

# Sister Who's Perspective

*Sister Who's Perspective, Issue #114 December 2008, 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

Life and the bigger picture of reality is an incomprehensibly complex web of interdependent relationships, within which actions of giving and receiving are constantly happening. To appreciate and utilize each precious moment and season of life fully, however, the greatest awareness and understanding of ourselves and our world as is possible are strongly recommended.

If we do not know what things are in respect to not only *what* they are but also *how* they function (past, present, and future), we cannot even begin to nurture their positive capabilities or encourage their greater potential. As with most things, positive changes in such areas must begin with ourselves.

This month's reflections and perspective offer some food for thought which are hopefully helpful to you in finding an empowering awareness of all that this current holiday season has to offer.

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

## What Did You Give

I remember that as a child, the success or failure of the holidays was measured by the frequent question upon returning to school in January after the holiday break, "So what did you get for Christmas?" If I could not name something impressive, my social worth was somehow diminished and it was more difficult to persuade others to include me. On some subconscious level, it was if I had not been valued and this was interpreted as some sort of recommendation that I should not be valued; that I was not worthy of love.

An exaggerated interpretation? I don't think so--especially within a commercially and economically obsessed society. In general, children have always had and probably always will have, a remarkable ability to perceive the truth of relationships and events in ways that make adults uncomfortable. Perhaps this is because what matters most to children are love and honesty and it is deeply confusing when those whom we love and

whom we believe love us in return, fail to be honest with us.

Using the Christian story of Jesus' birth as an example, the difference between that story and our current human civilizations is that the story focuses upon what was given rather than upon what was received. In similar fashion, if the current celebration of Christmas was more concerned with giving than with receiving, we might get so carried away with expressing our love for each other that opening the presents might be overlooked and left for another day.

If the celebration of Christmas were viewed as an opportunity to give, we might in some new alternative way be emulating the Native American ritual of the Give-Away, in which the virtue of being generous was not merely a statement but rather an actual demonstration of significant proportions.

All of which prompts the question, if you don't feel the loss of what you have given in some way, have you really given anything at all? Additionally, have you invested yourself in knowing the recipient well enough to have any sense at all of what would be empowering to that person? The giving of gifts that one has personally made are sometimes described as a form of giving of one's self. That being the case, perhaps we should not give anything at all to those to whom we would be unwilling to give of ourselves, since the gift would be a lie.

The miracle of this season, therefore, regardless of one's spiritual/religious orientation, may be yet another opportunity--in imitation of the change from diminishing days to diminishing nights--to shift our living from diminishing love toward diminishing apathy; to shift our living from diminishing relationship toward diminishing isolation; and to shift our living from diminishing selflessness to diminishing selfishness. If this is all we give to ourselves and to the world around us, it is enough to bring light back to the world.

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

## What Did You Get

Seeing only appearances is easy and is perhaps especially enabled at this time of year by the abundance of colorful gift wrap, all of which generally conceals rather than reveals whatever the packaging contains. The old adage, "Don't judge a book by its cover" has been around for a very long time, but an enormous amount of attention is still spent fussing over the exact design of book covers. Similarly, gifts wrapped within foil or reflective metallic paper immediately identify a giver of sufficient wealth to spend a little more on the wrapping. Because my childhood family frequently had more limited resources, Christmas presents were occasionally wrapped within pages from the comics section of the Sunday newspaper.

Did it matter what was inside? Oh, most definitely! By the time I discovered what was inside, however, my expectations had already been metaphorically colored by the external wrapping. In some cases, this made the final discovery more wonderful; in other cases, the disappointment was more crushing than it would have otherwise been--mostly because I had not yet developed the eyes to see the deeper meanings and potential of certain gifts.

I have often remarked that I believe each person to be a "care package" from God; one of those packages of diverse items which college students sometimes receive, generally from either someone who wanted to be remembered or else someone who wanted to be supportive of the particular student. In a similar way, gifts are sometimes given because of the role which the giver wants us to play within his or her life and at other times given because the giver genuinely wants to be supportive of our discovery and demonstration of the best we can be and do.

Receiving the latter, a gift of unconditional love, is a rare and wondrous blessing which needs to be recognized as such by applying ourselves more diligently to developing our unique interests, aptitudes, and skills. I recall reading a quote a few years ago that our lives are God's gift to us; what we do with our lives is our gift back to God.

Similarly, we could each be a Christmas present from God to the world around us. The challenge of this, is that sometimes we are not what the world expected and our wrapping may be unintentionally misleading. The invitation within this is to discover and explore the mystery which God has given to the world through us.

Someone whose appearance suggests ugliness or impracticality may be met with disinterest and challenged to prove their potential to an adversarial audience. Those with more desirable appearances may never be asked to prove themselves at all, even though they may be shallow and weak in ways that are devastating.

Ultimately, what we get within every gift is an opportunity to do something with life, which was previously impossible for us to do. Each person we meet offers a new perspective or way of seeing, a way of reducing our metaphorical glaucoma or inability to grasp a broader view of life. Each thing we receive may be a new tool by which we can address challenges which were previously insurmountable, thereby accomplishing things we never before dreamed we'd do.

Such perception of possibilities, however, requires a certain multi-dimensionalness to our vision--that we learn to see not only the wrapping, not only the form, not only the action, but also the potential of the gifts we have received. In applying such perception to people whom we meet or who may even be very familiar to us already in a superficial sort of way, we must learn to see what they can become, how they learn and grow, what affects them or gets their attention, and what are the ways in which love can most effectively begin to heal them, especially within their deeply hidden memories and places.

We may never know what lies within them. Perhaps we do not need to know what lies within them. Like the blooming of the pointsettia, triggered by subtle changes in daylight, unconditional love can be the environmental shift which allows them to bloom in ways we never imagined to be possible.

If all we get for Christmas this year is love--pure, genuine, unconditional love--we will be the recipients of a far greater treasure than can be found within the massive Macy's store at Herald Square in New York City or on any page of the holiday catalog published by Nieman-Marcus. If all we get is peace, either because of what we have given, because of a renewed awareness of being loved, or for any other reason, we can count ourselves richly blessed. If all we get is hope--that beacon of light which shines like a guiding star to lead us to divine mysteries we could spend our whole lives learning to understand--we will be far richer than all the millionaires of human history.

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

## What Have You Released

The primary reason that nearly every culture throughout human history acknowledges this time of year is the fundamental shift from darkness to light. Recognizing dependence upon light, humanity strives to create and welcome life in any way it can, one example being lights and ornaments that sparkle on nearly every holiday tree, no matter what theme of decoration is used.

Specifically because the name of Christmas comes from Christianity, the decoration of a tree comes from Paganism, the lighting of candles comes from Judaism, and additional elements of typical holiday celebrations can be tied to a number of other religious and cultural traditions, it is helpful to me to think of Christmas as a human celebration, integrating diversity in a constructive way and inviting peaceful global community.

Part of what allows me to do this, however, is that I have released ownership of the day to the whole of humanity. I have no interest in arguing about who is right or wrong or whether any claim of the right to control the celebration is legitimate, which reminds me of the Native American proverb, "We do not inherit the land from our ancestors; we borrow it from our children."

Similarly, in the words of Chief Seattle, "Man does not weave this web of life. He is merely a strand of it. Whatever he does to the web, he does to himself." When we release control, release expectations, and release each other from demands for conformity or performance, we give a gift of unconditional love and of freedom. We allow others to shine, move, and contribute within the web of life as only each of them can.

The proverb has been around for a long time and unfortunately the name of its author lost to history, "If you love something, set it free. If it comes back to you, it's yours forever. If it doesn't,

it never was." The primary teaching of this quote is that we cannot control or cling to what we love, but must release it to its own will and fate. To do otherwise will strangle or suffocate it. To love, therefore, is to release--not to neglect, to become apathetic, or to push away, but simply to release.

In releasing what we love, we become collaborators and servants of mysterious higher wisdom hidden within the object of our affection. Just as I release a seed into the ground so that it can grow and refrain from interfering, I must not be the adversary of growth which would otherwise occur within any person or thing I claim to love.

At this time of the turning of the year, I can release fear of darkness and allow it to fade of its own accord rather than according to my ideas of what should be. I can release expectations of the coming year and instead simply remain attentive and supportive, letting the best possibilities come to the surface and blossom as they will.

What remains central to the challenge of releasing, is that the form of the seed must be left behind in order for the plant to sprout and begin to grow. Faith is also essential because it may be weeks or months before the sprout reaches the surface and digging the seed up each day to see how it is doing would most likely kill it altogether. I must trust that life is growing in ways which I cannot presently see. This act of trusting is also a form of release, a way in which specific understanding, perception, and control are given up so that the divine spark of life within the seed can do what it knows best how to do: to grow.

In welcoming such wisdom into our own lives, we must recognize that the passing year is a sort of seed of the coming year, a shell which must be broken and released for the life within to expand into new proportions and capabilities.

As the night releases its control and allows the day to grow, we too can release ourselves to new ways of thinking, being, and relating, shrugging off fear of what is unpleasant (i.e. springtime mud) but necessary to the growth of life. We can recognize that although the snow served a certain purpose, it is okay for it to now melt and thereby nurture and renew our world. We can acknowledge that who we have been throughout the past year may have been helpful within its context, but a new context is now forming within which we must have the freedom and ability to find and build new forms as well.

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

"Just as you cannot give away  
what you do not possess,  
you cannot successfully integrate  
objects, persons, or methods,  
the details and identity of which  
you do not know."

-- *Sister Who*

## What Have You Welcomed

I recall the first time I read of the Pagan celebration of Samhain (pronounced "sa-wen," the equivalent within the non-Pagan calendar being Halloween). The explanation given for costumes was that they were to illustrate a quality for which the person wished throughout the coming year.

Similarly, when I decorate my artificial holiday tree each year, each shaping of a branch and each placing of an ornament is accompanied by a brief thought-prayer. In shaping the branches this year, I was very insistent that no matter where the particular branch was located within the configuration of the overall tree, each branch must be reaching upwards, inviting the highest and best possibilities throughout the days to come.

In placing the ornaments, those which I placed most prominently are the ones which remind me in some way of a person, event, or time which I consider to be important--not all of which were especially pleasant, but the importance of their place and contribution within the overall picture of my life cannot be overstated. I am who I am to some degree specifically because of what these have given to me, for whatever amount of time the particular interaction occurred.

In these ways, the decorating of my holiday tree becomes an act of self-reflection and meditation, that even as the wheel of the year is turning, I myself am turning from what I have been to what I will be throughout the year to come.

Certainly it is a lot of work to drag out all of the paraphenilia, assemble the tree, test the lights, and place the decorations. If I fail to do so, however, how easy it will become for me to forget who I am and how necessary is the annual turning from dark to light, from old to new, and from death to life. Regardless of all that I do remember, there is much more of which I need to be frequently reminded within the hurried chaos of daily living.

New friends, old friends, the diverse ways in which I work to create a sense of family and to affirm my interconnectedness with the web of life--if I fail to be mindful of such things, I fail to renew within my heart the essential reasons to feel, to respond, and to live my life with as much passion and conviction as I can muster.

In failing to do that, I would fail to welcome myself and those around me into genuine living of this blessed holiday season and the year to come.

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

## On a Personal Note

To say that the past year has been challenging would be an understatement. By divine grace and significant help from certain friends, however, I have survived and continue to press onward in whatever ways I can. I am still trying to resolve the problem of not having reliable transportation, which has been additionally complicated by a mechanic who proved himself to be devastatingly untrustworthy. It is a terrible thing to have one's faith betrayed, but an act of courage and perseverance to endure such betrayal and yet retain faith in God and the ongoing possibility of human kindness.

My doctoral studies continue, although not as quickly as I'd hoped. Whenever I am tempted to give up, however, I am reminded of a very good friend and fellow student who stood by me throughout my masters degree studies, who once told me that although he didn't know when I would finish a doctoral degree, he had no doubt that I would. I refuse, therefore, to be a willing participant in any betrayal of his faith in me.

My house is frequently so cold that my toes go partially numb and my fingers hurt (disadvantages of minimal bodyfat), but I remain as industrious and productive as possible. A relatively warm winter this year would be a blessing. Hopefully within the next year the necessary insulation will be in place to prevent any recurrence of the current conditions.

For anyone who has forgotten to communicate a request, please remember that the 2009 desk calendar featuring photos and quotes of Sister Who is now available. Additionally, eight brand-new episodes of "Sister Who Presents" for cable-access television have been completed and submitted to Denver Open Media for cablecasting and Internet video-streaming. These are also of course available for purchase on DVD either by postal mail or by direct online purchase through my website, [www.sisterwho.com](http://www.sisterwho.com).

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 encourage production and distribution to continue. (Please make checks payable to Denver NeVaar and send to the postal address below).*

*Sister Who, PO Box 593, Westminster, CO 80036*

*Email: [dn@sisterwho.com](mailto:dn@sisterwho.com)*

*Internet website: <http://www.sisterwho.com>*