

sister who's perspective

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Overview

If faith is a merely a matter of words, it will have no power to accomplish anything that is genuinely good. Words may be where one starts, but they should never be where one ends.

That being said, this month's essays reach for a vibrant sense of life within each ordinary--or even adversarial--moment. In seeing more, we can be more and know more, about what was available all along.

Demonstrated Words

Many years ago when the very first movie within the *Star Wars* series was released, I made a point of reading the book before viewing the movie. Within the front pages of the book, preceding the actual story, was a page displaying a few inspiring quotes. The one which I still remember, was attributed to Princess Leia Organa:

They were in the wrong place
at the wrong time;
naturally, they became heroes.

There is no implication within this quote that what occurred consisted of mere words, thoughts, perspectives, or intentions. The convergence of specific circumstances and persons, inspired responsive action and, ultimately, personal transformation. Where this is in conflict with certain human behavior is within the tendency to focus upon leaving a "wrong" place as quickly as one can, rather than engaging with its particular challenges.

Equally viable, however, is analyzing to what extent any effective response is even possible. If I were faced with the challenge of sacrificing my life for a cause or a higher principle, I think I probably would. As I have often said, however, "If you're going to play the martyr card, you can only do so once--so

choose that moment very carefully."

So it was that in late 2016, I decided that freedom was more important than having a particular address. I found myself in a place of enormous interpersonal conflict within which all sorts of immoral and illegal behavior was happening and within which I was unable to locate any effective advocate. Essentially, the bullies "were going to get away with it," just as a different set of bullies got away with physically assaulting me on buses and school playgrounds during childhood.

Wrongs that have never been made right--leaving me with the ongoing life-challenge of how to live out my insistence that bullying is always wrong, in ways that are actively responsive and personally transformative. In those moments when I have been most besieged by doubt, however--with astonishing reliability--I am blessed with reminders to answer the darkness, not with a reflection of itself, but rather with a stubborn dedication to shining even more light. I must find within myself during such moments, the self-control to demonstrate who I am, instead of being merely a reflection of negative circumstances.

To paraphrase the words of an unknown Christian author I once read, "Preach the gospel at all times, but use words only when necessary." If others cannot tell by one's life, what one actually believes about spiritual truths and personal virtues, then expressing the same things only with words, is not going to make a significant difference. The other side of this, however, is that circumstances which call for godly behavior by being more or less the opposite, are invaluable opportunities for remarkably good things to happen.

It is specifically when I am preparing for good things to happen, that discouragements have the least opportunity to emotionally pull me downward. Whatever joy I feel, is thus not a matter of ideal circumstances, but rather of proactive and positive engagement.

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

Incarnated Beliefs

Among the various questions with which I've been wrestling lately, is that of whether my faith is strong enough to accept suffering and pain from Godde--knowing that as the embodiment of greatest love, Godde would never ask that of me without an exceptionally good reason. More concisely, can I trust the reason I cannot even imagine, specifically because of trusting the Divine whom I cannot directly see? If so, how do I openly and actively weave this into my daily life?

Going one step further, can I tolerate being described as crazy, stupid, or weird, as I do so? According to Albert Einstein, "Great spirits have always encountered violent opposition from mediocre minds." I'm in no hurry to describe myself as a great spirit, because that somehow seems a bit arrogant, but I can definitely testify to having often experienced a great amount of trouble for "thinking outside of the box."

All that being said, I'm not sure I would be who I am, if I did not live the way I believe. A lesser demonstration could only suggest degrees of hypocrisy and the possibility that one is seeking to embody the expectations and understandings of others, rather than one's own truth. I am absolutely convinced that I was not put on this earth to spend my days living someone else's beliefs and life.

What is at the heart of incarnated beliefs is, at its core, the same occasionally intense pursuit of truth which has driven innumerable anomalous individuals throughout history to venture beyond their usual "personal comfort zones" in order to finally grasp a meaning or purpose which cannot be found within the conventional religious practices of their respective times. Sadly, in many cases, what they learned came at a high price--specifically because of the ways their discoveries required revisions to many contemporary norms. As automatic as growth appears to be within virtually every manifestation of life, resistance to growth and development seems to have been part of the fundamental human psyche since the very first tribal community was formed.

I still find it astonishing, for example, that Galileo was nearly burned at the stake as a heretic and survived only by being placed under house arrest for the last two decades of his life. That Albert Einstein once worked as a school janitor is another outrageous example. Yet what both of these make clear, is how the possibilities swing both ways.

When certain human administrators do not believe that a particular idea or invention is even possible, opportunities for growth slip by unnoticed. Those persons' lack of belief holds the surrounding community hostage to the past. When certain individuals have more cynicism than faith, they fail to attempt activities that could ultimately be central to their lives' primary purpose--and humanity is once again thereby impoverished.

Even more dangerous within the present, is the phenomenon of economic obsession, because "When money becomes the measure, community always suffers." The selfishness and greed which go not only unmentioned but are even encouraged by innumerable public venues, are in fact forms of mental illness that leave a wake of broken relationships behind them. The belief that money can substitute for ourselves and solve every problem, leaves literally millions of people suffering in diverse ways.

As an objection to being too generous, the concern I most often hear voiced in one way or another, asks, "What if I start to run out? Shouldn't I save my excess for a time of need?" If we all see each other as family, however, then none of us has to take care of him or her self, because everyone else is already doing that. When we truly thrive, it is because everyone behind us is thriving too.

When incarnated beliefs are reduced to monetary matters, however, a vast, painful emptiness lingers within one's self, stripping one's soul of all justification for the struggles which have been thus far embraced--unless those struggles are fused with love and done for the benefit of others whose life-path has intersected with one's own. In loving each other, our own lives find their true purpose.

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

Material Blessings

If one defines a blessing as something good or helpful which is given by one person and received by another, then a great many physical objects are not actually blessings. If an object or environment has no higher meaning, it may be beneficial in one way or another, but without the dynamic of giving described within the first sentence, "blessing" is not the true name of the benefit. The perhaps obvious corollary, however, is that whenever one assigns empowering meaning, one could thus transform a mere material object into potentially a most wonderful and empowering blessing.

The particular stones, talismans, and artistic creations upon my personal altar, for example, all have profound stories of who, where, when, and how they were transferred to my stewardship. In taking time each day for prayerful meditation within their presence, I reconnect across time with innumerable aspects and components which those stories encompass. Any moment of prayer at my altar is thus a convergence of past, present, and future which transcends time and space.

On a different note, material blessings that are incongruous in relation to the recipient, may be analogous to tests that measure the level of one's abilities. They may even be intended to create experiences of failure. The vital information, however, since failure is somewhat guaranteed, is at what point along the scale ranging from easy to impossible, does a particular person fail.

As I look back over the last five years of my life, I see a number of instances in which it was impossible for me to pass the specific tests life presented to me. I can now see how a different choice might have produced

a more positive result, but my mental and emotional resources at the time, were simply inadequate. No amount of putting more pressure on myself to succeed, would have truthfully altered the outcome.

So can I forgive myself for not being any sort of comic-book Superman? Can I allow myself to be less than omniscient and/or omnipotent? Sadly, even if I do, it doesn't make the resulting losses any less painful.

Yet for having lived through the loss, I am more of a man, minister, and person than I would otherwise be. What still needs to be answered, nonetheless, is "Where do I go from here?" in my continuing quest for freedom from oppression and injustice. The more the mental illnesses of selfishness and greed proliferate, the more difficult this question becomes to answer in any respectable way whatsoever.

A popular reply to this internal struggle is to insist that it's all a matter of timing--which may be at least partially true. What is a blessing within one moment, may be a curse within another. A recommendation to learn patience seems to be the most common response, but radiates a subtle hypocrisy if it is spoken by anyone other than the person most directly experiencing the adversity.

The other aspect of such dynamics which needs to be considered, is whether or to what degree one has developed any sort of tunnel vision, which will always project similar limitations upon one's abilities to effectively utilize what has been given. Just as every cell of the human body is symbiotically interrelated, so also are the moments of one's days, one's years, and ultimately of one's life. Expecting one day to have sufficient inspiration for a thousand, invites crushing disappointments and maybe even a sense of having one's trust betrayed.

All that being said, interaction with material objects allows one's beliefs, thoughts, and emotions to be illustrated in ways that human senses can grasp--which curiously then wind up shifting the unseen realities of the heart and mind. It is once again a merging of body, mind, and spirit.

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

*"Meditate not
upon any broken promise,
but rather upon
the transformation of pain
into divine truth and love."*

-- Sister Who

Spiritual Manifestations

It is perhaps one of most challenging and therefore most frequently dismissed realities of being fully human, that each person is a fusion of body, mind, and spirit. The mere chemical formula of one's physical body is insufficient to create a duplicate example of life. A mere transcription of every thought that has ever passed through one's head, is insufficient to convey the whole of anyone's personal understanding.

Spiritual matters go beyond where any foot or thought can ever tread--hopefully thus inviting further growth and exploration, but it seems that a great number of people are not willing to invest the necessary time and energy. I have yet to hear anyone who has made such investments, however, complain or in any way regret doing so. In a much similar way, throughout all of my years of hiking up mountains, I have never even once overheard anyone express a wish to have stayed home and not made the climb.

The time of any physical human life is finite and the one thing upon which it seems that every elderly person agrees, is that it has all gone by too quickly. The primary best use of whatever moments a physical life may encompass, therefore, is the creation of as many beautiful and empowering memories and moments as possible. Without virtually any exception, every physical work is likely to eventually break down and be replaced, but the non-physical works are the ones which have the potential to echo into eternity within the lives of every generation and person directly or indirectly touched thereby.

While the names of the originators may be forgotten, the fingerprints of love and wisdom remain--eternally renewing life within each successive generation. How much good does any of it accomplish? The mass and volume is quite beyond measurement.

These are things which I most strive to remember within the darker moments of struggle, and lift such glimpses of love and wisdom like stars into a nocturnal sky.

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

On a Personal Note

Living by faith is often a confusing sort of thing requiring tolerance of an inordinate amount of uncertainty. Just when something seems to be following a pattern, suddenly the pattern changes again. One could say that what is most important is the particular lesson (or lessons) the experiences are intended to teach, but that is too simplistic to explain the ever-fluctuating intersections of a myriad of endlessly evolving variables.

My current residence continues to grow ever more oppressive with each passing day, to which my dogs can also attest. The last time we attempted jogging together within this neighborhood, there was a rather close call with the possibility of a dangerous dogfight (or at least it seemed so), so I've given up on being able to do that again until we find a better place to live. I continue to pray and do whatever I can, each and every day, to encourage this to happen.

Financially, my resources are stretched to the limit and food is in short supply, so I am thus reminded to pray for all hungry and homeless people everywhere around the world on a daily basis as well. Fundraising to purchase a major fixer-upper within a rural area of central Colorado, may have begun quite well but its growth has decreased to tiny increments within more recent weeks.

Nonetheless, the conviction that persists, is that all good things, really will come to be.

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

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