

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

Overview

In spiritual matters, the word used most often is "revelation" and when the word is used, it generally indicates something important to contemplate. In interpersonal matters, the word used most often is "disclosure" and within this newsletter I encourage us to consider some of the various ways this can occur, all of which one is wise to regard with careful consideration also.

Sometimes it may be others' disclosure, inviting us to be trustworthy and attentive recipients. At other times it may be our own disclosure that is seeking its moment to unfold--something within us that needs to get out, to be shared, and to touch the life of another positively.

The challenge which remains within all such moments, is to do so with love and wisdom rather than with any fear or desire for ego-gratification; it is not simply to be heard, but to make the world a better place, that we think and act as we do.

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

Self-disclosure

I recall reading a book by John Powell many years ago entitled, Why Am I Afraid to Tell You Who I Am. For me it also prompted the question of how well I did or did not know who I am and the challenge of making my internal identity and my external or social identity congruent. This then formed the basic understanding of integrity which I continue to have to this day. The absence of this internal/external congruity is a big part of what constitutes hypocrisy, but also leads to a long list of other psychological and emotional dysfunctions. It is thus no wonder that the biblical Jesus was so opposed to it within individuals and social institutions of his time and place within human history.

Similarly, at least for me, I have found that accomplishing congruence or harmony between who I am internally and who I am externally, greatly increases my ability to respond to life's challenges and to events and circumstances which are other than what I would prefer. When I know who I am

and I act like who I truly am, I am able to calmly bring the truth of who I am to bear upon any particular challenge or obstacle. It is when I momentarily forget who I am, that I am afraid and more likely to make wrong choices.

In taking the initiative to disclose who I am to another person--whether or not what I disclose is really anyone else's business or right to know--I embrace both my vulnerability and my courage and leave fear behind, moving toward the creation of relationships which can be genuinely empowering. If someone else does not know the truth of me in some way, the power of that truth cannot empower our relationship.

A counterfeit form of self-disclosure which is sometimes very subtle and even occasionally insidious, however, is that self-disclosure which is not seeking to humbly disclose truth, but rather offers sensational exaggerations in order to draw the attention, support, and energy of others into one's self. The most honest but unpleasant truth of such an interpersonal dynamic is that it is parasitic--that it lives off of the energy of others rather than drawing strength from its own truth and abilities.

Metaphorically, it is pretending to be weak and persuading others to do the work which most needs to be done by me. The truth remains, however, that "whoever wants the muscles, must lift the weights."

Ultimately, the danger of failing to embrace self-disclosure is that I also thereby build my own cage and limitations, indirectly deciding what additional things will be impossible for me to do or become. I also impoverish the surrounding world, which would otherwise be enriched by the contributions which only I can make to its understanding, growth, and collective abilities.

It is by being internally, externally, privately, and publicly all that I am in the best possible way, that the specific light and strength which the Divine has hidden exclusively within me will be able to bless the world.

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

Spiritual Disclosure

It is generally believed that God (by which I mean that which is truly God, which generally exceeds what religious institutions say about God) knows everything and that nothing can be hidden from God. I believe this also, but I also recognize that many live as if they could hide all sorts of things so that God would not know. Because this dynamic has long been with us, most belief systems include rituals of confession.

The first thing to notice about these rituals of confession, is that they are done for the benefit of the confessor. There is something about opening ourselves up in some form of prayer or meditation, which allows our souls to breathe and to heal in ways that regenerate all that we are.

Similarly, there is something about opening ourselves up within some form of communal prayer or meditation, which allows the collective identity of the group (and each individual within the group) to breathe and to heal in ways that regenerate all that the group is and can become.

I have often encountered groups, however, who stress the maintenance of secrecy, of keeping the general public ignorant about their presence or activities because "they wouldn't understand." There are two primary reasons I continue to object to such secrecy, both of which use the power of knowledge abusively.

My first reason are those examples within which the group is afraid of persecution or oppression. As legitimate and real as this possibility may be, it is also an example of reacting fearfully rather than acting deliberately in ways consistent with love and wisdom. Reacting to anything fearfully will always have a tendency to produce more of the same (more fear, more fractured rather than collaborative relationships, and more brokenness of some kind).

My second reason are those examples within which the group is seeking to be somehow superior to those around them, seeking a higher hierarchical position within interpersonal relationships so that the group can "talk down" to others. Because I believe in the interconnectedness of all things, this is inherently and inescapably a strategy which creates imbalance within relationships. We may all have different roles, tasks, and contributions, but I have never believed for one moment that anyone was inherently any more valuable or essential to the bigger picture of life than anyone else. I suppose

this idea was first presented to me by the nuns who taught within the Roman Catholic elementary school I attended as a child, who insisted that God loves everyone equally.

The arrogance and perhaps even snobbery which derives from claiming superiority based upon greater knowledge or experience, is adversarial to empowering relationships. Those who genuinely do have greater knowledge and experience but are also genuinely guided by love and wisdom, on the other hand, are able to encounter individuals and groups with humility, as servants to others' personal and spiritual growth.

In practicing spiritual disclosure, therefore, I remain sensitive to the characteristics, limitations, and abilities of the one(s) to whom I am speaking and share what I can in ways that are most likely to empower them and to empower my relationship with them. I allow the truth of who I am spiritually to give light to the world--not in an intrusive or arrogant way, but as an available resource. The sun has long shone upon the earth, but the gifts of its light and warmth and the constructive use of solar energy are still far less appreciated and utilized than they could be. Similarly, the light, the warmth, and the energy of each individual with which humanity is blessed, are more often blocked by some sort of metaphorical beach umbrella or sunscreen than welcomed by a photo-electric power cell or passive-solar housing design.

We cannot see the sunlight itself and we cannot directly see spiritual energy within ourselves or others, but the ways in which the presence or absence of this energy affects us are perhaps beyond our ability to count. I recall a conversation with a group of theologically conservative and socially proactive Christians quite a number of years ago, in which a woman lamented an inability of people to pray openly within the Soviet Union (a typical remark of the Cold War era, but that's another discussion for another time). I responded that it probably wouldn't matter if public prayer remained prohibited, if private prayer were simultaneously consistently practiced by every individual involved.

Whether by the light above or the shadow below, the sun's light can be acknowledged and valued with humility and gratitude. It is no less so with the spiritual light of every individual whom we meet, as well as of ourselves. We cannot be our best without this light also--so, in love, let it shine.

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

Political Disclosure

I doubt that anyone who knows me very well is unaware of my disdain for political matters, but I must concede that from the moment that more than one person occupied this planet, some sort of official or unofficial political system became necessary. The fundamental concern of any and every political system is simply the distribution of tasks and resources. The various competing systems throughout human history are simply ongoing arguments about the best ways to do this.

In political disclosure, therefore, the concern is the ways that distribution of tasks and resources is empowered by disclosure. Prior to disclosure, there must also be awareness, but once one is reasonably aware of one's thoughts, attitudes, and actions, the next area to consider is that of the values which guide and motivate the political decisions to be made.

One group may decide that what is good for many people is more important than what is good for individuals. Another group may value exactly the opposite. For me, the best answers always satisfy all concerns, but because of the number and diversity of variables which need to be integrated, such answers may take a bit longer to find and implement.

All too often humanity has seen moments of difficult choices as being a matter of choosing "either this or that." More recently, the English language has incorporated the expression of a "win-win" situation, to refer to the invention or accomplishment of a mutually beneficial resolution to a problem. Another way of perceiving and phrasing this, is by thinking in terms of "both this and that," since upon closer inspection a much smaller number of things are mutually exclusive

"If we have more than we need
and are not using it to serve others,
we are not successful--we are selfish;
we are not a blessing to the world--
we are a burden,
withholding essential love
from those in need."

--*Sister Who*

than we have usually imagined.

In moving toward political disclosure, therefore, I move toward allowing my values, patterns of choice, and preferred interpersonal dynamics to be known by those with whom I relate and to varying degrees with whom I must collaborate. If I want their assistance in some way--that is, what they can give--then I must equally be sensitive to providing what they need in any way I can. I will only be able to do this effectively, however, if I take the time to actively listen and strive to understand their values, attitudes, thoughts, and actions.

The slogan "everyone matters" has been around for a long time, but if we all really believed that, I am very skeptical that there would be a homeless, starving, marginalized, or destitute person anywhere on the planet. The only excluded persons would be those who for whatever reason chose to exclude themselves.

To say that someone has excluded himself or herself by disagreeing with everyone else, however, is to move toward our own limitation. If we cannot tolerate anyone disagreeing with us, we are essentially also saying that we cannot tolerate someone seeing something we don't see and attempting in any way to make us aware of whatever it is that we are failing to see.

I prefer to see as much as I can, rather than limit myself by some form of self-imposed blindness. Within the bigger picture of life and interrelatedness, the eyes of others are extensions of my own and when I reject what others see, I place a blindfold over at least part of my own perception. I may have a different interpretation of what is seen, but I will nevertheless make a point of seeing whatever it is, before drawing my own conclusions or making my own interpretations.

The primary concern of political disclosure, therefore, is collaboration that is honest and respectful and that values all potential collaborators equally, while allowing each to find whichever role or area of activity most suits them. This includes allowing others to disagree and discouraging them from thinking that our opinions and perspectives are all the same. It is specifically by having a broader spectrum of opinions and perspectives that we move forward together, loving and valuing that which is distinctly different but simultaneously also an extension of ourselves and an essential part of who we are.

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

Relational Disclosure

As much as I know that I am who and what I am, I also know that I do not live in a vacuum; that every individual is both a unique individual and someone who exists within a context of many relationships.

Some of these relationships extend across different periods of time, forming bonds both with those who are older or younger than I am as well as with past experiences and future dreams--both of which shape each day of the present season.

Some of these relationships extend across different regions of space or topography, forming bonds with birds that soar above, whales that swim below, and friends of whatever species that walk alongside of me. The joy of my dogs prancing along on their leashes as we go jogging for two miles each morning, reminds me that no troubles are great enough to hold all feet glued to the ground in sadness. On the other hand, we follow a familiar route each day and for Gareth, my old English sheepdog, there is security in following that path and anxiety in straying from it.

An additional relationship which I must daily own, however, is that which I have with the face I see each morning in my bathroom mirror. It is imperative that I find a way to inspire within those eyes a certain minimum of hope and joy, a certain forgiveness of those who behave selfishly, and a certain love for those who know only painful woundedness, hatred, and anger.

In order to participate in healing whatever brokenness or woundedness may cross my path, the relationship which I must daily choose to disclose, is that I am more than merely a reaction or a mirror reflection of the difficulties I encounter. Rather, I can choose to be the love that opposes hate; I can choose to be the song that breaks the silence; and I can choose to be light that dispels at least some of the darkness--and disclose this.

In redefining and disclosing my relationship to the world around me in such ways, I can be more than merely a reaction; I can be a divine action, the gentle moving of holy hands within shadowy earthly corridors. I can testify by my example--my thoughts, my words, and my deeds--that better possibilities remain available and that all of the adversarial forces in the universe have failed to vanquish faith, hope, and love from the human soul and the vision of what we can be.

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

On a Personal Note

Life remains a very mixed combination of joys and sorrows. Just after the first day of the year, Arthur, the Cairn Terrier my former lifepartner and I adopted in 1992, passed away at an age of sixteen years. The night he arrived at our home was the occasion of a severe snowstorm. As if closing the circle, it started to snow when he was taken from my former lifepartner's home to the veterinary hospital for the last time. I couldn't help but think the world was somehow diminished by his departure, but it was comforting to believe that waiting for him on the other side was Lance, our longhair dachshund who died of a spinal injury in 1996. The two of them had been best friends in many adventures for the four years their lives overlapped and I am happy to imagine them playing together again at last.

On a positive note, an unexpected financial blessing has provided a quantity of insulation for my house and I was also given large double-pane windows to replace the old and drafty one in my livingroom. Significant progress has thus been made, even though much work remains to be done. A stained-glass adhesive film for the windows is on its way, which includes beautiful doves and shades of blue and green. A third church pew has been donated also.

Thanks to a particular guardian angel or two, I now have a reliable vehicle, a Toyota pickup truck, and am thus once again mobile and equipped to do whatever work is necessary to various creative and income-producing tasks.

Regarding "Sister Who Presents," two complete episodes can now be viewed through the website www.YouTube.com, each episode having been broken into three ten-minute segments. Production sessions for four more shows each month are scheduled for January, February, and March. I continue to receive comments from viewers also, assuring me that shows are not only being seen, but that they are being helpful.

May God's blessing, love, and peace be with you now and always, *Sister Who*

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