

sister who's perspective

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Overview

Within the magic of living life with as much multi-dimensional awareness as I am able, common phrases can sometimes take on extraordinary meanings. My hope in exploring some fairly common and traditional phrases, is that the insights gained thereby, will be empowering to each person reading this newsletter—who may also have still more empowering thoughts and considerations beyond what I have written here.

“For Better,for Worse”

It occurred to me the other day that while many have said that spirituality is not a recipe but rather a relationship, most have not gone one step further to consider the parameters by which such a relationship might be defined. How far will one go and what will one do, to express dedication and commitment? The value of any relationship could thus be described as equivalent to what one would sacrifice in order to defend, protect, or provide for that relationship.

Those which are dependent upon good circumstances, comfort, and convenience, must either avoid those depths of interaction which are inseparable from struggle, or accept that they will last only until the very first incidence of significant misfortune. If one's love is thus measured by how much pain one is willing to endure to protect or save the other, it is highly questionable whether one truly loves the other at all, if even mere inconvenience inspires withdrawal. What is thereby exposed, is the truth of whether one is optional or essential to the other in any way that truly matters.

Perhaps it is a very trite thing to say, but for me at least, physical life is far too short to tolerate being treated as optional by anyone who personally matters. I continue

to believe that each of us is here for a reason and that this cannot be effectively served by trivializing each other or the details of one's life. Time is running out and it is imperative to make the best use of it.

I cringe a little inside whenever I hear someone advocate for “not taking one's self too seriously.” What is usually behind that, is a person who is unwilling to face something that it is very important for that person to face. If one does not address whatever is “worse” within one's life, hoping it will just fade away on its own, one devalues and disempowers one's self in relation to what could otherwise be accomplished.

The assumption that rules are more important than the lives they were created to serve, creates self-imposed blindness that severs one's self from the collaborative blessings which would otherwise follow. In recognizing that life can unfold in both positive and negative directions, sometimes in defiance of the wisest choices anyone could make, the strength that gives one's commitment the power to endure, is finding and treasuring the value of the other which remains unchanged by fortune's whims. As a minister long ago instructed me, it is not “I love you if...” or “I love you because...” but rather “I love you” (unconditionally).

The question at the heart of this essay, is whether one can say the same thing to any conception of the Divine that one holds. If I love Godde truly, that love must be first, last, and always unconditional—not dependent upon whether life experiences tickle or hurt—and the same needs to be something I can say about every other relationship of love as well. Going one step further, if love is not real, what difference does it make if anything else is real in any way whatsoever?

Life experience continues to impress upon me,however, that love is absolutely real, if also a bit rare within the current time.

Nonetheless, may one and all and everything, blessed and loved ever be.

“For Richer, for Poorer”

I've had to say it so many times during the past two decades that even I myself am getting tired of hearing it: “When money becomes the measure, community always suffers.” A similar theme can be found within perhaps the majority of holiday television specials, within which the focus is more often upon renewing vital personal relationships. I somehow interpreted from hearing this message so often and within so many places, that it's something everyone is actually supposed to do.

Even after so many years of hearing that love is more important than money and yet observing how few people live this out within their lives, I remain baffled by how universal self-sabotaging narcissism and greed have become. The phrase which forms the title of this particular essay, however, although drawn from traditional marriage vows, has a much broader and deeper meaning than most seem to realize. They are easy to say, but difficult to swallow when one begins to think of all of the possible examples within which they must be lived out, if they are to have any inherent integrity at all.

If, heaven forbid, the future holds a loss of income or financial resources, come home to me and we will weather this unexpected storm together. If the promotion, reward, bonus check, or inheritance one was promised, fails to materialize, know that I will not similarly abandon or even neglect you. If the contribution you intended to make or the gift you intended to bestow turns out to be either beyond your ability or inadequately acknowledged, such that it is robbed of its logical effects within the lives of others and yourself, know that your worth to me will nonetheless never decrease.

What is sometimes confusing within such moments, however, is the variety of ways that such dedication and commitment may be expressed. Loving someone doesn't always mean ensuring that his or her life experiences are perfect, pleasant, or even palatable. “You could have prevented this from happening,” one may hear or express

to others, as a painful moment unfolds.

To say that this allowance of difficulty or pain was intended to be instructive, would be resoundingly arrogant and adversarial to any relationship of trust thus far built. Yet in some cases, the allowance may not have been intentional. “If I'd been thinking more quickly, I would have done so,” one might lament, recognizing a missed opportunity.

I have often had this sort of argument with Godde throughout the last three years—which forms what one might call my personal experience of Theodicy, a peculiar term utilized almost exclusively within the world of graduate-level theological school. More concisely and directly phrased, this would be, “if Godde truly loves me, why would this ever be allowed?”

Perhaps the only acceptable response, with which I similarly baffled my professor of that particular course, was that the problem of Theodicy is potentially only real within the realm of limited human thinking. It is not always adequately encouraging, but I try to occasionally be thankful that a perspective exists from which the adversity and chaos of my current season of life would not only make sense but also seem formative and recommendable. It doesn't make the experience less painful, but if the pain serves a higher purpose—even if that purpose is presently unknown—the pain doesn't seem to matter as much as the unknown higher purpose matters.

One friend suggested this is a common phenomenon within lives dedicated to any form of spiritual service. More concisely, it is not that life is pleasant or that one is happy, but rather than one is engaged in activity that truly matters. Even if one never directly knows love and happiness, if the work one leaves behind at the time physical life ends, ultimately blesses the lives of countless others with love and happiness, none of the struggle would have been in vain.

If for now I must endure struggles, I ask only that they not be meaningless. If I have found the strength to live with integrity, failure will thus be no more than an illusion.

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

“In Sickness and in Health”

Perhaps the most difficult part of being ill or afflicted, is the remembrance of when one was not. From one perspective, this validates an experience of loss as being exactly that. Conversely, this may also suggest that such blessed and happy seasons of life will return—like the persistent recurrence of spring after winter within successive rotations around the sun.

Yet when spring does finally return, little time is spent bemoaning the loss of the previous year’s springtime. The primary challenge, therefore, is surviving the times in between; the confusing, disorienting, and discouraging transition between one way of being and another. What makes virtually every marriage ceremony blindly optimistic and naive, therefore, is that the persons making promises to each other, cannot say for certain what each will become or how each will be affected by all the unknown experiences which follow.

Perhaps at the heart of this transition is the degree to which each is aware of being a creature of time without the ability to always remain the same, yet choosing not only to go forward anyway, but to do this with specific collaborative company. Ideally, this is never a purely intellectual choice, specifically because of how much mystery, discovery, and personal evolution will unavoidably be part of the continually unfolding process. All that each is and will become is realigned to be symbiotically entwined like a DNA helix, with what is distinct from one’s self.

The complexities are obviously radically increased within commitments to any sort of extended family or larger community. It may be that many if not most of humanity’s

current struggles are tied to a decrease of such commitments to each other. Healing, in this case, is a matter of rediscovering and reinvigorating genuine love for each other—without which survival is very questionable.

In raising this point within various conversations, the response I most often observe is that everyone seems to be waiting for the other person to go first. Like the Dr. Suess story of “The Zax,” life does not continue for those so engaged, even while life continues all around them and wondrous experiences of healing and even empowerment are readily available. In focusing so resolutely upon nothing beyond themselves and their own agendas, they have become the primary adversaries of any and all subsequent life experience.

What the story does not address, is how they are both running out of time. The moments of life characterized by sickness are nonetheless moments of life which can be shared and during which relationships can be formed and nurtured. The moments of health are similarly so, but all too often taken for granted or invested in activities of no relational or developmental significance.

At some point, there will be no more moments left to share and one will not care so much whether it was a moment of sickness or health, if one could only have any such moment just one more time. I am reminded of my Old English Sheepdog, Gareth, in relation to which I still often recite the verse, “If love could build a stairway and memories a lane, I’d walk right up to heaven and bring you home again.” He was not always the most well-behaved dog, but I never once had to question his love for me.

So I am left with the question from time to time, of whether to remain present when it is neither convenient nor comfortable nor even pleasant to do so, specifically because the time will most definitely come when I no longer have this ability. It is not true that Godde never gives one more than one can handle, but I remain convinced even within feeling overwhelmed, that it is still possible to demonstrate what sort of person one truly is.

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

*"The world often tells us
that we're not allowed
to say 'no' to its demands,
but history is pretty much made
by those who do."*

-- Sister Who

“Until Death”

I was aware while engaged for six years in my doctoral program that I was doing work of high quality upon which others might build their own unique contributions to greater human understanding. When the school abruptly withdrew all support for my program even though I was nearly finished, my life was devastated in a wide variety of ways. I do hope that circumstances will ultimately allow me to finish that work, but I also try to trust that a reason this sabotage may have been allowed, was that the information was ahead of its time in way that would have seriously damaged its wider success.

When in spite of extensive searching my only available options seemed to be two thousand miles away on the east coast, I decided to be open to the idea that this ministerial work needed to be redefined as a global work rather than being exclusively associated with Colorado. Subsequent developments have made me wonder if I somehow made an enormous mistake in attempting such relocation, but I am trying to be patient and remember that my story is far from its end. The years ahead are likely to produce still more radical experiential shifts.

I mention all of this specifically because there seems to be a preoccupation within the words of the title of this essay, upon the radical transition of death, which neglects healthy consideration of what constitutes the word, “until.” A similar negative accusation is often leveled at hikers of high mountains, who are sometimes accused of being “peak baggers,” which is to say that they are only concerned for the destination and fail to remain committed and aware within each step of the journey. It is not that the journey should not have a destination and it is not that the destination should overshadow the journey, but rather that both collaborate in creating a wholeness that is greater than the sum of its contrasting pieces and periods.

A primary challenge is that one is usually standing too close to the current moment to respect the larger empowering dimensions.

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

On a Personal Note

The second of five photo-shoots for the creation of The Tarot of Sister Who was successful. Preparations for two of the remaining three photo shoots include finding suitable locations, while preparations for a different pair of the three include collection or creation of two to three dozen additional props. Nonetheless, successful completion of this project in early October seems likely.

I have received no further communication from the filmmaker who expressed interest in creating a documentary of this work, that due to other current commitments is planned to begin in August. I am nonetheless excited to see the approach he will select, considering how multi-dimensional my life has thus far been—all of which has contributed in one way or another to the literal and metaphorical content of this unconventional ministry. It is sometimes bewildering to me, to be the embodiment of so many possible stories, but I try to trust that the work is wiser than I am and follow wherever it leads, doing my best within each and every step along the way.

It is often a painful and difficult journey during which I must tolerate being frequently misunderstood, but I try to remember to embody the larger dimensions of the journey rather than the smallness of any particular moment or experience. While I do make my requests known to Godde, I strive to trust that higher wisdom selects the best answers.

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

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