

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

Cycles of Victimization and Abuse

Sometimes someone does something very bad to me. Until I can get done being angry, I cannot look upon them with compassion, forgiveness, or love. Did I do something wrong? No. Did they do something wrong? Yes. Yet if I overlook their basic humanity I compromise my own. Until I am done being angry, I want them to be punished, to somehow feel the pain that they made me feel. If I am successful in doing so to them, however, I have simply completed the cycle of abuse and no healing has resulted. Rather than discourage the negative incident from being repeated, I have almost ensured that it will be repeated. Breaking the cycle requires the pursuit of healing, both of myself and also of the perpetrator.

It is not that my anger is not justified nor that punishment of some sort is not the standard current societal response to abusive actions. Justified or not, however, such things do not accomplish healing or positive growth.

Jesus of Nazareth advised us to love our enemies and pray for those who persecute them, which is a far cry from the Old Testament law of "an eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth." Why would he say such a thing? Doesn't he know how much it hurts to be abused by another person? I suggest the reason he said what he said, was because he was encouraging us to move beyond the hurt and into a new phase of healing and growth in our lives.

Also relevant to this discussion is the old adage, "there but for the grace of God go I." It is completely possible that I would be a murderer, a pedophile, a thief, an embezzler, a liar, a cheat, or an abuser, if I had in fact experienced the same environment and events which made the abuser into what he or she has become. Had that been the case, I can only hope that those around me would seek my psychological and emotional healing, whether or not I had the presence of mind to seek it myself.

There is ultimately no punishment of the perpetrator which can undo the damage and abuse which was done to me, nothing which will bring back the

person I was before it happened. If that is what I am trying to reclaim, I have set myself up to be indefinitely stuck in failure in terms of my personal growth; I have frozen myself in time, on some deep internal level reliving over and over and over, the moment and experience of the particular abuse. No matter how evil the abuse was, which was done to me, embracing the holy and virtually unlimited potential of life requires that I honestly confront what happened, get past the anger, and find a way to make peace with myself and with my oppressor(s), either in spite of or perhaps ultimately because of what did in fact happen--none of which includes reinterpreting the action(s) of my oppressor(s) as being anything other than evil and abusive.

It is once again the challenge of good finding a healthy way to coexist with evil, a way in which good remains good and evil remains evil, but that the people who (willingly or not) encompass both, also have the ability to move toward being better than they've been. This is in fact one of the most common but most frequently overlooked challenges of life, from the beginning of time to the present.

In my own life, this has recently taken many forms which I previously overlooked. Among them is the basic element of political corruption. It is no secret that our national government has included elements of corruption since its first breath of life more than two hundred years ago. I did not want to believe, however, that such corruption was to be as equally expected in the most immediate and local levels of political administration, nor to believe that the immediate and local levels would be as difficult to purge of such evil as the national government is. Yet somehow we go on with life in spite of how much corruption there is within the administration of our country in Washington, DC.

Some people respond with denial: "Political corruption? What political corruption?"

We live in a truly great country and anyone who doesn't think so should leave!"

Some people get stuck in obsessive anger, never able to focus upon or discuss anything other than what is wrong with the government (or whatever other problem has caught their attention).

Some people calmly decide to make it their life's work to improve things in whatever ways they can, but without losing their grasp of the rest of life within that process. They still have good times with their families, discuss other topics as well--everything from gardening to how to do car repair, and attend christenings, weddings, and funerals without dragging everyone else into their particular life's work.

Some people (myself?) try to maintain a reasonable degree of awareness and practice a general sort of good citizenship by voting and speaking out from time to time, but understand that their life's work lies in other areas, perhaps education, spiritual ministry of some sort, agriculture, or commerce--all of which are equally as necessary to life.

It is important that we each do what we can, but looking upon each other with judgmental attitudes is almost never helpful. The decisions of each day are rarely clear and polarized black and white decisions because each and every one of us (and therefore all of our societal institutions such as governments, churches, and businesses) is in fact a combination of positive and negative qualities--a combination that fluctuates from moment to moment on a never ending path of personal growth, if we succeed in not getting stuck at any particular point along the path.

The fact of evil is with us and I suspect will be with us for a long time to come. If we are to avoid being characterized by evil ourselves, it will take a bit more love, compassion, and understanding than has been the general practice so far. That being the case, I know in which direction I want to move and I know that moving ahead one tiny step at a time is definitely preferable to staying where I am. May one and all and everything, blessed and loved ever be.

*"Rejoice in another's success
and accomplishments,
but let not this keep you
from achieving your own."*

---Sister Who

Change of Address

Considering that with all of the possibilities and advantages the Internet has brought to the world it has also brought the capability of nearly anyone being able to find anyone's phone number, address, and so forth, it seemed pointless to me to continue the expense of maintaining a post office box for Sister Who. Therefore I recently closed the post office box, redirecting all future correspondence to my home address of 407 Beaver Road, Idaho Springs, CO 80452.

The newsletter remains free of charge, with donations encouraged to insure the continuance of its creation and distribution. If you know of anyone who would be interested in receiving a copy of this newsletter each month, please have them contact me. My email address remains SisterWho@sisterwho.com. If you know of anyone who might be interested in reprinting or more widely distributing any of my newsletters or the articles within them, please encourage them to contact me as well.

I did receive some positive response to last month's newsletter from a couple of different people and I thank you very much for taking the time to contact me. Your encouragement meant more to me than you might imagine, especially during this time of (to use the current popular phrase) "paradigm shift."

I have recently received word that the organization through which one hundred and seven episodes of "Sister Who Presents..." were cablecast over a period of more than ten years, will most likely be shutting down by the end of this year. Coupled with peculiar shifts in the general public mindset, I am as eager as anyone to see what Sister Who's ministry will be and how it will express itself during the coming year.

If there is to be a continuing struggle and especially considering that it has already been a long one, may it give birth to a new, more beautiful, and more empowered and abundant life than any of us have known thus far.

My pagan friends occasionally speak of the burning times, referring to the terrible executions of the Medieval Age, but I suggest that we are once again living within a time that burns, though in a different way. I pray that it will be the burning of the phoenix and that equally so we will rise from the ashes, reborn with stronger wings than we have ever known. May one and all and everything, blessed and loved ever be.

What I Did this Summer

It seems this was always the first writing assignment when elementary school resumed in Autumn, through many years of my childhood, though I rather doubt that a deeply reflective, philosophical, and spiritual self-examination was ever what any of my teachers had in mind.

For me, this past summer has been a season of rebelling against the possibilities of loss--none of which ever occurred, thanks to divine blessing, but the possibilities were not for that reason less real.

If one stops for a moment to thoughtfully consider the subject, we are surrounded by possibilities of loss every moment of our lives. Surely there is a better way to cope with this than ignorance or psychological denial.

Five days of each week, I drive approximately forty miles each way to travel to and from an office job, so that I will be given the funds to pay for my basic needs. Any moment of this circuit could contain the auto accident that terminates my physical life. Obviously this has not yet happened and hopefully never will.

Any day of my life could also contain the discovery within myself of a terminal illness. This has also, by divine grace, not happened and hopefully never will.

Hostile and threatening behavior by certain neighbors in April persuaded me to put my house up for sale, but no one has been willing (thus far) to buy it and I am quite uncertain whether to conclude whether the buyer is just around the corner and will be phoning me this week or whether I am (for whatever reason) really supposed to remain here a bit longer.

Is it a trap, in which I find myself, a victimizing situation which will eventually rob me of my soul and of my loving spirit? Perhaps. It would not be the first time in history that a loving person was thus subtly destroyed. What makes me any better than thousands of others who've gone before me and not been delivered from their victimizing situations? For the moment, the conclusion seems entirely unclear.

My response to the victimizing situation of April, in any case, was to put the house up for sale, move anything of value which I owned to a more secure location, and work on completing the renovation of the home in whatever financially affordable ways I could.

So now the inside of my house is completely covered with plaster wallboard, textured with plaster, and half of the house has also been painted. I even put down some inexpensive new

carpeting (I prefer ceramic tile but without an adequate foundation this was not an option).

Had I not moved all of my things out, the finish work inside of my house would not have been done. I was recently blessed with an enormous quantity of good fill dirt also, to heal the unsightly ditch in the back part of the property.

But what to interpret from all of this?

If nothing else, my experience of living here has gone through its own paradigm shift and will be significantly different from what life here was like last March or so. Will it be better or worse? Probably it will be both, but in different ways than I might have imagined only a year ago.

But back to the point of rebelling against loss. I continue to be haunted by the words of Corrie TenBoom, the Nazi Death Camp survivor, "I try to hold things loosely because it always hurts so much when God has to pry my fingers open."

I still do not find myself particularly willing to accept the possibility of losing everything and having to start over, though thousands before me have gone through exactly that sort of "paradigm shift."

I'm certainly not the first person who's had to live across the street from known thieves who have also engaged in destruction of others' property, poisoning of dogs, threats of violence, and various other forms of harassment. So how do I do it, how do I go on showing them that love is stronger than hate, that kindness is better than violence, and that peace is better than war?

Yet this is what my soul tells me I must do. I must go on being who I am, shining a light especially where the world seems darkest. I do what I can to reasonably protect myself and my home, but sometimes the risk seems greater than I want to tolerate. Even when the risk is beyond the level of my tolerance, however, I must go on being who and what I am. I must go on being kind, loving, honest, hard-working, and so forth.

If I do not, it will be myself and not anyone else, who deprived me of my soul.

I am reminded of that wonderful line spoken by Princess Leia Organa within the first Star Wars movie to ever be produced. Sentenced to die for treason against the evil empire that ruled the galaxy and brought once more before the evil leader Tarkin, he attempts to persuade her once more to surrender to his manipulation by fear and she responds, "the more you tighten your grip, the more star systems will slip through your fingers."

Perhaps there is no greater or more constant defiance of all that is evil, than to go on

experiencing happiness, creating beauty, and expressing love.

I found myself following behind a particular couple on the way down the mountain driving to work this morning, two who were among the hostile neighbors who inspired me to put my house up for sale last May in an attempt to move away from this place. What kept going through my mind this morning, however, was how sad, ineffective, and pointless their selfish bitterness was.

No matter how emotionally ugly they choose to be or to remain, it is not enough to stop the mountains and trees all along the valley from being magnificently beautiful this year. Their unfriendliness is not enough to keep good friends from coming to visit me or to keep other people from being willing to help me make my home more welcoming and secure than it has been throughout the two and a half years that I have lived here.

The same is true of the very sad state of affairs in our nation and world at the moment. All the untrustworthy war-mongering politicians and self-centered greedy financial hoarders and manipulators put together, are still pathetically ill-equipped to prevent laughter and love from transcending international boundaries and cultural differences.

That we continue to laugh, to love, and in the fullest and best sense of the word to live, may be the victory that all these short-sighted adversaries will never be able to either perceive or appreciate. Our lives are not for that reason less real.

I encountered someone recently who seemed surprised at my answer to her question regarding Sister Who, "Are you still doing that?"

I was not offended by the question, as I might

have been at some point in the past. Rather I understood that it was more accurately an indication of what she didn't see.

She did not see that after twelve and a half years, being Sister Who has become much more than just the application of grease paint and costume. She was quite unaware of the thousands of people with whom I have spoken over the years, who went on their ways with a tiny bit more inspiration or vision than they'd had before. She didn't see how as wonderful as it is to me, to have been blessed with so many opportunities to touch the lives of others around me, I am much more concerned about being faithful to touch with love, light, and inspiration, as many lives as possible in the future.

It is often the memory of how I have been part of others' lives that persuades me not to stop being Sister Who; not to stop being open and honest about the unfolding of my own life because of the way my struggles seem to have often been instructive to others; and not to stop thinking deeply about the colors, shapes, relationships, and both visible and invisible realities that comprise this diverse and challenging world in which we all live.

One more thing to add to all of you who have become in some way my true family, is that a new member was added to my household this week. Now, as a companion to my shorthair completely black dachshund Galahad (who is now almost two and a half years old), Tristan has also come to live with us and is a longhair dapple dachshund of about ten months, with one brown eye and one blue eye.

And so the paradigm continues to shift.

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

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--S.W.