

# 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

I studied the German language for four years in high school with an exceptional teacher who stressed that language is always more than just the words used by the persons attempting to communicate.

The systems of sounds and written symbols by which specific understandings or perceptions are accurately transferred from one mind to another, include a long list of assumptions, social and environmental perceptions, as well as religious beliefs. Only to the extent that my linguistic peripheral vision is engaged, can I expect to have a reasonably accurate understanding of my various conversation partners. In direct proportion to my failure to see, is the amount of communicative stumbling I consequentially do. Thank God for the mercy of forgiveness and the ability to do better the next time something similar occurs.

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

## Association

At some fundamental level within every language is the question of how ideas are organized or interpreted, which is also often affected by life experience. People in polar climates, for example, have many words for different kinds of snow and ice, specifically because their survival depends upon being able to accurately and precisely communicate as much understanding as they can, regarding the environmental challenges they face. People in tropical regions (who also do not have any high mountains nearby) have no need of any word for snow because for them it doesn't exist.

With many such words, it is very difficult to understand directly, so we sometimes describe the idea or thing by its opposites. We hope that by saying all that it is not, what remains will be what it actually is, but usually this creates no more than an outline, a void, or a hole, which still waits and needs to be filled with specific understanding.

Having grown up during the so-called "Cold War" years, it seemed to me that a large part of the

definition of who Americans were was the recognition of what they were not; essentially, we were identified by whom we were against rather than by our own best qualities. I have observed many people continuing this pattern, throughout the years since that time.

The biggest problem with being identified by contrast with my opposite, is that when my opposite doesn't exist, there is a strong suggestion that I don't either. Similarly, if I am what I do (i.e. a plumber, a carpenter, a taxi driver, a teacher, a painter, a house cleaner, a factory worker, or a computer programmer), when I don't, I no longer exist. Essentially, in such a case, I have deposited my identity into that activity, and I only exist by association or in relationship to that specific activity or role.

I can, however, choose other associations. I can choose other ways by which to be identified by associating myself with more desirable actions, qualities of character, and methods of relationship. I can embrace and associate with what may lead to future victories, rather than what is only either the residue or consequence of past failures or the purposes which others have assigned to me.

I first began playing guitar at about the age of twelve and also learned that the one thing that virtually all experts in every field have in common is that their areas of expertise, are the things to which they individually committed the most time and energy--the things with which they most associated themselves and frequently by which their greatest associations with the world around them were ultimately created.

In this sense, they have become part of the greater language of humanity, just as each of us may eventually become also. We may in fact, by such association, become someone's definition of friendship, of kindness, of healing, of honesty, of truth, of justice, and perhaps even of love. We may even, in some small way, become part of someone's definition of what God is like.

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

## Definition

Dictionaries are wonderful things, but we too often forget that they are the first indication of meaning rather than the last (if there is a last). Within most languages, additional implications beyond the reach of even the most excellent dictionaries, can be found within the particular word's surrounding context. In such cases, my understanding is inherently partial and incomplete until I consider the specific usage of the word within its social and environmental context. Additionally, many words take on alternate local definitions by unconventional use and may then be referred to as local slang.

An additional confusion of language which is difficult at best to convey through printed words, is the variety of ways that definitions are altered by the ways in which words are pronounced. Intonation may indicate everything from ignorant innocence to biting sarcasm.

Even more confusing are those circumstances within which one thing takes on the appearance but not the integrity of another. According to Scott Peck's book The Different Drum, for example, the primary characteristic of true community is an orientation toward conflict resolution, whereas the primary characteristic of pseudo or false community is an orientation toward conflict avoidance. Such determinations as that, however, are rarely if ever immediately apparent, but rather only become apparent with the passing of time.

Similarly, arrogance or aggression may sometimes be mistaken for confidence or competence, when in fact these may actually be attempts to conceal fear or emotional insecurity. One of many possible historical examples of this is J. Edgar Hoover, who was openly discriminated against homosexual persons even though privately he was one. In the words of William Shakespeare, "Methinks thou dost protest too much."

All of which acknowledges that definitions are far from the concrete, reliable, specific, and more or less precise mental concepts presented within dictionaries of any particular language.

What remains to be carefully and continually considered, are the ways in which each of us continues, either by intention or by accidental convenience, to create the definitions by which we will be known and hopefully understood.

What is the definition of relationship between humanity and God? Within the details of

our lives, choices, and activities, each of us is a possible answer to that question. What is a person of a particular race, spiritual or political creed, or economic class? Again, within the details of our lives, choices, and activities, each of us is a possible answer to that question.

Meaning is not inherent within dictionary definitions of vocabulary, but is rather assigned by minds that think, souls that feel, and bodies that act in various specific ways. No matter what any particular word has meant in the past, each of us has the continuous opportunity to present to the world a new and better definition--a definition which by love and wisdom encourages and nurtures the very best within ourselves and within everyone our lives or expressions ever touch.

Ultimately the definition of what life is, what love is, what wisdom is, and even what God is, is found within each of us. The definition of what each of these could be, however, is more truthfully found within our relationship to God--to transcendent, limitless, mostly undiscovered, ever expanding, and unconditionally loving creativity.

It is not difficult to find opinions and definitions of what we have been. Nor is it difficult to find a myriad of perspectives of what we are. Only we, however, can decide what we will be.

Shall we be known by integrity or by deception; as genuine or as counterfeit? One of the predominant problems with deception is having to accurately remember to whom one told which specific fabrication. Similarly, one of the predominant problems with being a counterfeit is that, like the play money associated with various board games, the paper bills are totally worthless and non-negotiable at every bank and place of business in the universe.

Shall we allow our lives to be rendered worthless by tolerating counterfeit forms in the place of what is truly valuable? Board games can be quite an involving distraction from the pressures and stresses of life and may thereby allow our minds and hearts to rest for a moment. Life, however, is not a board game and allowing ourselves to be distracted from what really matters will cost us more at the end of the game than any of us can truly afford to pay.

It is not important who wins if anyone loses, because we will all be thereby defined as being less than we could have been. Let's therefore run in such a way that we all win.

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

## Translation

In having at least a bare minimum of exposure to the study of four different languages (English, German, French, and now Russian), I recall from my high school German teacher the two maxims that, first, literal translation ("word for word") is more often than not inaccurate and, second, that some words simply refuse to be translated because there is no exactly equivalent word between one language and another. In Russian, for example, the verb "to be" is assumed and never spoken. Thus "I am tall" in English simply becomes "I -- tall" in Russian. A more complex example would be the German word "gemuetlichkeit" which conveys a sort of friendly camaraderie, but has no direct English equivalent.

At whatever point I might establish a more or less accurate translation between one language and another in terms of vocabulary and grammar, however, I would still be faced with the challenge of variances from one subculture to another and also from one person to another.

All of which raises the suggestion that the notion of a common language within any particular group of people is to some extent a myth. The definition of the word "family," for example, has been debated for many years, perhaps even centuries. Within recent decades, the definition of the word "marriage" has been hotly contested within certain political and religious circles.

Does it matter that we do not all understand things in exactly the same way? Perhaps a better question is whether we can allow such a distinction to be divisive, since doing so could

*"Inherent value  
is not something  
which must be  
demonstrated  
nor can it be earned.  
Inherent value exists  
within each living thing  
simply because  
God put it there."*

*-- Sister Who*

deny us the benefits of each others' contributions. Many of life's challenges require us to collectively work together in relative harmony. Specifically because we can translate from one personal "language" to another in ways that create and support mutual respect, it follows that collective harmony, collaboration, and survival become realistically possible.

Nevertheless, translation also tells us where boundaries need to be. If my definition of a church includes a requirement that all members believe that a marriage is defined as a legal and religious commitment between one man and one woman, then my church will not include any people who for whatever reason do not share this belief. This only becomes a problem when such people have other qualities which are needed but not present within those who are members of my church. In such situations, by translation, the church would nevertheless be able to collaborate with non-members in order to satisfy specific needs.

As a dear friend, Ollie Feist, said to me years ago before he died suddenly and unexpectedly, "boundaries do not need to become barriers" to positive collaboration in other areas. For the sake of such positive collaboration, mutual respect needs to be present and translation needs to be engaged.

A similar example I experienced, was the short-lived "Colorado Human Rights Summit" of the early 1990s, which set as its goal the creation of an all-inclusive human rights organization for the state of Colorado. The primary problem I observed, was that an adequate foundation of translation and mutual respect between various minorities had not been created. Because there were no boundaries which recognized differing values and terminology within various groups, judgemental statements were rashly uttered, sensitivities were brutalized, and common goals were sabotaged within the first few weeks.

The world's people, languages, and cultures are diverse beyond anyone's ability to fully comprehend. It is imperative, therefore, that we discover, develop, and consistently practice the means to translate communication and maintain mutual respect, if we are to ever create a relatively harmonious global community--the sort of community within which we are individually and collectively empowered to become the best that we can individually and collectively be.

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

## Interpretation

Beyond the boundaries of all existing languages, in the shadowy realms of perception and understanding where essences are more common than forms, lies the mental leap of interpretation--the action of assigning meaning based upon past experience, existing knowledge, or acceptance of some representative authority.

Symbols, colors, shapes, actions, and juxtapositions within this realm, convey information, understandings, or the awareness of mystery, without resorting to the use of words in any way. Sometimes past experience guides us ("Because I have experienced pain when I encountered this in the past, I expect it to be a potential source of pain within this instance also."). Sometimes stored knowledge guides us ("I read about this in a book a few weeks ago."). Sometimes the words of authorities whom we respect guide us (statements made by parents, teachers, ministers, or public officials).

Sometimes, however, we have no guidance and must create our response, one unfolding moment at a time. Within such times, I must first acknowledge that I do not know what I do not know and then I must be willing to listen, to learn, and to remember.

Additionally, I must be careful to notice whether the interpretation I have received is still correct within the usually unique present moment and circumstances.

Just as every snowflake is unique and no two are completely identical, so it is with each moment of life. Nothing is exactly a repetition of what has come before, though there may be some similarities which can equally offer either accurate guidance or misleading prejudice.

In all cases, I'm the one who gets to decide what the particular word, symbol, action, or experience means to me. I get to decide how I will be the same or different from that moment onward, in consideration of what I have experienced or learned. Most importantly, I get to choose what contribution I will leave for all who come after me, each one also seeking either an individual or a collective understanding (or both).

May we all have the courage to mark our own footsteps, even as we notice those left by others, in humanity's continuing individual and collective pursuit of understanding and growth.

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

## On a Personal Note

After more than a decade of waiting and striving, I am very happy to announce that eighteen of my songs are now available on a CD album for \$15 each (plus \$3 for shipping). Anyone wishing to purchase one or more copies of "My Soul Knows its Face" may send a personal check or money order (\$18 total for each) payable to DDN Ventures (or Denver NeVaar) to the address which appears in the bottom-right corner of this page. If you have made a donation to the work of Sister Who for more than this amount within the past twelve months, please remind me of this and indicate that you would like a copy of this CD and I will send it to you promptly.

Work toward the production of new episodes of "Sister Who Presents..." and other TV shows continues, though as is often the case with creative projects, much more slowly than I would prefer, due to limitations of resources, time, and personal energy.

For anyone who will be in the Denver-metro area of Colorado on Wednesday, March 15, Sister Who will be featured within a new theatrical production during the weekly Chapel service at Iliff School of Theology, beginning at 11am. Please let me know if you would like directions to that location. For those who are unable to attend, your prayers for effective ministry to be accomplished through this presentation, are very much appreciated. It is possible that this presentation will be videotaped and that copies of that videotape may become available afterwards, but this is uncertain at the present time.

In other news, I am now in my fifth of eight consecutive quarters toward a Master of Theological Studies degree, but have been unable thus far to find a part-time job to assist with keeping various usual bills paid so it has been an interesting experience of "living by faith" of late. Nevertheless, by the grace of God, the work of Sister Who continues.

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

### Subscription Information:

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