

The Blessings of Loneliness

I have always believed that everything has something to teach, something to contribute, some positive reason for being included within God's creation. Discussing various emotions with an acquaintance the other day and commenting on how so many new religious and spiritual perspectives seem intent on removing supposedly negative emotions from human experience, I mentioned that I was still trying to discern the constructive rewards of loneliness.

Fear seems to be the greatest target for elimination, of the above-mentioned religious and spiritual perspectives, followed closely by loneliness. Fear I understand to be a sort of guardian angel which speaks with a shrill unpleasant voice, attempting to communicate a need for more information or a need for immediate corrections within one's life course. Panic is not Fear's desired response from us. Sometimes the courage and boldness to ask a direct question completely resolves the situation.

Loneliness has been a bit more of a problem for me to understand, I am beginning to realize, specifically because it is not so much concerned with mental understanding as with emotional growth. By enduring times of loneliness honestly and not fleeing into the myriad of available distractions, I find that my capacity for empathy and compassion has increased, as well as the dimensions of my faith and the space within which my relationship to God unfolds.

To put it another way, Loneliness is the soul's way of creating vast internal space. People with small shallow hearts do not feel the extremes of loneliness and conversely also struggle to feel the expansiveness and power of divine love. The pain that accompanies loneliness is simply the sensation of one's interior walls being pushed back and stretched outwards as the soul seeks another soul with which to connect.

One might say that enduring the pain of loneliness is the process of "birthing" a larger form of one's self, a form large enough to encompass greater dreams and consciousness and understanding than has so far been

attempted. Using physical childbirth as a metaphor for this internal emotional and spiritual birth-process, we must remember that the process does not last forever, is not completely under anyone's control, and is not to be ignored or dismissed. We need to be willing to sit with the person, hold his or her hand, and offer whatever encouragement or comfort we can until the process is completed, knowing that at some point or perhaps at numerous points within our own life, we will most likely endure the same and need similar encouragement and support. We may even find that struggling together through dark clouds of loneliness gives birth to new friendships.

To use the metaphor of the world of the theatre in the living of my own life, when the casting call goes out, the most important thing is to show up for the audition and do my best.

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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

Something for Nothing

Yes, I am fond of old cliches, but I'm also fond of looking at them in new ways. "You only get what you pay for" and "what goes around, comes around" are two that jumped to my attention this morning, affirming the existence of cycles and continuing exchange within life and its activity. In considering the divine spark within each of us, however, I see a new responsibility and opportunity to break or alter cycles in constructive ways.

The real question behind this article's title is, when I feel like I have nothing, what sort of something will I give to it? The two qualities that seem to most identify that which is divine (within my understanding, at least) are love and creativity. When I receive something painful from someone or something within life, I do not have to respond with nothing more than a mirrored reflection. I can (sometimes, at least, if I have the strength) respond with something better and thereby change the course of the cycle.

At times, however, I am threatened with discouragement because the cycle I am attempting to retrain in a new direction, just isn't listening. Like a pet with its own mind, I repeat the exercise again and again, trying to effectively communicate both the content and the priority of behavior I wish my pet to practice. The first few months of raising dachshund puppies have consistently been months of dealing with a wide variety of chewed items, for example. Eventually but never completely, the problem dwindles.

In a similar way, Life must sometimes be trained by stubborn persistence, to deliver my hopes and wishes in whatever

particular way I choose. Giving up only guarantees that the answer I seek, will never come. Part of my challenge then, is to also pace myself and equip myself for the duration of the training session, how ever long it may turn out to be. Usually, it is much longer than I would prefer.

Another aspect of this, however, is learning to listen and to be constantly improving my listening skills and ability to understand. If I can begin to grasp the manner in which my pet understands and responds, it is more likely that I will begin to give more effective commands.

Unfortunately there is no "one-size-fits-all" answer or panacea, one particular thing which will sweep aside all problems permanently. Nor should there be, if that with which we are dealing, is truly alive. Life requires change and growth, often in directions we would not choose, if circumstances were not as they are.

I am finally just beginning to recognize a greater freedom to move toward new possible futures, that was conspicuously absent while I retained all of my mementos within my home environment. I now observe that I have been far too attached to my memories and my past to adequately respond to my future. I have not gotten rid of my souvenirs and mementos, however, but rather they have been placed in a safe and secure storage place until such time as I am blessed with a home in which to again display them.

When I placed them into storage, a great distance away, I first noticed that I had been drawing a much greater amount of emotional strength and support from them than I'd realized. For weeks I felt

weak and unhappy to come home, because where I live does not feel like home anymore. Then, slowly, I began to feel the urge to create something new, some new direction which would utilize the talents, abilities, skills, and the understanding I gained from all of my past experiences. I suppose one could say, I needed to give myself time to “come around” emotionally, just as I would allow myself time to adjust to a foreign culture if I suddenly moved to a distant country.

In high school, my German-language teacher mentioned a time or two early on, that really knowing a language included being able to think in that language rather than having to translate everything within one’s head before answering. At no time, however, were I or any of my classmates pressured to do so. Suddenly, during our third and fourth years of German-language instruction, toward the end of our years in high school, it just happened. Without anyone ordering it to happen, simply as a result of constant use and practice, we found ourselves thinking in German and no longer translating everything in our heads before answering.

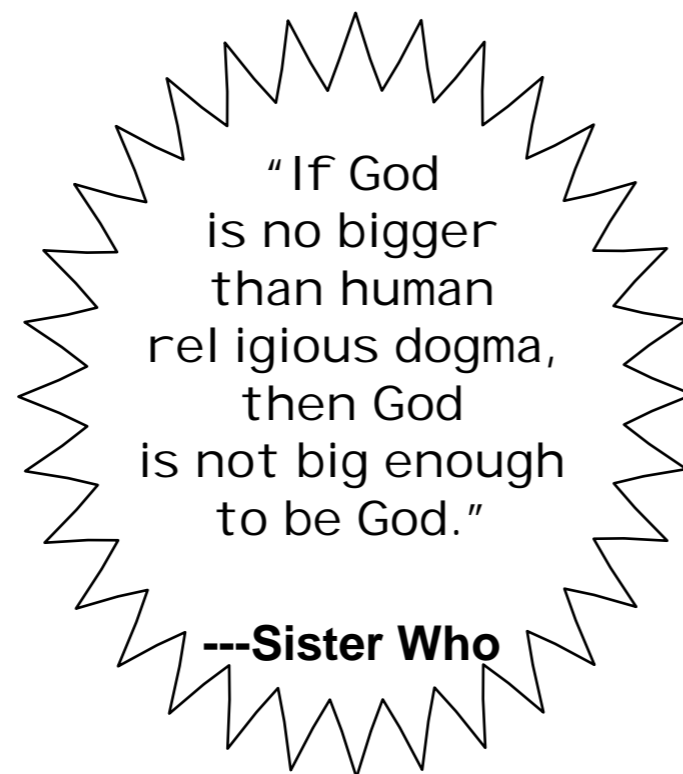
A month or so ago, a friend advised me to make greater use of my intuition when making decisions, but he cautioned me against being demanding with myself. Rather than look upon my intuition as a new muscle to develop, he suggested sitting quietly, meditating gently, and simply listening to whatever my intuition or sub-conscious mind might wish to tell me—even if it didn’t want to say anything at all for a while. It does make sense that our deepest thoughts and understandings will come out, once they know it’s safe to do so. So much of how we think and behave is nothing more than the result of social conditioning, which judges nearly everything and derides that which it deems inappropriate or unnecessary.

Perhaps this is a little like the way humanity has for centuries derided and laughed at those who are different in any way. Each person or thing has an insight or an understanding or a contribution to offer

and we impoverish ourselves if we do anything to encourage the feeling that a particular contribution is not welcome or a particular difference is dangerous to confess. Each of us is a goldmine of new and wonderful things by which humanity could be enriched, but as with all living things, the treasures God has hidden within each of us must be nurtured and supported and protected and utilized.

Giving someone an opportunity to do what he or she is particularly good at doing, is a high compliment and could invite even more great accomplishments and gifts to the world—which is why I continue to insist that each person is a “care-package” from God. What remains is to dramatically improve our skills of opening and communicating with each package and effectively sharing the contents.

As we face an uncertain future with the usual possibilities of economic disaster, war, incurable disease, and societal breakdown, I believe we will find that God has hidden our salvation within the diversity that is each one of us. May one and all and everything, blessed and loved ever be.



The Irony of Divine Perspective

I went for a drive with a friend the other day, past a house my ex-lifepartner and I had completely remodeled several years ago.

During the five years we lived there, we had reworked every wall, ceiling, and floor (including fifteen hundred square feet of ceramic tile flooring), replaced all of the windows and doors, added about three tons of rock landscaping and extensive gardens, planted about three dozen trees and bushes, reworked half of the wiring, reinsulated the attic and basement, torn out several walls, installed new kitchen cupboards, repaired the plumbing, and reconstructed the stairs to descend in the opposite direction at an angle that was less steep and therefore more manageable.

During the first year after we sold the house, we noticed that nothing outside was watered (the house is located in a very dry valley) and that therefore almost all of the bushes, trees, and perennial flowers died, the one exception being the dragon’s blood sedum in the flowerbed by the driveway, which is more suited to desert-like environments.

The next year we noticed that the adjoining lot which we’d purchased to provide for a bit of “elbow room” between ourselves and the neighbors was sold and a large unattractive house built there.

This last time (and I suspect it will be the last time I drive by to see what’s become of all of our hard work), I noticed that the rock landscaping around the driveway was being removed. What was most challenging--well, okay, initially it was infuriating--was that the rocks had been moved across the road and arranged next to that neighbor’s driveway to form a planter for the last surviving remnants of the the dragon’s blood sedum perennial groundcover we’d planted. The reason I initially felt very angry at seeing this most recent change, is that the man who lived there was unquestionably the most unfriendly of all to us during the time we lived there. It was as if “the enemy” had stolen some of our treasure.

Reflecting upon this later, however, I knew I needed to find a different perspective which would allow me to escape the feeling of being victimized and which would also reaffirm my belief in a higher sense of order and justice within

the world in which I live. I did not wish to lie to myself about this change nor pretend anything different from what I was honestly feeling, but I also did not wish to become the prisoner of circumstances over which I had no control.

As I meditated and prayed before the small altar I have set up in my bedroom, asking for the eyes of divine love to give me a more empowering understanding, I began to realize that the new owners of the house which had once been my home had no appreciation for the beauty my ex-lifepartner and I had left there nor any willingness to do the work necessary to maintain that beauty. The oppressive neighbor across the road had both. A small piece of the beauty we’d created would survive by means of a supposed enemy’s ability to perceive beauty and his willingness to do the work necessary to maintain that beauty.

I still find myself feeling rather dumbfounded by the irony of this new interpretation, which did not require the altering or denial of any of the facts.

What makes this new perspective possible, is my own willingness to accept a larger perspective of the event, a willingness to truly see and appreciate “both sides of the coin.” I think a significant part of this ability is also the time which has passed. Sometimes we’re standing too close to perceive situations in ways that are more personally empowering.

Most importantly, after this meditation, I found myself at peace with what had happened and able to move on with my life. I found a greater appreciation and acceptance also, of the different stages and phases of life and the necessity of moving from one to another, of not chaining myself to the “good times” which are almost ridiculously romanticized within my memory now.

All times and all events as well, it seems, are a combination of good and bad qualities. Somehow in viewing the curious mix from a higher perspective, more often than not, I’m okay with things being whatever they are. May one and all and everything, blessed and loved ever be.