn@SisterWho.com*

Internet website: <http://www.SisterWho.com>

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