

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

Brokenness, that "elephant in the living room" which none wishes to acknowledge or address, is actually opportunity. Were it not for shortening days and colder times, there could be no return of spring. The release of heavy burdens could not occur, if such burdens did not exist. Even birth would be trivial and unimportant, were it not for mortality and death at the other end of our individual journeys through time.

It is specifically the darkness which makes the candle flame so beautiful. It is specifically the adversarial weather of winter which makes the warmth and security of home such a highly prized treasure. It is specifically the barbarism of military conflicts which makes peaceful collaboration with others who are quite different from ourselves, into such a miraculous blessing.

Here's another look at a few dimensions of brokenness.

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

Brokenness Passing

I always kind of dread opening the storage boxes of Christmas ornaments, knowing that somehow in spite of whatever care was applied to packing them away at the conclusion of last year's holiday season, one or another will have been somehow broken during the months of waiting for the next holiday season. Since virtually all of them are irreplaceable, the beginning of decorating for the new holiday season must therefore also be a time for letting go of certain cherished ornaments and to some extent the memories they inspire.

Last year, I remember that a couple of especially treasured ornaments which were originally my grandmother's were the ones which I discovered to have been broken. Was it somehow an omen that her own departure from this world would follow several months later? Perhaps not, but the synchronicity is still a little troubling.

This year's broken ornament was purchased on a shopping trip some years ago, when I was

accompanied by a fellow whom I thought might become a new lifepartner at some point. There have been a number of such men in my life since my lifepartner and I separated in Autumn of 1998.

Perhaps these are the losses which create room for relationships yet to come. There have been, after all, numerous opportunities I'm sure, which I have not seen because my attention was preoccupied with something or someone else. I can regret these missed opportunities and perhaps even consider my life to be destined for some degree of failure because I did not know when or what to do when a particular moment appeared.

I can also, however, allow life to include broken moments and equally allow those moments to pass rather than define all that follows. While waiting in a reception area to be interviewed for a teaching position (for which I was not hired), I noticed a scribbled note on a bulletin board by an unknown author which stated, "Don't worry about people in your past; there's a reason they didn't make it to your future."

I remain grateful for the inspiration and energy that being in love with someone always brings, for the feeling of strength and confidence and security which comes with being part of a community of whatever description, and for the moments when familial dynamics bless my life. I strive to honor all of the above within the living of each new day--to accomplish as much good as I can so that no one who was ever generous toward me will have to wonder whether or not such acts of generosity were wise.

Similarly, in just a few more weeks, we will again be given a new year in which to live, to shape and form it in whatever way we wish. The challenge which lies before us, therefore, is whether or not to allow to pass whatever brokenness the old year contains; whether or not to remake ourselves with even better ways of loving and living; and whether or not to live in such a way that the giver of this new year will have to wonder whether or not such generosity was wise.

By wisdom and love, we may all be reborn.

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

Brokenness Linger

Endlessly, it seems at times, I brainstorm ideas and possibilities for surviving the socially, politically, and economically abusive world in which I live. In spite of my best efforts, some problems (at least for now) refuse to leave. Is there something which they are trying to tell me which I have not yet understood? Is that why they remain with me? Is it, as some of my New Age spirituality friends advise, the punishment for sins of a past life which I cannot now even recall?

I remember reading a small book during my teenage years which told of the faith healer Kathryn Kuhlman and included the quotation, "I don't know why God doesn't heal everyone, but I'm very afraid of those who say they do."

Controversial though faith healers may be, it is specifically challenging, even during the thirty-three years Jesus is reported to have physically lived on earth, that an abundance of disabled and diseased people continue to exist, in nearly every time and place anyone can name. Whatever conclusions anyone else may wish to draw, it does seem that Jesus's ministry and the practice of spirituality which he advocated was only peripherally and not primarily concerned with the restoration of what is generally considered to be perfect health. That discussion, however, I will leave to more professional theologians who I'm sure can keep the arguments going for at least as long into the future as they have in the past.

What concerns me is the lingering of brokenness. I have accepted that our bodies are mortal and temporary and I do believe that we each have an eternal spirit of some description which will live on after the termination of bodily functions, in some way or another which is probably incomprehensible to any current human intelligence or consciousness. I also know from friendships with persons with various disabilities, that no disability is sufficient to prevent a person from being genuinely intelligent, loving, and valuable, even in the midst of more or less endless struggles against the particular disability.

It sounds almost too simplistic, but perhaps one aspect of lingering brokenness is that it can help to keep a person honest. For a paraplegic, there is no denying the existence of nor the dependency upon a wheelchair. For a person who is legally blind, there is no denying the need for alternative means of perception--during each and every moment of life.

None of which, I hasten to add, inherently prevents any such disabled person from living life to the fullest; from engaging in love, creativity, learning, relationships, and diverse experiences. It must be noted, however, that here again the limitations of language are problematic, since many so-called disabled persons do not consider themselves to be broken (lingering or otherwise).

A bit more difficult to manage, are those who struggle with forms of lingering brokenness which are not so visible or obvious. Throughout my teenage years, I read book after book after book, trying to learn the secrets of positive self image, esteem, and expression, only to discover that the world is virtually saturated with professional and personal relationships which punish rather than reward the accomplishment of such inner growth. Curiously, although nearly all of the books superficially promised to provide the resolution which I sought, none of them ever did.

The realization of this, however, was what actually made the difference. The lingering brokenness is ultimately little more than another sign post, pointing a way through life by which our minds, our hearts, and most importantly our eternal souls can grow.

In more places and situations than I can name, I have met good-hearted, well-intentioned, and intelligent people who in spite of all of their best efforts, simply did not have a visceral understanding of struggling for survival, of being marginalized for personal characteristics beyond anyone's control, and of having an entirely different perspective of the surrounding world.

Dialogue with those who are different from ourselves is a wonderful place to begin. To deepen our understanding, however, we must also be willing to visit, to place ourselves, and even perhaps for a time to live within the worlds experienced by others. It is not comfortable doing so; it is, however, most valuable experience and perhaps the strongest persuasion any of us will ever receive to let each individual self-identify and communicate life as he or she perceives it.

If I can allow you to be you--disabilities, orientation, racial classification, gender, religious or spiritual creed, and all other personal characteristics included--then I may find the same freedom extended to me and we may even be able to be true friends and family to one another--even in the midst of lingering brokenness.

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

Brokenness Transforming

I don't even remember the title of the book anymore, but I do recall while in grade school discovering a fictional novel of the shared adventures of a young boy and the mythical phoenix. For whatever reason (it never occurred to me to ask why), throughout the vast universe, there was only one phoenix--but that's a discussion for another time.

The signature quality of the phoenix is the ritual self-cremation which precipitates the emergence of a new reborn phoenix from the ashes of the funeral pyre. This was the conclusion of that novel as well, that just when a self-serving naturalist was approaching, intending to shoot the phoenix and take it to a laboratory for scientific study, the boy pushed the new bird toward the edge of the bluff, encouraging it to flee from the approaching danger. He watched silently as the bird finally took wing and soared into an orange sunset, its new wings sparkling in the fading light.

As I said, however, that was the end of the book. A great many chapters of adventures and shared struggles preceded, none of which could be hurried along without skipping over and thereby completely missing some very important parts of the story. I recall reading many years ago that, "the problem with life is that it's so daily."

Telling the highlights of a life can make virtually anyone sound impressive. Living life one moment at a time with someone, reveals a great amount of tediously slow progression, just as the hike to a mountain's summit (as well as the entire way back to the trailhead) is accomplished one step at a time.

It is within such individual steps, however, that elevation is gained. Similarly, it is within the moments which like sands mounded together begin to build a mountain, that the expanse of a life begins to take shape and form. Only one

*"Fleeing from loneliness
and perceiving it
as adversarial
may prevent me from ever
having enough space
to spread my own wings."*

--Sister Who

mental step beyond that, is the original event of brokenness being transformed by all that follows it.

On some mountain hikes, when such events occurred, I have had to turn back, promising to attempt the journey to the summit at a later date. At other times, I improvised and compensated for whatever losses I experienced, such that I was able to prevail and view both the world and my place within it from a much higher perspective.

Often within such hiking trips, my wooden staff would be scarred by the stones along the way. On one occasion, the top of the staff was broken and needed to be later re-glued and mended. Considering that the staff had originally been a small tree in a forest and then a Christmas tree for a short time, the additional scars were but subsequent chapters and pages in its long story, written with mysterious symbols which could only be understood by the one who'd also traveled every step of the way with it. For my staff, I am the only storyteller who knows and can interpret its symbols, writing, and language; the only one who knows nearly the whole of its story.

For each of us, there have been setbacks and stumblings which only those who were with us could possibly know. That our stories and experiences are unknown, however, does not make them less real or less true. Rather, they are reminders that we are each more than is superficially visible to those around us. Similarly, as this year draws to a close, there are hundreds of stories of where life has taken us throughout the past twelve months, of which we are each the only storyteller who knows. Because we know, we can transform understanding of what has occurred.

Whether in form analogous to the phoenix's ashes or the darkening days of early winter, the negative spiral can be broken and reversed. Fear can be diminished and love prevail. The only question is whether or not we will be participants in such transformation, adding our grains of sand to the mountain of human experience and spiritual reality--providing a new day's wings and light.

The phoenix does not enter the fire because it despises life, but rather so that it may have life in a new and better form. Similarly, I embrace new challenges, not because I wish to make my life difficult, but rather so that my spirit and contribution to life may expand. May this be a time of rebirth and expansion for you as well.

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

Brokenness Fading

Does brokenness ever really go away, so much so that life can be as if the brokenness had never occurred? I don't know. I do know, however, that I will not be all that I have become, if I ever cease to remember what the experience of brokenness has taught me, simply because I was willing to listen and to learn from the peculiar and painful experience.

Do I live within the memory? I try not to. Its limitations are too small for the dimensions of my soul, which has grown larger in response to the experience. I do, however, strive to live with the memory because of the ways such memories empower my vision. There are so many things which would be (and will be) beyond my comprehension, if I ever forget the love, the reality, and the honest truth of such struggles.

Equally so, there are so many moments which I will fail to appreciate, if I am ignorant of the struggles which were necessary to endure, in order to give birth to the particular moment. It is the struggles rather than the resolutions which give depth and strength and height and breadth to the unfolding of life within and all around me.

As pleasant and as desirable as moments of prosperity and ease are, they do not make me stronger, wiser, or better. If anything, they encourage complacency, apathy, and self-centeredness. As necessary as salt is to food, equally so is giving essential to prosperity and ease so that we do not become like the Dead Sea, hording so much salt that we become toxically adversarial to life itself.

I am reminded again of the words of the unnamed poet within the movie, "How to Make an American Quilt": "Young lovers seek perfection; old lovers learn the art of sewing shreds together and seeing beauty in a multiplicity of patterns."

It is the brokenness, partiality, and smallness of the pieces within a quilt which makes them desirable for inclusion within the overall work, ideally arranged in configurations which make their colors and individual patterns all the more vibrant and inspiring, even as they provide basic warmth and comfort to those wanting only to survive the coldness of the world around them.

When all is said and done, we are God's quilt, intended to keep each other warm throughout the changing fortunes of time, until the coldness of brokenness fades to a distant memory.

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

On a Personal Note

Has it already been a month? Well, a very busy one it has been. I'm not sure of the particular order of events, but within the past four weeks has been a second rejection by a university doctoral program, a computer breakdown so complete that the operating system itself had to be reinstalled, a very difficult surge in my monthly mortgage payment, a general diminishing of income-producing opportunities, enrollment in an online doctoral program which is not at all what I had in mind but may be nevertheless well-suited to the ministerial work I will undertake within the years ahead, and thus far three "God Space" meetings within my home which were minimally attended but very much appreciated by those present.

Additionally, the annual fee has been paid so that "Sister Who Presents" will continue to be cablecast in Denver, Colorado throughout 2008 and an additional twenty-seven episodes are in the process of being edited, which will bring the rotating collection of shows to a total of seventy-five episodes, which are (or will be soon) all available on DVD.

The calendar, entitled "Finding Harmony in 2008" is now available, free of charge.

An additional encouragement has been the purchase of several photos and quotes through the website. The pictures available there include those used within the 2008 calendar.

It is my hope sometime during 2008 to record a third album of original songs, to be entitled, "Steps Along the Way." The first album ("My Soul Knows its Face") and the second album ("Prayers"), as well as DVDs of "Sister Who Presents" and prints of photos and quotes, are all available for purchase online through the website.

All that being said, the work of Sister Who is unfortunately still not financially self-sustaining, so any and all contributions or assistance with increasing website purchases, is very much appreciated.

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

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