

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

A sense of belonging has long been identified as a fundamental human need, but the more I have listened to this discussion, the more convinced I am that we don't really know what it is that we are discussing. I'm not sure I know either, but my willingness to wrestle with profound questions out in public where others can watch, seems to be a tool that Godde has often used to nurture or guide others' growth—frequently in ways I had no way of knowing would be helpful to them.

I find that I learn much more from others when I finally take the time to genuinely listen to them. Similarly, I find that I learn much more about particular ideas, topics, and challenges when I finally take the time to stop and genuinely listen for that wisdom which lies beyond my current understanding. May this be your experience as well, as you read the words I offer here.

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

The Absence of Belonging

It seems that all genuine healing, all genuine growth, and all genuine living requires some sort of embracing of truth. To run from truth is ultimately a matter of running from Godde. Within Christian contexts, Jesus said, "I am the way, the truth, and the life; no one comes to the Father but by me" (John 14:6). One cannot therefore truly embrace Jesus without embracing truth. Consequently, running from truth ultimately makes us hypocrites.

Similar dynamics can be found (I believe) within every spiritual, religious, and philosophical ideology humanity has ever created. Even the atheist has respect for truth, while opposing the abuses which have occurred within the contexts of various religions (an opposition with which both Jesus and I would agree, I strongly suspect).

As painful as the absence of belonging may consistently be, truth demands that because (as I was instructed within science classes in public school many years ago) "nature abhors a vacuum," one must notice and consider what rushes into any

particular empty space. The space within our lives that would be filled by belonging, does not remain empty simply because that perception of belonging is absent.

To an actor or an actress, an empty stage is most wondrous and miraculous opportunity. Drawing from scenes and poetry committed to memory or from one's own imagination, virtually any experience or event can be immediately created within that space. Are such experiences real? If the actor or actress loves the work enough to make it real, then, as suggested by the skin horse within the literary classic, "The Velveteen Rabbit," the work will only fail to be real to those who do not understand.

The absence of belonging is therefore an empty stage upon which virtually anything can happen, subject only to the limitations and resources of the available performers. If more and more performers embrace the opportunity provided by the empty stage, the possibilities of creation expand exponentially also. To the extent that everyone on the stage is acting in some sort of collaborative and inclusive harmony with each other, they begin to create a sense of each one belonging to the creative work that unfolds there.

Each moment of life has the possibility of being an empty stage upon which virtually anything is possible—if we individually and collectively will it to be so. It is not just a matter of wanting it, but of willing it; committing all of one's wisdom, experience, and ability to the most exceptional performance one can deliver.

The absence of belonging is thus an invitation and encouragement like the words of William W. Purkey: "You've gotta dance like there's nobody watching, love like you'll never be hurt, sing like there's nobody listening, and live like it's heaven on earth." In doing so, life has a chance to be the most exceptional and transforming experience it can be—and nothing belongs more than what is exceptional within the ongoing miracle we call life.

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

The Pursuit of Belonging

I have often been lectured throughout life on the necessity of self-censorship, of secrets, and of maintaining contrasting senses of public and private self. I confess that I have never been able to resolve the conflict, however, between this sort of recommendation and the spiritual principle I've found within virtually every system of belief, that all things are interconnected, that nothing secret can ever indefinitely remain so, that nothing hidden will never be found, and that one's deepest thoughts and innermost being will not ultimately be projected into and through each moment one lives.

It has always impressed me as being more logical and recommendable, therefore, to embrace truth inwardly, outwardly, genuinely, and completely. Although I do strive to integrate truth about others' languages, sensitivities, biases, choices, and so forth, and to therefore not burden them with knowledge they appear at least temporarily unable to bear, truth has consistently instructed me that misrepresenting myself to others may seem immediately helpful but will ultimately only cause more problems.

Life continues to provide me with an abundance of problems to solve; I don't need to add any more to that abundance, thereby making things even more difficult than they already are.

Nonetheless, among the challenges and activities of ongoing problem-solving within my life, is that of pursuing belonging; of being moved by a sense of not belonging, toward establishing collaborative and mutually beneficial relationships anywhere I can. Within such attempts throughout the many years of my life, I find that necessity has caused me to learn many different ways of perceiving, speaking, and acting that I would not have otherwise learned. Corresponding to learning these alternative ways of perceiving, speaking, and acting, I like to think that I have learned to be less judgmental as well; that the fact that someone is different in some way is in and of itself neither good nor bad.

Has all of this accomplished a sense of belonging for me? Well, not as far as I can tell, but I definitely have many more abilities than I did prior to particular experiences. It seems that the pursuit has been more constructively formative for me than the accomplishment would have been.

As fond of Marilyn Monroe's quote as I am, that "I guess I belong to the world, because I've never really belonged to anyone or anything else," I would very much like to have continued that

conversation with her, to get her perspective upon what belonging to the world genuinely means.

What if one were to pursue belonging to the world more than pursuing belonging to any smaller classification? What abilities would reward such a pursuit? What abilities would be lost by doing so and would we miss them when they were gone or if they never appeared in the first place?

The metaphor of walking alone on a well-worn path through a forest suggests belonging to that class of travelers who have done so enough to form the path. Surrounded by trees, one could be described as belonging to the forest.

As a creature within the unfolding of a particular moment within time and space, that combination could be interpreted as evidence of belonging. The fact that a human being is in fact alive, asserts that even the most eccentric or anomalous example inescapably belongs to the human race—whether or not any other human being approves.

When we pursue a sense of belonging, however, we are generally reaching for more than the inescapable facts of our existence within particular times and places. Ultimately, we are reaching for each other and thus testifying to the expansive quality of love (of some kind) within us.

One could even say, from a certain perspective, that to live is to love, yet love is the most enigmatic but also pervasive of human emotions. To pursue belonging is thus also an expression of love. To resign ourselves to isolation and to being ignored, to restrain ourselves timidly to some sort of private secrecy, or to be and do less than we could simply because it's too much work, it's inconvenient, or it's uncomfortable, is to neglect the full pursuit of our own lives and the nurturance of transcendent beauty hidden within us.

Every elderly person with whom I've spoke has agreed that life is short and gone too quickly. The moment for nurturing and sharing our inner beauty in whatever ways we are able, is that moment whenever opportunity presents itself.

Among the adversaries of any future moment of opportunity, is preoccupation with past opportunities that we failed to utilize. As short as life is, it is still long enough that opportunities can continue to appear all the way up to our final breath. May we have the courage and strength to pursue each and every opportunity, up to and including the very last one.

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

The Methods of Belonging

If I were to change my residence to be geographically situated within the official boundaries of a designated community, would I truly belong there? If I were to change my clothing so that it is congruous with that of an identifiable group of people, would I truly belong with them? If I perfectly mimicked and even completely believed in the validity and virtue of a particular code of behavior, would I truly belong to those who identified themselves by that code?

Clearly the intelligence of a rocket scientist is not required, to recognize that a cat may spend lots of time in trees, consorting with birds in close proximity to their nests, and still not belong to that classification of life that is able to fly. Neither is vast knowledge required, to understand that a bear dressed as a ballerina within a circus is still not (and never could be) truly one whose public life is defined by abilities to move with extraordinary grace and poise. Finally, although the original author's name is unknown to me, I am in agreement with the one who noted that going into church doesn't transform a person into a Christian any more than going into a garage transforms a person into a car.

In each case, something invisible, internal, and foundational is additionally required. If that deep internal reality is there, the rest is often unimportant and can not only be one way or another, but can also even be present or absent, and still not have any definitive effect upon what something is or whether or not it truly belongs. As important as belonging, as consciousness, and as life itself are, none of these truly lie within the scope of things that humanity (individually or collectively) is able to control.

In attempting to proactively bring a sense of belonging to each moment of my life, therefore, I

*"Whatever good I do is
a happy and grateful payment
of a debt to the future,
specifically because
the belief in a better future
gives me strength
to endure present struggles."*

--Sister Who

find that I must return to that fundamental relationship with truth that is greater and more pervasive than I am—truth that is not so much created as it is discovered. I also find that love is a fundamental dynamic of this return to truth and that the dynamic between these two must be wisdom.

When I fail to act with love, I create both an absence of true belonging and false and inaccurate perceptions of myself, of others, of Godde, and of just about everything else. I may imagine, for example, that the reason people have done things that have been in various ways injurious to me, is simply because they were greedy, selfish, or bad. In growing to love and understand them, however, and in embracing truth wisely, no matter how long it may take to do so, much better possibilities come within reach. In knowing others more, it is commonly reported that individuals also come to know themselves much better as well. It could even be argued that we will never know ourselves as well as we could, if we neglect getting to know others around us—and that if we do not know either of these, knowing that which is truly Godde will be that much more impossible.

Consequently, the methods of belonging do not truthfully include shopping trips for the "right" clothes, changing one's address to the "right" neighborhood, or modifying one's personal habits toward "right" public performance. First and foremost, the methods of belonging are a matter of rediscovering the wonder, the mystery, and the value of each other; not imposing or projecting what we believe or want the truth to be, but beginning to have a conversation within each moment of our lives. Within these conversations, we can summon up the courage to ask with open minds and open hearts, what is truth and what is love—and to listen for the answers and responses that other conversational participants are able and willing to provide (sometimes through their words and sometimes through their actions).

If belonging were a matter of actions, of appearance, or of one's physical address (using the metaphor of the biblical creation myth), Adam and Eve might have returned to living within the Garden of Eden almost immediately. Specifically because belonging is a deeper and less material matter of identity, their departure was the beginning of a journey into life, into growth, and into becoming more than that garden was ever able to empower them to be. That to which they belonged, was ultimately the journey itself.

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

The Experience of Belonging

I often find that I do my best thinking and self-reflection when I am engaged in dialogue with others. During an interview several weeks ago, I mentioned quite spontaneously that whenever I am in ritual garb as Sister Who, I feel most in alignment with my life purpose; I feel connected with the entire universe of unfolding love and wisdom; and—no matter how anomalous I may actually be in comparison to whoever and whatever is around me—I feel like I belong.

I'm not sure whether it makes any logical sense, but I feel somewhere deep inside that I was in fact born to become Sister Who, but that the work is so without precedent that it was impossible to find anyone who could serve as a mentor or a guide through the myriad of deep and difficult questions that this spiritual path has included.

The paradox of this experience, however, is that as much as I feel like I belong to the universe whenever in ritual garb as Sister Who, this has also made me into such an anomaly that in most other ways, I feel completely isolated, alone, and unable to "blend in" anywhere I go.

Considering the many generally unnoticed but quite serious experiences within my life within which death was a possible and perhaps more probable outcome, however, I interpret the fact that I'm still alive to mean that Godde still has work for me to do. If from Godde's perspective my work belongs more to a future generation than to the current one, however, is my life less valuable just because it is simultaneously anachronistic? To answer this, one must first answer "To whom?"

Specifically because numerous individuals and societal entities do not value myself or my contributions adequately, many opportunities and possibilities of societal contribution or social interaction remain closed to me. Specifically because Godde does value me and my potential contributions, however, I remain available to the world and its broad spectrum of experiences.

At some point, Godde will withdraw this resource and the world will no longer have direct access to whatever I could have otherwise contributed. I can only hope that I will have left a sufficient body of work, to indirectly make a positive contribution and difference when those future moments finally arrive. Either way, the blessing within life is that the spectrum of possible experiences of belonging, remains virtually infinite.

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

On a Personal Note

Only the tips of two fingers still remain numb. Nocturnal pain in my right hand is nearly gone, probably helped by an absence of major construction work of any kind. I continue to have much trouble sleeping, but this has been a lifelong problem and, from numerous articles I've recently read, is consistent with the general experience of people categorized as "high-functioning autistic." Reports suggest that Albert Einstein and many other visionary thinkers throughout history were in fact high-functioning autistics. The more I read, the more I wonder whether or not this might apply to me, but an official diagnosis is expensive so perhaps that will remain unconfirmed.

Either way, this unconventional ministerial work continues: the 2013 calendar is available, twenty-three more episodes of "Sister Who Presents" will be distributed this week (bringing the total number of episodes to 278), and I'm about to begin my second-to-last pre-dissertation doctoral paper, entitled "The Definition of Morality within Cross-cultural and Inter-religious Contexts."

On a different note, a series of problems inadvertently launched my transition from PC/Windows to Apple computers. For the moment, I am having great difficulty finding and learning resources for website maintenance, newsletter composition, and video production, but I trust that these and other challenges will soon be resolved—as we all move into a new year and into yet-unimagined ways of being. I have no doubt that if we all work together, we really will triumph over every obstacle any of us ever has to face.

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

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