

personal growth in the process.

What prevents such lessons from being learned? Often it is the dark side of our emotions, specifically that I am too busy being angry that things didn't go the way I wanted them to go, to notice the blessings that slipped in through the back door when I wasn't looking. If all I see is my own expectation, I will miss what I have actually been given.

Like an unexpected guest who shows up at my front door just when I was expecting a visit from someone else, I may have just received an unequalled opportunity but there is an emotional adjustment which needs to be processed just as quickly as possible. If I spend too much time grieving the absence of the guest I expected, the unexpected guest (and opportunity) may feel unwelcome and leave.

Should that happen, I suppose I would again find myself looking into the mirror, wondering where to go from here. The perpetual blessing is that I will always be able to go somewhere, even if I can never go where the unexpected guest could have led me. The road may be different, but there is always a road to follow and a face in the mirror with a small divine spark twinkling in its eyes to guide me--if only I will trust rather than judge it.

Perhaps the most challenging aspect of the face in the mirror, is that the answer to every question I ask of it, is silence. Like perhaps all of us, I have been raised to associate communication primarily with speaking and listening. Perhaps this is the next clue, however, that the greatest answers and the greatest guidance come within moments of silence when I have surrendered to whatever the work of my life will become, when I have conceded that God should be god and I should be the man that I am.

It seems the conclusion that I always come back to, eventually, is that it is God's job to see to the unfolding of the universe and my job to simply love and pray within each moment I find myself to be. It is love that heals and prayer that dispels the word "impossible." My privilege is to simply be part of it all rather than a mere observer on the sidelines.

Whether the world around us is filled with peace or war, let us dance the steps of love and holiness which can be found within every human heart. May one and all and everything, blessed and loved ever be.

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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

Straining for 'Critical Mass'

One of the few terms I remember from a high school science class is "critical mass", which referred (if I remember correctly) to the point at which a certain ingredient within a chemical reaction reached the quantity at which the interaction of the ingredients would become visible and the chemical composition of each would in fact change. Until that point was reached, however, it was necessary to simply wait and/or continue to add more of a specific ingredient to the container within which the reaction would eventually occur.

Similarly, until a lobster has grown enough to raise the pressure upon its external shell to a certain level, the shell will not split and a new and larger version of the lobster's self cannot emerge. The internal self must become dissatisfied with the external self's limitations before actions of dynamic growth become important enough to pursue.

Yet so many people whom I've encountered of late, do not wish to become dissatisfied with their external selves. They seem to wish for the convenience and comfort of the corpse in the coffin, more than for the miracle of a small flower's struggle to grow creating a crack in even the most hardened stone. I don't think we need to debate which of the two contains more divine life and presence.

On one hand, I would argue that everyone is free to make such a choice, to choose the comfort of the coffin over the hardships of blooming high on the side of a mountain. We live in a world filled with diverse conflicts, with abusive and destructive forces of all sorts, and with people who find it inconvenient to care about others, to pursue wisdom and

understanding, or to make even the smallest effort to leave the world better than they found it.

On the other hand, I hear many complaints about how things just keep getting worse within our world. Duh! What else do these people think that not caring about others, not pursuing wisdom and understanding, and not making even the smallest effort to leave the world better than they found it, will produce?

I was discussing this with my friend on the telephone yesterday, he being a Gay rancher in Wyoming who is also paraplegic. Mostly I value his friendship because he has so much good common sense about difficult questions. His metaphor was that people have hired a fox to guard the chicken coop and now are complaining that there are no eggs to have for breakfast. So the people go to the fox and present the problem of not having any eggs at breakfast time and the Fox responds, "Oh, don't worry about a thing. I'll take care of it for you." "Oh, thank you," the people respond, "it's so good to know that a competent person like yourself has things well in hand. Now we can get a good night's sleep, knowing that there will be eggs for breakfast in the morning." The next morning of course, there are still no eggs.

After a week of repeating this same scenario every day, the people begin to think that not having eggs for breakfast is absolutely normal. For reasons unknown, it never occurs to them to GET RID OF THE FOX! What makes this story even more perplexing, however, is that there are in fact a few people who have actually seen the fox kill and eat the chickens but they would rather say

nothing than start an argument by making accusations--in spite of the fact that the accusations would be absolutely true. Their light of truth is completely worthless, hidden as it is, under a nearby bushel basket.

At one time, there were so many lights under so many bushel baskets that the entire yard would have been as bright as day if they had all been uncovered. As time passes, however, more and more of the lights begin to suffocate and burn out within their small enclosed spaces. Ultimately the night becomes so dark that no one is able any longer to see what crimes the fox may commit within the blinding darkness, up to and including the individual murdering of each one of them, until no one is left.

So the corpse lies within its coffin, the very picture of serenity, seeming to be only asleep, its face painted to resemble a more lifelike healthy glow. Yet as time passes, the colors fade and need to be reapplied. The real problem of course is that eventually the corpse rots away and there is nothing left to support the painted facial makeup.

One of the most widespread challenges within American society today is the focus upon nice external appearances without sufficient regard for internal conditions. The problem of course is that at some point, just like the corpse, there simply is not enough form and structure left, to support the external appearance any longer. The layers of whitewash collapse and the true state of the body is revealed. What seems most peculiar to me, is that everyone reacts with shock at what (on some level) they knew was occurring all along but didn't wish to acknowledge, even to themselves.

The most baffling aspect of all, of our current societal and world problems, is that we are in fact smart enough and knowledgeable enough to know better. It is no secret that one cannot commit an act of violence toward any other person without sowing the seeds of future

violence towards one's self. It is no secret that one cannot lie to one's self or others without sowing within one's self, the seeds of psychological and emotional dysfunction. It is no secret that if we live for nothing greater than ourselves and our own expectations of life, we will have forfeited our very souls to the mundane patterns and potentially destructive forces of physical life. We will cease to truly believe in anything at all.

But perhaps if we shine a light into the darkness, people might begin to remember what they've lost and how very much the external appearance of niceness has cost them.

Perhaps if there is even one example of something a little bit different, people will remember how to think of new possibilities rather than just repeating all that has already been done.

Perhaps if even just one person succeeds in walking through life with integrity, honesty, and love, a few others may want to follow and create their own individual examples of integrity, honesty, and love.

Perhaps, just perhaps, in seeing something different, the world's people would decide they'd had enough of apathy, homelessness, poverty, hunger, bigotry, violence, injustice, and ignorance.

Perhaps such a miracle could begin with each one of us.

"Until discontent reaches 'critical mass', nothing will change; within ourselves or within our world."

---Sister Who

Once Again to the Mirror

Which mirror? The mirror of a million faces; the mirror of every person I meet and every experience I feel, each and every day. Whenever something upsets me and I find myself lashing out in anger or defensiveness (or at least tempted to do so), even in private after the moment has passed, I try to remind myself to be open to the exploration and discovery of a dialogue with myself.

Recently, I was faced with a most challenging close-minded person who seemed devoid of any receptive senses, neither hearing nor seeing anything I attempted to communicate. Again and again I prayed for wisdom, asking how I might express divine love toward this person in spite of the ways I was being continually devalued and even attacked.

What finally came through was the mirror, the willingness to at least ask whether there was any way I was unconsciously practicing similarly reprehensible actions toward others. Though no specific examples came to mind, it finally occurred to me that close-mindedness and attempts to control others, frequently go hand-in-hand. In those moments when I am attempting to control someone or something, I may be closing my mind to new possibilities and perspectives. My eyes and ears begin to shut down, seeing only what I am trying to accomplish and hearing only what supports my personal agenda.

As an artist who has worked in a large number of different creative mediums, one thing I have found with nearly everything I have ever created, is that usually fairly early in the process, the specific work being created seems to take on a life of its own. In those times when I have been willing to listen to the work, to allow it to teach me, and to allow it to take an alternate route which sometimes even leads to an alternate destination, I find the end result is usually greater than anything I could have planned or expected. Ultimately, the work itself is wiser than me, its creator.

So I find it very important, knowing what a combination of strengths and weaknesses I am, to begin each day by asking whether or not I really am doing the best I can and in what areas I could perhaps do a little better today.

Generally, I do not trip over the first stepping stone in my path, if I am looking and listening to where I am going, instead of rehearsing my preselected monologue for the day within my mind.

The flip side of this are those persons whom I encounter who seem to think that I am to be their next creative project, every detail and characteristic already thoroughly planned by them without any investigation into the unique qualities of the creative medium (by which I am referring to myself). Generally their creative process is thoroughly vetoed and rejected very early in the process. I have been far too independent for such manipulations by others since even before kindergarten.

Is it that our subconscious mind recalls that we are all created in the image of the divine and supreme being and therefore erroneously inspires us to play god with each other? If that's true, the fact nevertheless remains that we do not have the breadth of vision and understanding necessary to fill such a role successfully. All of our attempts produce only flawed results which are nevertheless what we find we must live with from that point onwards.

I hear some begin at that point to make excuses for their flawed accomplishments and argue in favor of the impossibility of perfection--not because they have suddenly stopped believing in pursuing that which is perfect but rather because they do not wish to accept an honest evaluation of their work. In so doing, such people reinforce their limitations rather than transcending them.

Within every work, no matter how flawed, there is always something that went right in spite of all the contrary odds and something that went wrong unnecessarily. With regard to the first, I can reflect upon how the good happened in spite of me. With regard to the second, I can formulate preventive measures to take during the next attempt. A little bit of thinking ahead can prevent some problems from ever occurring. Indeed, I sometimes wonder whether with just the right information, perhaps even the majority of life's problems could be minimized or avoided, without sacrificing