

Sister Who's Perspective

Sister Who's Perspective, Issue #148, October 2011, 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

Overview

As observed by the Greek philosopher, Heraclitus, change is the only constant in the universe—and clearly the present time is one of profound change. For some, viewing the change for the first time would be a new experience. For others, a glance was enough to convince them to look away. For others (hopefully many of you reading this newsletter), reviewing what we have already seen or what we think we have already seen, may prove to be both empowering and insightful. Phrased yet another way, there is within this time an invitation to re-view or to reconstruct a perception within a new perspective or contextual frame. Whatever you find most empowering, I hope this month's essays will be helpful to you and that—wherever you are—you are blessed with wise, loving, and effective companions and collaborators as we continue—together—to find our way.

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

Reviewing Emotional Abuse

One of the greatest challenges of life is that we are inevitably always standing too close. I don't see myself the way you see me. Negatively, this is an invitation to narcissism. Positively, however, this is an invitation to community. It is only by communication and collaboration, that I will ever be able to see myself as you see me—and understand that your perspective is no more or less true than my own. Our perspectives are not, after all, in competition. The truth is whatever it is, whether or not we ever see it and understand it. What changes are the ways we are able to respond.

An abiding truth of life is that sometimes it hurts. As important as it is to honestly feel the pain when it comes and to grieve whatever loss accompanies that pain, part of healing from that pain as quickly as possible, is reconnecting with the larger interdependent network of life again.

Similarly, essential to any process of healing is the basic challenge of seeing the experience from other perspectives, of seeing the moment within the

larger context of life—of not standing so close that the experience itself is all one ever sees.

Reviewing emotional abuse is not a matter of wallowing or getting stuck in the remembrance of pain and suffering; it is about reaching for deeper understanding and compassionately leaving those things which are too painful to touch, temporarily in the care of higher wisdom and love.

We do not always understand why painful things happen and until we have the wisdom and strength to bear the weight of that knowledge, it is better that we allow more capable hands, hearts, and minds to carry that knowledge. Someday, however, someone else with even less wisdom and strength will turn to us for help, so we'd best keep working on our abilities in this area.

Reviewing emotional abuse is about finally noticing the erroneous good intentions, the naive absence of questioning and deep thought, and the failure to effectively communicate which allowed that moment to happen. We can be thankful that others cared enough to involve themselves in the ongoing creation of our life experience, while understanding that they too are learning and growing and that they sometimes act from more limited understanding than we wish they had.

Reviewing emotional abuse is also about recognizing our own abilities to be emotionally abusive; to recognize that brokenness can slip past intentions to love and instead inflict wounding on those around us. If we cannot own our ability to make mistakes, the ability to participate in healing will also be prevented.

Although dark clouds can indeed provide nurturing rain, they are not for that reason something other than what they are. Specifically because they do provide nurturing rain, however, their occurrence can also be seen as part of a new beginning rather than only as something threatening destruction. Weather, by its very nature, continues to change—as do we.

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

Reviewing Mental Abuse

Perhaps one of the most difficult aspects of abuse that we might experience, is that it is just as possible for it to be done by ourselves as by others. By clinging to adversarial perceptions, interpretations, and beliefs, I can become my own worst enemy. By accepting someone else's negative belief, perception, or interpretation about me, all my best possibilities may be prevented. Once again because I am standing too close, the oppression facilitated by the face in my mirror, may be the most difficult for me to ever see.

Additional challenges of mental abuse are first of all that is usually very subtle and secondly that it is invisible. The assumption that all abuse that is not physical is not real, is clearly ignorant and evil. The first task of any victim of mental abuse, however, is convincing anyone else that the abuse actually happened.

Why is this even necessary? Well, perhaps because general current thinking is preoccupied with finding evidence and assigning blame. A better approach would be to focus upon the dynamics of the incident and the process of healing. Discovering what actually happened and ways to fix it, clearly holds greater possibilities for empowerment and future life. Obsessing about proving the historical occurrence and reducing the responsible party to an embodiment of the consequences, creates an anchor that binds everyone to the event which now lies permanently within the past. What is needed is movement toward a better present and future.

One of the most devastating occurrences of the twentieth century was the onset of the AIDS epidemic, which was seriously exacerbated by the initial refusal of most elements of human society to even respond. Even more devastating, however, was the long incubation period of the disease. Many victims had been infected many years before there was any indication that anything was wrong.

Similarly, one of the principle difficulties of mental abuse (whether inflicted by one's self or others) is that it may be years after the initial incident before anyone realizes that a problem exists. If mental dysfunction were a disease with physical evidence, it is likely that the majority of the human population would be diagnosed as having been infected. Specifically because mental abuse can be inflicted even by one's self, however, it is impossible to limit the spread of such a condition by isolating the victims.

Specifically because evidence is absent and convincing others of the reality of one's struggles is so difficult, experiences of non-physical abuse are generally isolating—leaving victims to face their battles alone, usually with inadequate resources and limited strength. Not surprisingly, assistance frequently comes from others who have had similar experiences and survived. In this way, the occurrence of a problem may provide an opportunity for the creation of a new community.

It would be easy when confronted with a wide-spread problem to respond with apathy or cynicism, but this is precisely where a review of the dynamics of the incident and a process of healing can make all the difference. Even better, if the review is done by a thoughtful community, the combined wisdom may accomplish what the individual acting alone never could.

In any case, to collectively heal mental abuse, we must be able to openly speak about it. As long as certain problems are considered simply too embarrassing or unpleasant to mention, a societal agreement to maintain silence will enable the affliction not only to survive but also to thrive.

We may not have the answer that someone needs, but it is even less likely that the answer will be found if we do not communicate enough to search for the answer together. For some, when addressing mental abuse, the definition itself may be unfamiliar. Unfortunately, this does not prevent anyone from being a victim; it only prevents that person from understanding the adversary that is negatively shaping his or her life.

Similarly, blaming is a trap that leads only to stagnation and not to healing or growth. The adversary may, in fact, not even be a person, but may instead be a societal or institutionalized dynamic—involving so many people that changing the dynamic is a matter of changing each and every person involved—all at the same time.

Why all at the same time? Because any individual may otherwise inadvertently and unintentionally become the carrier of the disease, dysfunction, or delusion to the next victim.

For now, the common knowledge is that we must frequently be content to change the world one person at a time. Certainly we must do whatever we can. We must never forget, however, that the job is not finished until everyone has lovingly and wisely been changed; that the game is not over until absolutely everyone wins.

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

Reviewing Economic Abuse

Capitalistic systems accustomed to looking no further than concerns for profit or loss may find the very idea of economic abuse bewildering at best. Unfortunately this does little to minimize the reality of pain and suffering caused by misusing financial resources. At the heart of my understanding of abuse of any sort is that all things are interconnected, inter-related and interdependent. Abuse is what it is because in hurting others, one is also hurting both one's self and the context of life that we all share.

Economic abuse, consequently, is the dishonoring of both resources that we have received and those who truthfully need such resources, by using those resources wastefully, irresponsibly, disrespectfully, selfishly, and counterproductively. In and of itself, currency actually has no value; its value and functional ability is entirely assigned by us. When we stop desiring currency, it immediately becomes completely worthless. We, on the other hand, remain valuable because we hold within ourselves the very essence of life. More concisely, economic abuse is the dishonoring of that life.

Inequitable distribution is perhaps the most obvious example of economic abuse, but what exactly constitutes equitable distribution? From one perspective, it is paying everyone exactly the same amount. Hm. Perhaps, but if not everyone has the same need, then distribution is once again no longer equitable. From another perspective, it is paying everyone enough to cover certain basic needs—food, clothing, and shelter, for example. For those with additional needs—diabetics, different-sized households, and certain vocational or professional conditions, for example—distribution

again seems inequitable because the ability to do without the other needs being met is not always possible.

Insisting upon a "one-size-fits-all" answer may in fact be the basis of many examples of abuse, which strongly suggests that equitability begins with both knowing and loving everyone and everything with which one is interdependent. To the extent that we know neither each other nor each others' stories, however, we strip ourselves of the ability to be equitable, loving, or wise. Within news media accounts of virtually every natural disaster, the first things publicized are generally people rediscovering each other—rediscovering that we ourselves are ultimately the best resources we have.

On the flipside of economic abuse, as with every other form of abuse, are the coping abilities that have been developed, specifically because other solutions (for whatever reason) were not available. There is very little that brings out ingenuity more than desperate need. The problem of course is that ingenuity can be tragically negative and destructive as often as it has the ability to be miraculously healing. As human beings, however, we have the ability to choose.

We may not have the resources to choose to end hunger, homelessness, or criminal activity everywhere throughout the world. Whether our resources are abundant or limited, however, is really not the question. Ultimately the money doesn't belong to any of us; it belongs to the world and the world will keep it. Our physical lives are finite and hearses generally do not trailer hitches on the back because no one is allowed to take anything along whenever death occurs.

The purpose of money, therefore, is not to be accumulated, but rather to be utilized to accomplish the maximum amount of good while it is within one's limited control. When I disregard the inherent sacredness of others or of the created world, it becomes easy to disregard the destructive effects my financial management may have. In possessing whatever I do with wisdom and love, however, I have the opportunity to leave the world a better place than I found it—but only if I am first conscious of wise use or abuse that is occurring.

Reviewing economic abuse thus includes awareness of the person that I have demonstrated myself to be in the past, that I show myself to be in the present, and that I aspire to be in the future—and wisely and lovingly striving to be even better.

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

*"God's gift of a thousand paths
to effective response,
a thousand possibilities
of empowering perception,
and a thousand opportunities
for new beginnings,
is the eternal invitation for life
to be a magnificent symphony."*

--Sister Who

Reviewing Spiritual Abuse

In speaking of spiritual journeys, many have described a moment of "waking up," as if they had somehow been asleep or at least unaware of some vitally important understanding. Being the complex and mysterious thing that spirituality inescapably is, it is reasonable that human societies would devise collective systems by which to manage this area of life activity. In taking a broad hierarchical approach, however, it is inevitable that abuse would occur—specifically because such an approach is generally not equipped to even acknowledge much less satisfy differences in individual needs. Once again, we are invited to rediscover each other and each others' stories.

It is not, however, that all experiences of institutionalized religion need to be discarded. As the caption of unknown authorship declares, "No one is completely useless; he can always serve as a bad example!" More importantly, we must not let the bad examples blind us to what good there is. We may need, however, to re-evaluate why and how we do whatever we do, when engaged in communal worship or spirituality.

It is not, after all, communal practices of spirituality that have done so much harm throughout human history. More insidious and unfortunately not confined to matters of spirituality, dogmatism is a primary ideological villain—asserting at its core that there is only one right answer to every question (which is generally also claimed to be synonymous with the answer promoted by the particular person speaking). In reality, however, diversity continues to prevail, as one answer after another is displaced by newer ones, throughout humanity's march through time.

The greatest form of spiritual abuse, therefore, may be the myriad of attempts to force the undescribable infinite energy of love, wisdom, and life into more manageable boxes (at least more manageable to human minds). The God who can fit within a human theological box is too small to have all of the abilities that God would need to have to be God in the first place. Similarly, the person who can completely fit within the box of others' human expectations, would not have the ability to do all of the wonderful things that God would have that person do during life on earth. Others' approval cannot be essential.

So, please be the best you, that you can be.

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

On a Personal Note

I really don't think I'm a workaholic; I just have too many dreams and creative ideas to fit within my otherwise limited resources. Perhaps in that sense, I have something in common with John Merrick, the so-called "Elephant Man," who said, "I think the reason my head is so large is because it's so filled with dreams." In any case, I do keep very busy, to say the least.

In any case, the past four weeks or so have included production of eighteen more episodes of "Sister Who Presents," the first half of the construction of a meditation labyrinth in the cathedral/circle in the backyard (including bringing in twenty-six-hundred pounds of fine gravel using only a shovel and twenty-one five-gallon buckets), and a significant amount of doctoral writing.

Additionally, appearances at an annual fundraiser for the teen suicide prevention organization called the Second Wind Fund (<http://www.swfmd.org/>) and at the annual Pagan Pride celebration at Stapleton Central Park in Denver, Colorado, were both filled with inspiring conversations and empowering interactions.

Apparently I forgot to include proper thanks in the past, so I would like to express great gratitude to Tom Loux of WhiteBirdsUnlimited.com for facilitating the December 2012 calendar photo using his trained white doves, which are typically utilized at weddings and memorial services.

On a more personal level, I am sometimes mystified by the curious and unique people who wander in and out of my life, many of which I would love to keep around as enduring family, but apparently there are other ministries and purposes which they need to serve. Suffice to say that at the present time there are hopeful possibilities and diminishing connections, but also many shining moments to light whatever darkness may coincide with this difficult time of transition, through which the entire world seems to be moving. I remain convinced that standing together, we will prevail.

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

Subscription Information:

"Sister Who's Perspective" is a free monthly newsletter. If you have appreciated this newsletter, please consider making a donation to empower the work to continue. (Please make checks payable to Denver NeVaar).

Sister Who a/k/a Rev. Denver NeVaar, MTS
3170 West Longfellow Place, Denver, CO 80221-2148

Email: dn@sisterwho.com

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