

# 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

The metaphor of a day seems simple enough but of course grows quite challenging when one considers the myriad of overlapping days which any moment in time includes. When one also considers a night to be part of a daily cycle, possibilities for metaphor and consequently understanding virtually explode from the eastern horizon all the way to the west.

I sometimes refer to God as Great Mystery because it seems there is so much that is either unknown or unknowable, but I have not for that reason been able to be less fascinated with what I have experienced as a very real presence in my life. It is not, however, the fascination of a scientist, but rather the fascination of a lover--an almost magnetic attraction to every detail of the other's essence, form, expression, and experience.

It is very much a question of being in love with God and thus of being in love with life itself.

## Fading Light

What is the measure of a day? From one perspective it is a mere twenty-four hours (or 1,440 minutes). In a more poetic sense, a day is measured from the beginning of something to its end. It could be the "day" of a particular ruler, the "day" of the prevalence of a particular style. It could even be the "day" of a particular age of societal, political, religious, or spiritual renewal.

In a much more immediate sense, I find myself in the twilight hours of the "day" in which I was a graduate student at Iliff School of Theology. As with my undergraduate education at a small church college in Iowa, I don't think I learned what the professors and administrators intended for me to learn, but in retrospect I readily concede that I learned a lot. The measure in each case was not how much I paid, which classes I took, or what grades I received, but rather who I became through the struggles I endured and the constructive ways I responded to those struggles. It makes me wonder whether it is the struggle which somehow

mysteriously makes the accomplishment worthwhile, which would prompt the question of whether human birth would be considered to be such a miracle if it did not in fact involve significant amounts of struggle.

Still, I could not recommend struggle as a means to significant accomplishment. Many seekers of God in other times and places have embraced that reverse idea, that if one has grown closer to God through personal struggles, that it follows that more struggles will help one to grow even closer to God--which of course is not always the case. If it were, then every significantly oppressed person would be a candidate for being canonized a saint.

Regardless, my days at Iliff appear to be drawing to a close and what will follow has yet to be revealed. I have been consistently and frequently bombarded of late, with temptations to shift all focus to concerns for an adequate income, a stable career track, and a comfortable retirement. While none of these are inherently bad, anything that takes the place of God in one's life is not in the place it should be.

As difficult as it may be to sustain, I wish to remain focused upon God's presence, wisdom, and love in my life--trusting that as I do my best, God will do the rest. Whether "the rest" includes triumph or tragedy, I am content to know that a higher purpose is served, that I am living for something bigger than myself, and that when all is said and done, I will have left the world a better place than I found it.

With God's blessing I also hope to construct and operate an interfaith spiritual retreat and conference center which maintains the utmost respect for the diversity and uniqueness of possibilities of human-Divine relationship. I cannot begin to suggest how this will happen, but I know that if God wills it, nothing can stand in its way. May the sunset of one day be but a prelude to the sunrise of the next. For what is done and for what is to come, I give thanks.

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

## Growing Night

What is night? The absence of day? A void of light? A great emptiness? Darkness has been used for hundreds of years not only to describe what is not known but also to describe both what is difficult to perceive as well as what is somehow objectionable. In this last regard, perhaps descriptions of night have more to do with what is inside of us than with what is outside of us.

If night may here be used to illustrate confusion, chaos, and mystery, I am reminded that when as a young boy I wanted to read books by flashlight under my bedcovers at night, it was necessary to bring both the flashlight and my eyes very close to the page, in order to make out the shapes, configurations, and letters.

Similarly, when I am now confronted with mystery, chaos, or confusion, I try to get closer to it in order to make out the shapes, configurations, and letters. I ask many questions and engage in long comparisons, noting where there are commonalities and where there are distinctions.

In growing night, therefore, I am drawing questions and a certain embrace of confusion and chaos to my side as allies. By assembling the pieces in close proximity, I will begin to perceive relationships and ultimately to create certain patterns and orders to the placement of the many pieces. It may not be the only order into which the pieces can be placed, but I will do my best to make certain that it is a good one.

When I was in my early teens and my family still lived several miles south of the small town around which I grew up, I was enormously fond of the monthly full moon. The light was so bright as to cast dancing shadows from the trees and reveal every stray dog, feral cat, or wandering farm animal. Once, I even went for a bicycle ride by the light of the moon, traveling perhaps three or four miles on an almost completely deserted side-road of old patched asphalt. Somehow the dim eerie blue glow over the entire landscape seemed magical, as if anything at all were possible as long as the light of the full moon shone from above. In the morning, of course, the blue light was gone and everything seemed quite ordinary again.

Perhaps in seeking to "grow the night," we are seeking a more magical and less ordinary experience of life, more times when the spiritual and the material interact in mysterious but life-enhancing ways. In this regard, nurturing a relationship with God is perhaps the most dramatic

thing anyone can do to reach beyond the limits of the ordinary perception of humanity during daylight hours. For God, the magic of the night is equally present throughout the day (and vice versa).

But is it the magic we seek or the divine presence from which the magic emanates? To put it another way, do you want the expert magician who performed at your nephew's birthday party last time to send his mysterious rabbit-producing hat next year or to come himself with new tricks we haven't figured out yet, so that we can once again experience surprise and amazement? The hat will be of little use all by itself. Similarly, the actions and creations of God will have no soul, no purpose, and no meaning if God is not equally present.

All that being said, I look to the growing of night not to produce the Divine in a way at all analogous to the magician pulling a white rabbit from a supposedly empty hat, but rather because night is a context in which I am able to pay more attention and to perceive things to which I would otherwise be blind.

Perhaps we should not so much fear our confusion and avoid our chaos as to instead learn to listen to them and to learn from them just who we are and of how much more we are capable than we would dare to imagine during daylight hours--the hours when we once again see ourselves as being only ordinary and not exceptional.

Perhaps night is God's gift to our imaginations and avoiding all contact with the night is detrimental to the exercise of the imagination. Perhaps we are missing out on fully half of what's available for our education, development, and life experience, if we avoid moonlit nights, getting soaked in a torrential downpour once in a while, and feeling wet mud squish up between our toes in the bottom of a creek, with icy cold water chilling our ankles.

Growing night is not growing darkness, but rather growing awareness of the other half of life which is too easily forgotten during the frantic rush to keep up with the victimizing money game, in which no one ever truly wins.

The one who has known God in moonlight, in glowing dawns, in painted sunsets, and in everything that happens in between--now that's what I call winning.

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

## Shining Bright

The Velveteen Rabbit remains one my absolute favorite stories of all time. In its simplicity, the struggle and tedious progress of the title character toward the goal of becoming real is very much a metaphor of spiritual life.

Darkness is a space which hungers to be filled, like ignorance seeking wisdom, though sometimes unknowingly in self-defeating ways. The task of every soul, of every spiritual light, is simply to shine, but most of us (myself included) often seem to have forgotten how to do that.

Part of the challenge, of course, is that how to do that is different within each circumstance and situation we face. Then again, because we're looking outward from the inside of our own lightbulb, we really have no way to measure how brightly we are shining.

For hundreds if not thousands of years, sailors have charted their ways across vast oceans by configurations of tiny points of light in the night sky. During the daytime, there was often no way to measure or chart what their location was. Only when the sky had gone dark, did they then have a means to determine their location on the surface of the earth.

I continue to be inspired by the words of the star man in the 1984 movie of the same name, regarding what is fascinating about humanity: "You are at your best when things are at their worst."

Applied to the sailors of times past, this could be translated, "They are most able to see when everything around is as dark as can be."

Applied to the velveteen rabbit, this could be translated, "He understood and experienced what is real when all that was not had been completely driven from him by the rigors of life."

Applied to each of us, it may be that it is the energy and attention we direct against our struggles which shines like a navigational beacon

***"I 'd rather suffer  
for what I am  
than rejoice  
for what I 'm not."***

***--Sister Who***

in the eyes of every other traveler in the vast darkness around us.

We may see a loss of temper in an argument with a victimizing perspective as a weakness or a lack of professional and mature composure. A certain distance away, however, we may be seen as having the courage to oppose tyranny, a courage which others may even envy.

We may see an inability to solve someone's problem as a lack of intelligence. A certain distance away, however, we may be seen as those who are willing to engage and empathize with people who struggle against societal marginalization due to complex constellations of geography, race, gender, age, disability, class, or orientation.

We may see a long-standing societal wound, peoples who have been enemies for longer than we have been alive and we are grieved that we cannot put an immediate end to the madness. A certain distance away, however, we may be seen as those who persist in believing that a healing of the age-old rift is still possible. We may be seen as those who strive even when it seems no progress is being made, to persuade each side of the conflict to see the humanity of the other and to therefore switch to a more compassionate and less adversarial strategy.

We may see a world that is politically, socially, and economically collapsing all around us and look with sadness to the horizons for some suggestion of where to go next. A certain distance away, however, we may be seen as those who have the wisdom and understanding to lay secure foundations for a better society to follow. We may not realize that hundreds, perhaps thousands, are watching our every move, ready to trace our footsteps toward their own better and brighter tomorrows.

We may be the worn-out stuffed animal, declaring to those with the ability to understand, what real is. We may be the one about whom the star man was speaking; the one who is consistently at his or her best just when things are at their worst. We may be the star whose relationship to other stars in the darkness, makes the correct direction of travel confidently known.

When the stars shine brightly within the night sky, meaning and purpose use the darkness of confusion and limitation like a chalkboard, to communicate divine wisdom and love to every eager student within the classroom below.

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

## Taking Flight

Taking flight for the first time is very much an experience of moving from one dimension of existence into a completely different one. Imagine someone learning to go scuba diving, who has never gone swimming before at all. Suddenly gravity has been suspended and the oddly shaped animals of this realm do not use the ground below at all, as a surface upon which to move. All perception and experience of life has been significantly altered. Even basic movements seem to unfold in slow motion, as if time itself proceeds at a reduced pace.

Similarly, imagine a bird which has never left the nest, which has always felt a secure branch or the solidness of the ground beneath its feet, now confronted with no more solid support than the wind beneath its own wings. At a certain height above the ground, there is suddenly almost nothing with which to collide. The sky seems to stretch into infinity and even the fastest beating of wings brings the horizon no closer. From the top of the tree to the grass on the ground and back again, faster than many a human eye could follow.

Again and again throughout our lives, whether or not we want to, we take flight. We leave familiar associations behind and must learn to function well in completely new and differently shaped environments and spaces. We leave behind familiar faces who are journeying in other directions. Their skies will be their own, as ours will be, but there is no need for competition because God has made enough sky for all of us.

Someone asked me a few months ago, "Are you ever scared?" and I was quite surprised, having never even considered that my more or less constant fear of the unknown was so well-hidden. "I'm always afraid," I responded, "but I don't consider that an adequate reason to stop doing what's right."

I am nearly finished with graduate school and once again I am definitely scared, wondering whether I will once again be able to rise to the challenges of life which will follow. As I responded to that particular friend a few months ago, however, fear is not an adequate reason to stop. Indeed, wheeling arial dances in both sunlight and starlight demand that I do not stop, demand that the work of Sister Who continue--especially when it defies the limitations of all that has come before it.

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

## On a Personal Note

I stand at the edge of an abyss, not knowing whether I have successfully created wings which will allow me to fly, whether the combined efforts and resources of people of faith will be the wind beneath my wings, or whether the Divine itself will accomplish through me what everyone insists is impossible. Time will tell.

As to the portable chapel-tent mentioned in last month's newsletter, I have managed to acquire all of the necessary framing, however, when the final estimate for construction of the fabric shell was received, it was not fifteen hundred dollars but rather three thousand. Hm. I am still searching for some means to satisfy this cost.

With graduate school drawing to a close, I am also searching for a suitable day-job as well as for ways that the work of Sister Who can become increasingly financially self-supporting. Your prayers and/or suggestions in this regard are very much appreciated.

With regard to the production of new episodes of the television show, "Sister Who Presents...", the next step is to find a suitable location and a talented camera operator, since I already have a number of potential guests eager to record informative and insightful discussion on a variety of subjects.

The 2007 calendar has been a bit problematic, but I hope to make a third and final attempt to create the photographs needed, within the next two or three weeks. The most necessary missing element at present is someone to be the photographer, since I cannot be both in front of and simultaneously behind the camera.

Through it all, I continue to remind myself that there is always more to life than eyes can see or even than the mind can comprehend. That being the case, it continues to ring true for me that we must live for something greater than ourselves and our own personal comfort, if we are to avoid our lives becoming small and petty.

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

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