

SISTER WHO'S PERSPECTIVE

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Overview

Many people go to great lengths to avoid certain words rather than embrace and order them with mature understanding. I find that I have thus often been a trailblazer, starting conversations and releasing them like a kite into the wind: minimally tethered, if possible, so that it does not fall to the ground before its dynamics can be fully appreciated.

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

Noticing Mistakes

The primary difficulty of this arises from the fact that the classification of any action as being a mistake is inescapably subjective. Any shift in perspective or available information could change the classification. Noticing any possibility for such a shift and determining whether or not that particular shift would be empowering or debilitating is yet another important step within coming to terms with one's circumstances and responses within a particular situation.

Among the inherent challenges of physical life on earth is that circumstances and considerations are always changing. What was not a mistake at the beginning could turn out to be one later, as one's interpretation of the relevant circumstances, responses, and events evolves. Similarly, what initially seems like a mistake could be reinterpreted as a chance to explore an unanticipated possibility that ultimately transforms the circumstances or interaction from bad to good.

Integral to such noticing of mistakes is also the possibility of becoming more aware of one's own assumptions. In order to perceive anything as being a mistake, a pre-existing pattern or collection of values, assumptions, and interpretations must be present. Only by perceiving particular results and characteristics as desirable or undesirable, is the foundation

for labeling anything a mistake created.

Desire has often been described in unflattering terms, especially by religious professionals, but it may be closer to the truth to assert that this emotion of attraction provides enormous energy and even courage. The challenge, of course, is retaining integration with whatever wisdom and mental awareness one possesses. The instinctive response is not always the most helpful one.

In learning to ski, one of the instinctive reactions I needed to retrain was the natural impulse to lean away from a fall. It is only by leaning into the fall, that the edges of my skis are able to grab hold of the ice and snow. Only by integrating mind and body, was I able to ski through icy conditions.

Yet a contrasting point of awareness within most western thought, is the assumption that wise choices can prevent every imaginable misfortune and disaster. Countless examples, however, confirm that this is not true. One can make all of the right choices, never do anything wrong, and still experience misfortune. The assumption that everything is controlled by choices, predisposes many people to being far too judgmental, condescending, and inclined to blame the victim for any misfortune he or she experiences in dealing with societal adversity.

The challenge then is not only to notice poor judgment, but also to notice any absence of mistakes which accompanies particular unfortunate experiences, suggesting that the source of the problem lies elsewhere. Even in the presence of bad judgment, however, empathy and compassion are among the most important ingredients of genuine healing. Yet if one fails to even notice a need for such, no healing will occur and nothing good will follow.

Central to all of this is shifting one's practices of noticing from passive to active; being actively part of the solution, rather than an accomplice of an ongoing problem.

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

Accepting Mistakes

An essential part of accepting a mistake, is recognizing that it was simply one of many more or less equal possibilities. Blaming is pretty much always a waste of time, although determining cause and effect relationships can be helpful--if it is done compassionately. The notion that what appears to be a mistake was actually a divine intention, however, can be downright cruel if the assertion is made by anyone other than the victim(s) of the mistake.

Additionally, if one interprets a mistake as being "what Godde intended all along," a certain discouragement is expressed to disagreeing with or responding badly to the mistake's occurrence. I don't know about anyone else, but I argue with Godde at least once nearly every single day. The freedom to disagree is actually inseparable from growth.

Accepting one's mistakes is thus more or less the same as accepting one's growth--along with any implications and/or alterations which that growth may include. Yet accepting one's mistakes is not only a matter of accepting responsibility for them, but also accepting that they are expressions of one's personal humanity, one's limitations, one's potentiality, and the levels of one's slowly developing expertise. Mistakes are not just errors within time, but also measurements of one's development that help to tell one's story.

It is not just a matter of accepting that one failed, but also truly accepting that one was willing to try--especially when others were unwilling. An attempt to accomplish a specific work may fail, but it is an indication of good character to be among those who showed up for the attempt. Perhaps a more obvious and applicable metaphor is that of professional sports teams, who know they must show up for the game, without knowing whether or not their efforts will ultimately be rewarded.

An important distinction is thus to accept one's mistakes in detail, rather than merely as vague generalities. If one does not know how and at what point failure became more likely than success, one will be ill-prepared the next time one is in a similar situation, to prevent a similarly disappointing outcome. Acceptance of mistakes is thus not something to be done in

a lackadaisical or careless manner.

Among the important details of such acceptance is the longevity and vitality of the particular mistake's effects. Most mistakes are actually not eternal in nature, but rather fade with time as other events of greater influence and impact take precedence. There is almost nothing of which a better and more developed example will not eventually arise.

That being the case, one's mistakes and one's self are both running a sort of relay race, receiving a baton of some sort from whomever or whatever came before us, which must then ultimately be passed to the next runner who continues from where one's portion of the race ends. None of us owns the particular baton, but we serve its journey through the full length of the race to be run. Accepting mistakes is a matter of accepting that we contribute to only part of the course and cannot manage the entire work all by ourselves.

Even if we do well, the work may later be sabotaged by someone else. Specifically because one is unable to prevent or control that possibility, one must instead focus upon avoiding failure within that portion of the race with which one interacts. The mere possibility of a later failure is insufficient reason to avoid beginning a race, just as much as the chance that one might lose a game is insufficient reason to avoid playing it.

It is fairly safe to say that every game will include mistakes. What nonetheless allows every game to still turn out to be a winning game is that the mistakes do not inherently have the power to define anything beyond the moment of their occurrence. Innumerable more successful moments may follow and shift the progression of the game dramatically in other more inspiring directions.

True acceptance involves attention to the entire spectrum of such possibilities and a certain vigilant patience that wants to see what each moment will bring. Mere tolerance of moments of inadequacy is not the launching pad from which better manifestation will follow.

We may hold hands or smile to each other from across the room, but we are winners because we persist in creating good together.

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

Owning Mistakes

Inherent within my understanding of ownership is the ability to decide how to utilize and interact with that which is owned. Owning a mistake is thus a way of subjecting the substance of that mistake to the dictates of one's ongoing creativity and ingenuity. As long as the mistake belongs to someone else, it is not for me to say what will be done with it next.

In a similar but reversed way, respecting others' ownership of mistakes includes leaving them sufficient time and space to try again in ways more likely to succeed. Within a sports game, if a player makes a mistake that initially is experienced as a set-back, the other players must either quickly forgive the mistake or else continue the game with a smaller number of available players. In a similar way, one must also be willing and ready to quickly forgive one's self in order to be ready for the next move within the overall game.

There is no one--not even one's self--who is capable of only mistakes. That being said, denying the occurrence or ownership of a mistake, very much gets in the way of better actions which could follow. While debating the nature of a particular mistake during a game would be an even greater distraction, failing to reflect upon the mistake afterward would invite the probability of diminished awareness within all subsequent competitive engagements.

There is an important but perhaps subtle distinction between contemplatively owning one's mistakes and, conversely, obsessing

"Financial budgets have often argued that dreams are impossible. Specifically because many have nonetheless been willing to try, many improbable things have been accomplished--one step at a time."

-- Sister Who

about one's failures. The first seeks deep understanding capable of empowering all subsequent action. The latter forms a sort of paralysis, as if the mind is stuck within an allegedly short-lived past moment of time.

Within the one high school auto repair course I studied, students were often given the task of disassembling and reassembling rather complicated engine components. Until we had taken the entire device completely apart and noted not only what the parts were and how they looked but also how they interconnected with each other, the wholeness of the particular part remained a mystery. If it failed to work, we could not know which aspect of its assembly was responsible, if we didn't even know what its constitutive parts were.

Within theological school years later, I was faced with similar challenges of defining theological concepts by disassembling or (in more academic language) deconstructing them into their constitutive terms, interpretations, and assumptions. My goal was not, however, the ability to define each particular term in detail, any more than the main goal of the auto repair course was to have the ability to disassemble and reassemble a thermoquad carburetor. My goal was to understand how these pieces could be effectively arranged and understood, to enable one to live a genuinely holy life.

Owning mistakes in ways that are constructive is one of many components that make the goal of a holy life not only possible, but also probable. What was most important at the conclusion of that auto repair course, was that I did not see an automobile as being an insurmountable mystery nor its maintenance as adversarial to important journeys throughout the remainder of my life.. What was most important at the conclusion of my masters degree program in theology, was having a way of continuing a spiritual path with integrity through more difficult experiential terrain than I had previously been able to manage.

Throughout human affairs is often the notion that rejecting ownership diminishes the power of a troublesome moment, when in fact it is the raw material from which better things can arise--but only if it is yours to command.

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

Transforming Mistakes

It is essential to notice the ways in which mistakes are more analogous to soft clay than to fired pottery, since these are opportunities for constructive shifts. All too often the hasty assumption that the constitutive pieces of the particular mistake cannot be reformed, is exactly what prevents such constructive action from happening. As much as there are hard grains of sand within unfired clay, there is a much greater amount of material which softens the moment any amount of water is added.

Symbolically, water is often used to represent the unformed inner qualities of dreams, imagination, and creativity. Within a world obsessed with industry, technology, and economics, however, such metaphorical water often goes unnoticed--leaving humanity more rigid and unresponsive than greater creative works inescapably require. Until the clay has actually been fired, however, adding water once again restores pliability and potentiality.

Yet even if the clay has been fired, one can still grind it again into powder and add it to unfired clay in order to provide greater strength and substance. What makes this metaphor perhaps a bit confusing to some is that each person is an ever-fluctuating combination of fired and unfired clay. Pausing to reflect upon which parts of one's self either are currently able to be modified, or can be made receptive to modification, identifies where new and wonderful creative works can begin to take shape and grow.

A temptation I often face by having an exceptional memory of certain past events, is wanting to return to the beauty I have known--and stagnate there. The past is often more beautiful than the present seems, but the central purpose of life is not existence within beautiful moments, but rather growth through a diversity of experiences. If we are not growing, learning, experiencing, and thus transforming, then we are not truly living--and time is running out to do whatever we're going to do within the current moment.

In the words of Abraham Lincoln, "whatever you are, be a good one."

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

On a Personal Note

Specifically because of who I am, I strive to make the best of each day. The truth with which I constantly wrestle, however, is that I am ill-equipped and ill-suited for my current human environment. Wonderful as it might be to think that my often reclusive presence is nevertheless having a profound effect, the toxicity within the surrounding population is often more than I have the resources, the strength, or the expertise to overcome.

In recalling the disastrous trip to Belgium in 2013, I wish I'd had more strength and support, but I'm trying to accept that being human is inseparable from limitations. In a similar way, I wonder whether greater strength would make a difference within my current life experiences in New Hampshire, or whether no amount of strength or public performance could inspire or persuade those who have set their minds and hearts in other directions.

So I am trying to lift my sights to more global horizons through writing, video work, and Internet communication. Of special note is that I am making good progress on a book many have requested since the beginning, telling more of the story of how this ministerial alter-ego came to be and what has transpired within the years since that time. If all goes well, I may be able to finish and publish that book before this year ends. Those who have seen bits and pieces of this work thus far, seem excited to read the rest of it, so I am doing my best not to disappoint them.

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

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*Sister Who a/k/a Rev. Denver NeVaar, MTS
97 Granite Street, 2nd Floor, Berlin, NH 03570
email: dn@SisterWho.com*

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

Additional Informational Internet Websites:

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