

Sister Who's Perspective

Sister Who's Perspective, Issue #55, January 2004, copyright

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

Daybreak

What a curious way to describe the onset of new creative activity.

Perhaps it is a suggestion that something must be broken before we can build or rebuild, a suggestion which is often disregarded and unheeded as I leap from my bed to turn off the alarm clock and hurry to the kitchen to give my dogs their breakfast. Perhaps even a moment's pause during which I break my mind's preoccupation with the activities and responsibilities I have planned for the day, would allow me more of that inner reconnection by which I can encounter the day with more peace, wisdom, and strength.

A new year has begun, initiating thereby a new day of sorts, for us to collectively create and define. Certainly we will have many moments within the next "day" of 2004, within which we find ourselves in sharp disagreement with others.

I pray that within such moments, however, we will find also a remembrance of quiet early morning moments when we focus upon more than just our own agendas; when perhaps we listen for just a moment, to how quiet and how in harmony the world is and how there is something within such moments pleading with us not to drive it away with excessive worry and competition.

Sleep in? You can if you like. If I could work my will, I would get up before dawn each day, just to watch the sun rise. I was once told that there have been tribal societies in the past which did exactly that, entire villages rising while it was still dark to sing the sun up into the sky once again, consciously and actively recognizing how completely dependent upon its blessings they were (not that we are any less so today, but we don't seem to pay as much attention to that fact).

Is there anything about which it is truly worth becoming violent, once one has begun the day with such an act of humility and harmony? How different our world would be if everyone began every day with some such ritual.

Yet it is somewhat ironic and a mostly unheeded message perhaps, that we follow (at least within the United States) a holiday season focusing upon giving and a general love and good will toward

all other people, with the season for dealing with taxes and other financial concerns; a time of internally focusing upon wealth followed by a time of externally focusing upon degrees of poverty.

If nothing else we are certainly an age which has become obsessed with its economics, to the point of overlooking or even forgetting what purpose all of this economic exchange is supposed to serve. That we even allow this obsession to provoke us to abuse and violence toward one another, suggests a sort of societal mental illness.

Like physical health, mental health is not something which is maintained by accident or without any conscious attention.

In the same way that I encourage my personal mental health by taking a few moments each morning to remember who I am and in what I believe, as a new year dawns breaks upon us, emerging from its shell with undiscovered potential, there is a great need for each community, nation, and population to take a good look into a mirror, to see who we are, what we have become, and what we will therefore strive to become within the day that is unfolding.

In a very real sense, we must begin by breaking. We must break through the shell of our past definitions and give ourselves the freedom and ability to be better today than we have ever been. We must break free of old ideas which no longer serve us, allowing them to be appreciated historical patterns that previously shaped us but not the limitations within which all future moments must find their form. We must break through any and all walls of arrogance, presumption, apathy, closed-mindedness, or hostility toward others, if we are instead to draw out our own and each others' best and most beautiful contributions to life today.

Most of all, we must break through whatever separates us from being people of divine love, which is the omnipresent "sun" which will not rise, if we do not sing it up into the sky once more.

Principles into Patterns

I am often speaking of having personal commitments to divine love and wisdom, compassion, and believing in each other. I suspect that far too often I also presume that the application of such things to life is as obvious to everyone else as it generally is to me. If one has never seen any such demonstration, however, it may be difficult to know where to start or to discern how such things may be applied to new or ever-changing life situations.

While I certainly do not have the last word on the subject, perhaps I could offer some ideas to get your own creative ideas flowing.

A couple of years ago, I encountered someone who seemed to be a person of good will but who ultimately was willing to actively help with a problem situation in only the most minimal way, due to a stated concern of not creating an emotionally codependent relationship. The notion that one would rather stand by and watch a friend perish than risk an inappropriate emotional attachment (which could be dealt with later as a separate issue), seemed quite absurd to me at the time and still does.

My gratitude at this point goes to my friend Jean, who is blind, who years ago gave me much good food for thought on the subject of helping others. While it is good to have the desire to help others, one must integrate a listening ear ("what kind of help would you like?") and a hand up rather than a hand-out also.

It is not helpful to do for others what they need to do for themselves (a bodybuilder must lift his own weights in order to develop his own muscles), but it is also not helpful to offer no attention or encouragement to those who struggle to lift heavier weights than they have generally ever lifted before (having a "spotter" standing ready to assist in case muscles which have been worked hard suddenly give out, is a typical safety measure at many health clubs and professional gyms).

When I simply don't know what to do but would like to help someone whom I can tell is struggling, I sometimes directly ask, "is there anything I can do to help?" Sometimes there isn't, but sometimes there is. If the person wants me to do it for them (like a weightlifter who doesn't want to lift his own weights), I might suggest we do it together. "I'll take half and you take half and we'll have it done in half the time."

I generally only attempt this once, however, if the person wanders off, hoping I will do both halves. If the suggestion ever comes up again, I would brush it aside with the calm, honest statement, "well, we tried that last time and it didn't seem to work like it was supposed to. Is there some other approach we could try?" For my part, however, I do need to be willing to brainstorm until a workable solution can somehow be found.

It is also good to put parameters around the help one can offer and stick to those parameters, for example, "I can spare fifteen minutes, but after that, whether we're finished or not, I will need to get to my next appointment" or perhaps "I'm free next Sunday afternoon, if you'd like to work on it then."

Balancing satisfying one's own needs with maintaining one's self as a generous and helpful person is simply being smart; it is not being stingy or selfish or uncaring. By being a generous and helpful person, one can maintain healthy self-esteem and approach challenges with relatively good confidence in one's ability to rise to the occasion. By taking care of one's self as well, the ability to remain a generous and helpful person is sustained.

Yet as I have often said, "life is a collaborative effort: we all take turns being the one in need." In such times as these and to those who have found themselves unwillingly within such times, it is important to remember that just as there

*"Be careful
never to spend more time
thinking about how bad
some person, possibility,
or circumstance is,
than you spend thinking
about how to go on
shining the light
of divine love and presence
in spite of whatever
may oppose it."*

---Sister Who

are people who need to receive, there are sometimes people who need to give. Sometimes I have decided to receive a gift even if it didn't seem particularly essential, specifically because I recognized within the other, a need to give.

More generally speaking, I find that we too often seek only the "big" or significant actions of giving and receiving and are almost completely oblivious to the myriad of little ways we each fill the world with varying degrees of light and love, in each moment and place within which our lives unfold.

Little things like a friendly smile, a couple moments of patience, a more courteous and considerate style of driving through rush-hour traffic, or pausing long enough to hold a door open for the next person entering, can subtly but completely change the flavor of that moment of someone's life experience.

I sometimes have spoken of believing in each other, that if anything ever succeeds in rendering the human race extinct, having not done so will somehow be part of the cause.

What does it mean to believe in someone? I suggest that it begins with giving him or her a legitimate way to get his or her needs met. I choose not to give money to pan-handlers and beggars, partially because I don't know whether they are actually con men but more especially because I don't know whether that is in fact the most effective way to help them. I have, on the other hand, given some extra muffins I had with me on one occasion and an extra pair of gloves on another occasion which happened in early winter.

A less obvious situation might be to look around for someone who really needs to feel connected and supported, when needing to get a particular job done. The mechanic to whom I take my car whenever it needs repair is an exceptionally honest and hard-working man (and a very good mechanic besides) who immigrated from Czechoslovakia years ago, yet who is still faced with more than the average amount of struggle in providing for his wife and infant child.

On many occasions I have helped friends who did not have the financial resources to simply hire a moving company, to move their possessions from one address to another. Occasionally there were children hanging about while their parents helped to move furniture. They so wanted to be part of what was happening but did not have the physical strength to contribute, as their parents did. Rather than send them away, I specifically held

back lighter things such as sofa cushions and pillows for them to carry out when the time was right. They just wanted to be part of what was going on, to know that in spite of their limited strength, they had also contributed to a successful relocation of the household.

Sometimes the best help we can offer, is express confidence in others and then give them the time and, if necessary the privacy, to do their work.

I recall the time when a good friend of mine was working on a song which was inspired by the story of *The Velveteen Rabbit*, but which had been too directly lifted out of the book to avoid possible copyright violations. I encouraged her to keep the inspiration but to let the song become her own.

Then I gathered up every teddy bear and stuffed animal I had in the house, arranged them in the spare bedroom, and closed the door, leaving my friend and her guitar undisturbed there for perhaps a couple of hours.

At the end of that time, she emerged with a much more powerful and more broadly focused song, simply entitled, "Velveteen." A few months ago, she told me it was one of the songs she hoped to include within her next recorded album of songs for children. Personally I think "Velveteen" deserves to become a major hit, but I do hope in any case that all of you will get to hear it at some point in the future.

But what does it really mean to believe in others, to believe that it really is possible for them to somehow reach their maximum potential? Sometimes it can be as simple as reminding them to keep trying, to never give up on their dreams; to remember that it is better to ask "what would it take?" than to label something "impossible."

Sometimes believing in someone means setting things aside which can wait until another day, and getting ones hands dirty by helping with gardening, cleaning, remodeling, decorating, or brainstorming for just whatever amount of time one can spare.

During the long and frustrating period of remodeling my current home, I invited all the help I could get from my friends. One insisted that because of a back injury, there was absolutely nothing he could do. "How about handing me nails or measuring boards and making pencil marks or just keeping me company so I'm not working all alone all day long?" I asked, already knowing the answer.

Once I was able to persuade half a dozen friends to come for an afternoon to paint the exterior of the house and on another occasion a friend came and helped to pack away all non-essential items for temporary storage while a extensive interior finish work was done (for both of which I was very thankful).

Beyond all of that, however, the friend who impressed me the most was in his mid to late seventies and had never before had any opportunity to work with construction tools of any kind. He insisted he was positively thrilled to be learning so many new things and spent more hours working with me on my home than nearly anyone else, helping to lay flooring, build walls, put up insulation, and connect wiring. To any watching eye, we may have been simply rebuilding a home. Where no eye could see, however, we were building a friendship of enduring depth and strength, more exceptional than nearly any other friendship I've ever known; the only obvious exception being my now ex-lifepartner, with whom I shared almost nine years, though that friendship continues to this day as well.

So what does it really mean to believe in each other, to love even the unlovely, to be patient with those whose growth is still insufficient for them to understand, and to coexist with evil while striving to embody and express all that is good?

Clearly there is no "one-size-fits-all" answer to such a question. For me, it begins with taking the time to know and be at peace with the face I see within the mirror each morning. As Sister Who this is symbolized by the way in which I lace my

shoes. To remind myself to always take a good look inside before expressing myself to the world, for each pair of eyelets, I thread the lace which goes toward the outside only after threading the one which goes toward the center.

As I close and lock the door, climb into my car, and drive to work, I say prayers of protection for my home and my two dogs. Then I say prayers of guidance asking that my words and actions within the day which I am beginning will bring encouragement and growth to those around me. Finally just before entering the office building where my dayjob of administrative assistant unfolds four days of each week, I remind myself that no matter what struggles I may be facing or negative emotions I may be feeling, life is much bigger than the tiny corner of my present moment and there is much more to be gained by focusing upon that larger world, than by remaining distracted by what is so much smaller just because it is more immediately available to my perception.

So, in closing, a new year has begun. Let us be proactively and positively mindful of the fingerprints we leave upon it each day. Let us give something good to each day--not because every day will give something good to us, but rather because if we don't, there will be that much less good within the day, when it draws to a close the usual number of hours later.

We do not give light, love, and goodness to the world because it has given such things to us; we give light, love, and goodness to the world because these are the qualities we want the world to have.

Subscription Information:

"Sister Who's Perspective" is a monthly newsletter available to all interested persons, as long as the necessary means and resources for its production and distribution are available. All copies of "Sister Who's Perspective" are free and not to be sold. If you have appreciated the contents of this newsletter, please consider making a financial donation to encourage production and distribution to continue. (Please make checks payable to Denver NeVaar with the initials SWP on the memo line of the check). I request that each person contact me directly, to initiate, discontinue, or make changes regarding his or her subscription. Electronic distribution requires a working email address. Postal mail distribution requires a working postal address. Either will be sent (or not) according to individual preference and request. If you give your printed copy of a particular newsletter to someone else, please feel free to request a replacement.

All correspondence may be directed to: Sister Who, 407 Beaver Road, Idaho Springs, CO 80452; or email address: SisterWho@sisterwho.com. Sister Who's internet website is located at <http://www.sisterwho.com>.

Do you know a person or publication who might be interested in reading or reprinting any of this newsletter's contents? Please give them the contact information listed above and encourage them to contact me as necessary, for copyright permission, but do not request newsletters to be sent to someone other than yourself, nor distribute electronic copies without first asking whether the recipient(s) wish to receive the newsletter. This is to avoid any legitimate accusation of unsolicited advertising or distributing spam (electronic junk mail).

Thank you for your help in spreading my words to new places and people.

--S.W.