

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 Godde 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

I've remarked on occasion that nothing has any more meaning than someone provides. Within this month's essays, my intent is to go further and deeper into understanding that our relationship to such meanings does not need to be passive.

As much as we may perceive and respect (or not) the meanings which others around us may assign to events and objects, we can also alter our experience of events and circumstances to varying degrees, by more consciously and intelligently either assigning or withholding meaning.

There is also the possibility that we are all collaborators in the formation of whatever reality we experience—never fully in control of everything but equally not without significant influence either.

At the heart of this month's meditations, therefore, is the challenge of utilizing the tool of meaning-making constructively.

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

Assigning Meaning Erroneously

I suspect a very contentious and debatable area of discussion is the discernment of what is erroneous and what is not. Granting that there are many different opinions on this subject, my intent is to focus upon a more basic level of functionality. If I assign meaning in a way that has a negative effect upon my ability to satisfy a particular goal, then clearly I am working against myself in much the same way as a person who goes jogging in order to develop healthy lungs and then engages in smoking a cigarette immediately afterward.

Certainly we each have the freedom to choose our own behaviors, whether or not they are self-sabotaging. I do not believe, however, that anyone genuinely has a right to lie to the self or to others about the choices that are being made. A choice that is contrary to truth, I believe, will always be a wrong choice. You are of course free to disagree with me on this point if you wish.

To return to the current subject, however, my intended focus is the action of assigning meaning in

a way that is in fact self-sabotaging. One of the most common ways this seems to occur, is within the wide variety of statements which predict outcomes and future developments. A current action does not inherently mean that any particular result will definitely happen, although past experience may describe that result as being more or less probable.

Specifically because each moment of life is a complex intersection of literally hundreds if not thousands of influences and contributions, anything is possible. Humanity's fascination with certainty, security, and predictability ultimately works against its ability to learn, to develop, and to grow. It is not that security does not exist, however, but rather that the only place security can reliably exist is within each other.

The only thing that ensures that security not only can but does in fact exist, however, is ourselves—our beliefs, commitments, dedication, principles, character, and so forth. In the living of each moment, we are each creating varying degrees of security or insecurity for both ourselves and for others. Assigning meaning in ways that ignore such interconnected relationships, is inescapably erroneous.

In this way, assigning meaning erroneously is more or less synonymous with refusing to engage in genuinely unconditional love, which is the lifeblood of all true spirituality and inter-relationship. To be genuinely spiritually alive, is to assign meaning truthfully rather than erroneously; to accept that one is in fact inter-related with all other surrounding life and that much security and empowerment can be gained by choosing to act with unconditional love whenever and however one has the strength and wisdom to do so.

We do not need to be our own worst enemies; love is what allows us to avoid this. We must be willing, however, to take a serious look in the mirror and notice when and how love is either absent or present. In noting where it is absent, we will have a place to start.

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Assigning Meaning Intentionally

I have heard many speak of the importance of personal intention, especially within the performance of prayers and rituals, but there is a very fine line between personal intention and hidden agenda which we would do well to understand—especially the basic difference that personal intention is a matter of one's contribution and hidden agenda is a matter of expectations.

A personal intention is, ideally, first and foremost an expression of love, of creativity, and in some way of healing. One contributes one's time, energy, attention, abilities, or resources to improve a situation or circumstance. Sometimes there may even be aspects of investment or self-sacrifice.

A hidden agenda, conversely, arises from judgment rather than benevolence, seeking control or domination of persons or circumstances. From the limited perspective of the perpetrator (and all perspectives are by their very nature limited), an interpretation is made about what is best for persons or situations. In most cases, such interpretations are made without adequate information, essentially creating a sort of self-imposed blindness. Wise interpretations can only occur using all available accurate information.

To assign meaning intentionally, therefore, one must first have a foundation of wisdom, truth, and love from which to create one's intentions. An often overlooked but nevertheless essential additional ingredient, is humility. Having assigned meaning intentionally, one must be open to whatever response life provides, even if that response is initially disagreeable. To do less would be synonymous with expecting life to be no more than a dispassionate computer—regurgitating what we want without any additional wisdom or love than we have already provided.

Life is ultimately about growth, especially growth of the soul. If we are simply repeating the same contributions and results we already know, we are not growing and we are not truly living.

Adding one's intentions, ideally, is about nurturing that moment specifically toward growth. In fact, the challenge of adding positive intention may itself be an act of growth. In pondering the language, symbols, or understandings by which we intentionally assign meaning, we may notice things previously overlooked and thereafter view the world and our relationships in a new way.

From a contrary perspective, however, there is the possibility of negative personal intentions and positive hidden agendas. I hope

that is fairly obvious that the former arise brokenness or woundedness of some kind. It has long been my observation that brokenness always seeks to reproduce itself in others and that ongoing cycles of brokenness are generally only interrupted by infusions of love and wisdom. I am not willing to blame the persons who participate in the ongoing cycles of brokenness, however, specifically because the beginning of the brokenness started long before they were involved and, like every person so victimized both before and after them, what is needed is effective healing.

With regard to positive hidden agendas, this is a gray area of mixed and confused ethics and morals. As the time-worn phrase suggests, "the road to hell is paved with good intentions." There have been a few times in my life when someone lied to me in order to accomplish what he or she felt was the best possible result. In every case, I found myself unable to fully trust that person afterwards, nor was any way ever found to re-establish the depth and strength of relationship which previously existed. Rather than becoming collaborators in discovering ever greater truth within each of our lives, I found afterward that the other and I had been irrevocably separated, because their willingness to manipulate made it clear that no greater discovery could occur than the knowledge or wisdom they already possessed.

So when I am given opportunity to assign meaning intentionally, I look for that interpretation which most embodies wisdom, love, and especially truth. These three are ultimately what virtually every example of empowerment, of growth, and of being fully, joyfully, and holistically alive includes. The most beautiful dreams one can have or hold, consistently include wisdom, love, and truth. Participating in making those dreams also come true, is a matter of adding whatever wisdom, love, and truth I can, to the complex combination of resources and influences which converge within each moment of life.

A final point to consider is whether in the absence of personal intention, one is even fully present within the pivotal moment. By forming an intention, I bring whatever wisdom and love I possess to the the needs and opportunities of the particular moment. If I am even internally or secretly preoccupied with something other than the present moment and every thing that its context includes, whatever love and wisdom I could have contributed will also be elsewhere.

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

Assigning Meaning Collaboratively

A primary challenge to collaboration is language, with all of its corresponding cultural nuances, personal ideosyncracies, and experiential variances. To collaborate, we must first establish at least a minimum of common language. The fact that we may be using the same words, however, is absolutely not enough.

I have often wondered whether an answer to this dilemma might be a matter of taking the time to fully hear one another's stories. A principle difficulty of that, however, is that there is never enough time and that even the telling of a story is dependent upon language which may be understood in many different ways. Ultimately, we are left with the challenge of understanding as much as we can, hoping that it is enough, and marching forward as if it is—yet with humility because we recognize that language is much more predisposed to misunderstanding than to understanding accurately. Nonetheless, if errors are unintentionally made, then we must be willing to recognize that whenever it becomes clear that this is happening or has happened, and promptly amend situations and circumstances in whatever ways we are able—because we are all students and learners in comparison to the divine embodiment of highest wisdom and greatest love.

A friend recently mentioned that he thought I might be preoccupied with perfection, judging by the standard of honesty I strive to maintain. I quickly corrected him, explaining that honesty is always a process, while perfection is static state that can move no further. If honesty cannot learn, then it is no longer honesty, because none of us is so perfect that we have nothing more to learn.

Effective collaboration does, nonetheless, require absolute honesty, in much the same way that dials and gauges of various kinds must accurately inform us about the operation of the corresponding machine. The gauges do not necessarily tell us what the particular machine will

*"Collaboration is always
a combination of
both seen and unseen
persons and forces
acting in harmony."*

--Sister Who

do next or even how long the machine will operate in the manner that it is currently operating, but if the gauges do not provide honest and accurate information, we will not be able to make wise responsive decisions. If, for example, a road sign indicates a sharp turn immediately ahead, I need to know with reasonable accuracy whether or not I am moving at a dangerously excessive speed.

To assign meaning collaboratively, therefore, is first of all to be blessed with comprehensible truth and then to respond in a way that embodies mutually empowering gratitude. We honor the giver of each and every blessing whenever we utilize the particular gift in a way that makes life and the world somehow more beautiful, able, and constructive. That utilization of any particular gift, however, begins with the challenge of embracing—if necessary, wrestling with—the myriad of possibilities that language includes.

An additional consideration of collaborative assignment of meaning, is that there may be three meanings between only two people: the meaning that each nonetheless retains individually and the integrated or synthesized meaning that the two were able—through ongoing and sometimes intense dialogue and negotiation—to form together. No assumption should be made that the individual meanings have ceased to exist, just because a final group meaning or decision was ultimately accomplished by mutually respectful negotiation.

An example of this would be any political election. Prior to the election, candidates representing and possibly chosen by various perspectives and specific interests campaign adversarially and intensely. Once the election has been completed and public decisions regarding the occupants of offices have been made, however, it is imperative that a community act with solidarity to encourage each and every elected person to do his or her best, often using a combination of accountability, assistance, and the provision of truthful and adequately detailed information.

Nothing good will come from eternally remaining adversaries; nothing bad will be prevented by ignoring errors, mistakes, and character flaws. Between these two extremes of strategy, however, is the possibility of honest and mutually respectful dialogue, by which genuine understanding and collaborative possibilities are increased. Considering that in a spiritual sense we are all ultimately interconnected anyway, love and wisdom always recommend collaborative harmony.

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

Assigning Meaning Empoweringly

As much as there are times when I empower objects or events by assigning them meaning, I have also experienced times and events when embracing deeper truth was a matter of recognizing that meaning was not inherent. Within such moments, it was more empowering to everyone and everything concerned, to remind myself that the effects or ultimate outcome of a particular development still included a range of diverse possibilities. It is important to remember, for example, that alternative solutions are always just as possible as disastrous events. It is also important to remember that it is not empowering to regard assigning meaning as a constant and burdensome task. Sometimes it is more empowering to reflect upon the meaning of the experience afterward and to simply be fully present and involved while it is actually happening.

In remembering the numerous hikes through the wilderness which I've done during the past three decades, I often discovered that my abilities were not as limited as I had believed them to be. It was not believing in my ability that kept me going or that accomplished a desirable outcome; it was the simple choice, repeated a thousand times, to take one more step—to never quit or give up. The choice to withhold from those moments the interpretation that my feelings of exhaustion meant that I would not be able to finish what I'd started, was what ultimately opened the door to sometimes miraculous accomplishment.

As long as one more step is possible, a myriad of diverse changes are also possible. As long as love is possible, healing can occur anywhere, at any time, in a virtually infinite variety of ways. As long as I understand that I am a multi-dimensional spiritual and physical being, being fully present and positively expressive within each moment of my life opens a door through which divine intervention may choose to enter and alter a challenging situation. As much as my preference would be to avoid facing my challenges alone, if my family is primarily spiritual rather than physical in nature, it is imperative that I continue to strive to make them proud of my efforts and actions. Their love is no less real, simply because it comes from a spiritual rather than material place.

It is not, after all, how much we have that determines our ability to assign meaning, but rather how much we do with whatever we do have.

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

On a Personal Note

After much hard work, all of the used building materials I was given have now been transported and stored in the backyard. My hands are beginning to heal. The next project is to install a wood-pellet stove in the partial basement of the house. It is possible this will be completed within the next two weeks.

My fourth pre-dissertation doctoral paper, "The Essential Contribution of Spiritual Vocation," is making its way through a complicated submission process, but seems likely to soon be approved and credited. This will allow work to begin on the second-to-last pre-dissertation doctoral paper, "The Definition of Morality within Cross-cultural and Inter-religious Contexts," which I expect to be both challenging and rewarding.

A significant amount of video editing on more episodes of "Sister Who Presents" remains to be done, but will hopefully be complete within the next two weeks and include adding twenty-three more episodes to the collection available on the Internet at www.YouTube.com/DenverNeVaar.

With regard to my furry family, the dogs seem to be getting along mostly okay of late, but with occasional tense moments. Gareth clearly has a number of emotional issues in need of healing, the majority of which seem to be the result of practices employed by the puppy mill where he was born—which was deceptively presenting itself publicly as being a reputable breeder of high-quality dogs. Obviously it's not his fault that he was born in a puppy mill. All things considered, he is loved and nurtured here by both myself and the other dogs, in whatever ways are possible.

May Godde's blessings, love, and peace be with you now and always. — S.W. / D.N.

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www.GodSpaceSanctuary.org

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