

# 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

An "elephant in the living room," that is, something unpleasant which is present but unaddressed because doing so would also be unpleasant, is equally an opportunity for personal and spiritual growth, individually and collectively. A close cousin of such an elephant is the challenge of self-reflection which, as with the elephant, is an invitation toward personal and spiritual growth. We cannot address something, however, if its existence has neither been acknowledged, nor measured, nor in any way closely observed and evaluated. Only when the object's properties and dynamics are familiar to us, can we begin to intelligently mold, shape, and change them.

This month's thoughts and reflections are offered in the hope that during this holiday season, you too will find new wings and new ways to fly, through greater skies than you ever imagined your thoughts, feelings, and spirit would travel.

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

## Detached Attraction

It's fairly safe to say that everyone wants good things to come to them. All too often, however, the primary focus is upon what we get, almost completing ignoring the quality of what we give. If what I give--my thoughts, words, actions, material gifts, and so forth--are genuinely both good and appropriate for the recipient, then even without receiving anything in return, I have increased the amount of goodness within the universe.

Phrased another way, I may put a "welcome" mat on my front porch, but there is nothing about that action that will actively draw desirable guests to my home. The mat has no audible voice, but may nevertheless encourage good feelings within all visitors who venture close enough to see it (large fluorescent orange letters which can be read from a hundred feet away may, of course, extend the mat's influence, but I've yet to see such a mat in use anywhere). Perhaps more importantly, the mat may also encourage positive feelings within myself, each time I re-enter my home.

Far too often, the discussion of what attracts good or ill fortune is obsessed with results rather than contributions. Far too often, this obsession is equally preoccupied with "blaming the victim" rather than creating a deeper understanding of cause and effect--or, better yet, of being a cause of genuine goodness without any great concern for whether or not the results favorably correspond.

One may argue that some sort of profit is essential to the maintenance of the ability to contribute, but this is true only to a point. Beyond that point--that is, in circumstances in which all costs have been covered and any additional return is pure profit--if unconditional love is not present, the effects of all previous efforts will ring hollow and empty.

On a different but related note, if we do good things as a sort of bargaining, keeping score of whether or not we receive a subsequent corresponding profit of some sort, we have once again failed to give from a place of unconditional love; it is doubtful at best that any other kind of love is genuinely love at all.

All things considered, we must do the things which may attract good things to us simply because they are the right things to do and not because, like some narcissistic mercenary, we want to be paid for our contribution. We do what we do because of what we are and within every moment we have the ability to show the world around us just what sort of person it is that we truly are.

When we detach ourselves from concerns of attraction, therefore, we are finally free to be whoever and whatever we are and to be the best examples of humanity that we can individually be. Will attraction follow? Perhaps, but keeping score of whether or not it does, takes time and energy away from being a source of light and love within our individually unique corners of the world. It would be much better to love and to shine--without conditions or expectations--within every opportunity we can.

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

## Detached Investment

I would like to think that by now the notion that all of life is thoroughly interconnected and interdependent is well-known, as is the understanding that the earthly material life of each person or creature is limited and finite, rather than endless and infinite. Since we are interconnected in various ways, making all other creatures in some sense parts of our extended family, it only makes sense that we would be concerned for the welfare of others in whatever ways we can be. Equally, it only makes sense that we would want those who live after us to remember us fondly and be thankful to us for what we contributed while we were here--not just the financial resources of whatever estate is divided up by the document of a "last will and testament," but of the ways that we taught those around us by our words and deeds to be loving and wise also.

Considering such relationships, therefore, one could speak of investing in the members of one's family, of one's community, of one's nation, or of one's world. In order to do this in a manner consistent with unconditional love, however, one must also embrace a certain detachment--that is, granting the recipient the freedom to make his or her own choices, to learn from life in his or her own ways, and to show the nature of his or her own soul by the manner in which the resources are put to further constructive use.

In giving with an attitude of detachment, one is not unconcerned or apathetic, but rather is releasing some sort of raw material to the control of another, to see what that person can make of the material received and what that person can learn while engaged in such construction. If life is ultimately about the growth of the soul, the most important question is the way or the extent to which receiving and interacting with the particular gift does in fact produce growth. The only time that a gift can legitimately be said to be a waste, therefore, is if the gift never produces any growth.

I recall a time when a friend generously extended to me a financial donation, but was silently disturbed when I used the funds for a statue of Quan Yin which I placed within the meditation garden which I was constructing at the time. I don't think he was able to see the broader implications of my choice. In the years since that occasion, however, I have remembered him fondly and said a prayer for his welfare, nearly every time I have once again noticed the statue maintaining

its silent vigil. Additionally, more visitors to the garden have commented on the international, interfaith, and inter-genderal qualities represented by the statue, than have commented on the myriad of qualities represented by the statue of Saint Francis of Assisi, standing only a step or two further south within the same flowerbed. (A note of explanation: some theological perspectives consider Quan Yin to be an androgynous integration of male and female, perhaps somewhat analogous to the Hindu perception of the Divine manifested with the name Ardhanari).

I do not know what God or humanity will make of the creative work I continue to do to the very best of my ability and resources, nor do I know what positive effect any of the words I compose or speak will ultimately have within the lives of those who hear or read them directly, within newsletters or within an Internet website, or by viewing any particular television show. In order to continue to do the work at all, I must entrust the best expressions of my love and wisdom to God and to others and then let go so that they can make of my humble offerings whatever is most useful to them. To do otherwise, to cling to what I have given after I have given it, or to seek to control another's utilization of the gift, would be like wrapping my fingers around the throat of the gift and strangling all of the genuine life out of it.

Life is much bigger than I am and while it has always made sense to invest in life in whatever ways I can, I have never clung to any illusions of being able to demand any particular form from life. This would be as ridiculous as a child demanding a diet of only ice cream, a ceramic bowl demanding to remain on a shelf unused so that it does not get broken (at least until the next earthquake occurs), or a student demanding to be protected from the presence of all that is unfamiliar and therefore uncomfortable. All of these work against the loving, empowering, expanding nature of life and leave the soul locked in a coffin, perhaps no bigger than Pandora's box.

As much as opening that box released a myriad of evils, doing so also released to humanity the gift of hope and therewith also the gift of beautifully constructive possibility. The manifestation of hopes is therefore just as available to us as the manifestation of evils. Which will predominate, seems to be mostly a matter of what and how we are willing to invest.

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

## Detached Engagement

To be fully present without imposing any constraints, is to serve that moment with the fullness of one's creative potential. To be fully present, however, does not mean to restrict one's awareness to what is generally considered to be the present time. Being fully present also includes appropriate and effective integration of past and future elements as well. Each of us within this moment is the sum of all we have experienced and all that we will experience--and more. Rather than being merely the sum of all of our experiences, we are also composed of our decisions, our emotions, our beliefs, and our interpretations. With regard to this particular discussion, however, the belief is that being fully present also includes the presence of one's inspiration, motivation, and compassion--the feelings that drive us to respond in some way or another to whatever we encounter along the paths of our daily lives. If we do not respond, we are not fully present and it could also be argued that we are not fully alive.

All that being said, how can one be fully present and fully engaged in responding, yet sufficiently detached that one can allow other participants within the particular circumstance to make their own choices, chart their own course, and directly or indirectly influence their own outcomes? If one loves enough to genuinely desire another's maximum growth and development, letting go begins to make sense.

To use another metaphor, we can remain engaged by holding onto the string while allowing the kite to respond to the wind and fly wherever it will--as high, as far, as stable, or as wildly across the sky as the relationship between the wind and the particular kite determines. Additionally, even two identical kites flown by two identical children will behave differently once they have found their way into that wall-less space overhead. To be disappointed that one is not mirroring the behavior of the other, is to deny each kite its own individual existence at the end of the particular child's string.

*"For those with eyes to see,  
a snowflake is a window  
to miraculous possibilities;  
the same is true of each of us."*

-- Sister Who

Detached engagement is undeniably a form of relationship, but clearly a difficult one to do. Emotional engagement with the flight of the kite empowers one's spirit to rise with the kite, to be inspired, and to conclude the day with a feeling of accomplishment and renewal. Additionally, such engagement has the ability to endure the disappointment and recovery of a kite that in spite of all efforts crashes to the ground and begs to be mended in preparation for another future attempt.

Being detached does not mean that the success or failure of the kite's flight does not matter, but rather that either outcome will be embraced as a manifestation of the rise and fall of life's ever-shifting tides. There is something perhaps a little bit sacred waiting to be discovered within either occurrence, just as there is within everything touched by the spirit of life in any way.

The practice of detached engagement, therefore, is the practice of playing, learning, growing, and building whatever it is within one's soul to play, to learn, to grow, or to build. More often within human societies, however, instead of detached engagement, expectations and censorship place demands upon individuals which are contrary to the inner winds of living, playing, learning, and building; demands which resist the inner winds, name the inner winds as being bad, and silence the individually unique music God has placed within each soul.

Shifting to a slightly different metaphor, it must be remembered that without the inner winds, the flute has neither a voice nor even a reason to exist. It may be that you are flute, the voice of which the world is still waiting to hear; the voice of which, within the understanding of your creator, the world desperately needs to hear, whether or not it is even aware of this need.

Such lack of awareness could be described as a form of mental illness and it is not difficult to assert that, in general, humanity is psychologically and emotionally dysfunctional. Few would argue that within certain historical incidents, humanity behaved in a way which was even literally insane.

Detached engagement is the challenge of remaining present and sane in the midst of insanity; daring to love when no one else does and when there's no immediate reward for doing so--except perhaps for the knowledge that love is always the right thing to do, even if it is almost never the easy thing to do.

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

## Detached Integration

When I engage without attachment, I give the best of myself so that the best of yourself can be nurtured and shared also. When we integrate all that each of us is, without attachment, we begin to create an expression of us; an expression that is neither your way nor my way, but rather a different way that blesses each of us equally. Doing something "our way" is thus not a question of any individual quality being left behind, but rather of all individual qualities being configured and organized into an orchestra of greater possibilities than any instrument could ever manage on its own.

The violin does not expect the flute to do what the violin does, nor does the timpani impose expectations upon the harp. Rather, each attempts to create a place within time and space within which the very best possibilities of each instrument can be shared and enjoyed by all. If each does its work well, the resulting beauty will leave the audience speechless and in awe, cheering loudly but unable to select any particular word to adequately communicate the sounds and emotions which have been heard--not just by their ears, but also by their hearts and minds.

Perhaps if everyone woke each morning with an intention to play as beautifully as possible within the symphony that is today, each evening's return to rest would be a time of awe and gratitude for the part we each were able to play within a greater manifestation of humanity's best possibilities--the sort of demonstration that I can only imagine makes God smile and once again pronounce, "it is good."

None of this is possible, however, if any instrument within the orchestra seeks to displace another or to ignore the conductor altogether. Indeed, history has seen far too many vying for the position of conductor without giving adequate thought to whether or not they had in fact acquired the necessary sensitivity, experience, maturity, and skills to do the job well.

Among the paradoxes of life is that we will have no true place within any orchestra, until we are able to detach from every other place within the orchestra, to allow others to play their best, to play only the part that was written exclusively for ourselves, and to play that part more brilliantly and beautifully than it has ever been played.

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

## On a Personal Note

Life's pitching curve-balls again. The past month has brought new friends, progress within doctoral studies, new opportunities, and a few invitations to persevere rather than collapse into cynicism. Failing a thousand times didn't keep Edison from discovering a lightbulb that worked; hopefully I will do as well.

Video production scheduled for early December didn't happen. After the usual three hours of preparation, I turned on the equipment and discovered the microphones were not working correctly. Twenty minutes of checking every conceivable switch and configuration accomplished nothing. The guests scheduled to be interviewed that day were called, the production session was canceled due to equipment failure, and the camera man was sent home. An hour later, all makeup once again removed, I re-examined the equipment and everything worked fine. Production has been rescheduled for December 17. All prayers and positive thoughts are appreciated. In the interim, I have refinished one of the three church pews to a medium-dark purple and placed it to be used within future episodes. Perhaps this is part of the bigger finished picture of the interfaith spiritual retreat center which is gradually forming here.

For Thanksgiving, I attempted to host a gathering of persons without families, but no one showed up so I spent the day fasting instead and finally had a bowl of cereal after sundown. I have no idea yet, what will happen on Christmas.

With regard to transportation, my motorcycle is still in the repair shop, the Toyota 4Runner is in a different repair shop, and the pickup truck is making worrisome noises. One reliable fuel-efficient 4wd vehicle with air conditioning that can pull a light-duty utility trailer would be great, but this remains elusive. Indeed, life in general remains an uncertain place to live. Still, I wish each and every one of you a very happy holiday season. Namaste.

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

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Sister Who a/k/a Denver NeVaar, MTS  
3170 West Longfellow Place, Denver, CO 80221

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

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