

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

Perhaps since the beginning of human history, struggles of self-definition have both plagued and blessed all that lives on this earth. Humanity has spread to every corner of the globe, bringing with it personal and societal struggles between how we look and how we feel, between what we know and what we believe, and between the reasons why certain relationships are required while others are chosen in as many different ways as there are people to do the choosing.

Here are some thoughts which may be helpful, as we individually and collectively grow to understand and relate to each other, a little better each day. May you find more of the truth and beauty of yourself and also of the world around you, as you reflect upon this newsletter's contents.

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

Form

Form is the part of reality we see, the way things look, and the layers which are most easily touched. Considering how much humanity (individually and collectively) responds to colors, shapes, and textures, form does have an important role to play. Like most theatrical plays, however, many roles must interact in relative harmony in order for the play to be a success.

Additionally, roles must be properly assigned. As dangerous as it would be to have parents sitting in the backseat of an automobile and their elementary school children doing all of the driving, there are times and places in which it is better to assign a different role to form rather than to place it in the driver's seat.

If I encounter someone, for example, whose appearance and form are contrary to my definition of an effective leader, I may fail to listen to the one person who actually possesses the knowledge to resolve my current difficulty, and therefore refuse to follow whatever advice I receive.

If I insist that God is always and only something which in fact is only true of God some of

the time, I may completely miss out on some part of God's available presence and voice. I wonder sometimes whether the myriad of distinctions between groups classed under the general heading of Christianity is at least partially a result of an over-abundance of incomplete and narrow definitions of God's identity and activity.

Form is that part of life about which we can be (at least temporarily) certain. Anyone who has taken even a brief serious look at life, however, knows that there is far more which is uncertain than which is certain. Form is a place to begin, but if it is also where we end, the majority of life remains undiscovered.

Additionally, form changes over time in response to literally thousands of fluctuating circumstances. If form were the basis of our understanding of life and the world, we would be reinventing ourselves with such frequency that we would never get anywhere; we would be starting and restarting the race so often that we would never get to the finish line.

Nevertheless, form has a role to play and deserves a certain careful attention. One of the roles I have given to form within my own life, is that of maintaining a record of my experiences and personal history.

Form is the measure I use, not to determine right or wrong or truth or error, but rather to determine how long, deep, high, wide, or enduring something is. It is the measure I use to recognize the color, texture, shape, and initial identity of various people and things, so that I know whether I have just grasped a bowl or a fork and whether I have just encountered a familiar friend or a new acquaintance.

Form is the container for whatever lives inside of it, much as a human body is a container for a human soul and spirit. Within especially blessed moments, we may even be a container for some aspect or glimpse of God.

Forms are beginnings and by definition beginnings are not where we should ever end.

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

Essence

The process of coming to understand anything--life, one's self, another person, a political or social circumstance or event--is in some ways like peeling an onion. Had I never seen an onion before, I would not know what lay beneath the dry external skin. I would not know whether like an apple it is composed of a more or less uniform substance, or whether like a squash it is hollow beyond a certain point, or whether like an ear of corn it is a layer of healthy vegetable around a woody core that is generally not eaten. If I had only previously seen the inside of a bulb of garlic but never of an onion, I may be surprised at the ways in which the two are different.

Because I want to know and understand, I peel away the dry outer layer and find a somewhat different layer underneath--and other layers beneath that one, until I finally reach the center of the onion. There at the center of the onion bulb, I may find a tiny spot of green: the potential beginning of a new onion plant; the essence which is both the heart of the onion bulb I am peeling as well as the complete pattern, intention, and potential of the new onion plant which the bulb could produce.

What is the essence of myself? What is it that when all other layers are peeled away, is revealed as the heart of who and what I am as well as the complete pattern, intention, and potential necessary to recreating a new form of myself?

In becoming Sister Who (working through the layers of the onion as described above), I first considered the implications of clothing myself with theatrical makeup and an unfamiliar costume. How would people react? What would it mean? Would it noticeably damage my skin to be using so much heavy oil-based makeup? Some people define themselves by their relationships to identifiable groups, which may leave them floundering for a sense of who and what they are whenever the particular group is not around.

Then I considered gender. Why Sister Who and not Brother Who? Why a form traditionally associated with female rather than male persons? A number of reasons came to mind. First, from growing up within the Roman Catholic Church, I understood the ministries of religious sisters and brothers as being quite distinct in a number of ways and somehow knew that the ministry of religious sisters was the work I was drawn to do. For me as a young child within the context of that

church, priests and nuns were additional non-sexual categories of gender, but pronouns used within the English language to describe such persons nevertheless reflected the particular person's gender. I was not initially comfortable with the idea of referring to myself using feminine pronouns. "Why?" I heard God asking. "Is there anything wrong with being a woman? What if you'd been born female? Would that really be okay?"

My first response was uncomfortable hesitation, but I understood from this that Sister Who's work would focus upon a deeper level of personhood that preceded gender. The unconditionalness of God's love dictates that all forms of life are equally loved and valued, except within the perception of those who do not understand. How could I aspire to anything less than the same unconditional love God expresses toward me?

The next layer, as I "peeled the onion," was a consideration of myself as spirit. What if I didn't have a body and consequently no gender, no orientation, no race, no language, no hair color, no eye color, no height, and no weight? In the gospel of John in the Bible, Jesus instructs that "God is spirit, and His worshippers must worship in spirit and in truth."

Spirit and truth are both essences which come in many forms. Just as we need to understand and recognize truth regardless of the form it inhabits, I need to understand and define myself by deeper qualities than the physical body my spirit now inhabits. If my spirit were magically transferred to another body, how would I be recognized? It might be a matter of what I know, but it might also be how I live, that would identify me to those I love and to those who love me.

Forms, by their very nature, change. Essences, by their very nature, persist through a multiplicity of forms. If I do not look within the form, however, I will never see the essence and various aspects of the form--which is one of the many possible expressions of the essence--will never be comprehensible to me.

Within a mysterious place in which essences meet and embrace, is a place in which all of humanity can meet and find love for one another. Within just such a mysterious place is also where each of us and all of us can touch the hands and heart of God as well.

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

Substance

"I've always been somewhat challenged by the biblical verse, "Faith is the substance of things hoped for and the evidence of things not seen" because it seems to be a contradiction in terms. How can hope and substance be legitimately equated? How can something be evidence, which cannot be seen? As much as these questions urge me toward further reflection, I do not expect to come up with any truly complete answer any time soon.

I suppose if we had eyes which could perceive the incomprehensible number of atoms of oxygen, nitrogen, etc. vibrating as air all around us, we would understand much better what is meant by the substance of air. Then again, if we could see such things, would it blind us to everything around us, to other substances more distantly located?

Similarly, although I occasionally wish for enhanced spiritual perception, it is sometimes better that this is lacking, because of the ways such perception could become overwhelming and blind me to a great many other things.

Christian, New Age, Pagan--a struggle I've observed within all of these as well other forms of spirituality or religion, is the task of defining or deciding what our relationship(s) to all of this unseen substance will be. That a relationship nevertheless exists is illustrated by the example of an abundance of negative effects on personal health from breathing polluted air. When we avoid polluting the air with toxic chemicals or dangerous allergens, we are thus engaging in positive relationship to what we mostly cannot see.

Churches, academic institutions, and spiritual gatherings of all kinds have done their best to provide substance for the unseen realities about which they teach. All of the teachings I've

*"Because our eyes
are both on the front,
there are always
at least three other perspectives
of the world around us
which we are not seeing."*

--Sister Who

encountered, however, leave me with the feeling that there's still more to be discovered; more to be understood that I don't yet understand. More concisely, I am still hungry for more of the substance of life and God, than any church is currently able to provide. Churches are forms and thus beginnings, but the pursuit of spiritual substance goes much further. Churches will become much better than they have been, however, if those in attendance have begun to grasp true spiritual substance.

So why is the pursuit even important? Ask a person who's asphyxiating why a steady flow of oxygen to the lungs is important. For those with impaired lung function, ask why the regular availability of a full tank of oxygen is so important. In spite of humanity's greatest accomplishments, we remain very dependent upon what we cannot see--upon what one might call invisible substance.

If we are aware of this relationship, we can move through life and relationships wisely, ensuring a good future for ourselves and everyone around us. We can also collectively build better ways of being--ways that do not include poverty, ignorance, apathy, or hypocrisy. We could be better than we've ever been. We could even make the world a better place for everyone.

Driving across Wyoming, as I do from time to time, it is easy to tell from a great distance just exactly where the rivers are located. On both sides of each river, for perhaps a hundred yards, more or less, are lots of trees. As far as I can see, the trees do not touch the river and the river does not touch the trees. The trees know, however, that there is water in the ground because of the nearby river and their roots spread out within the soil in ways that no one will ever see, to connect with the water available there.

When we reach out in prayer, even secretly, we connect with the substance of God and because of this, like trees, we are able to grow even within hostile environments. We are able to experience the seasons of life, releasing our leaves in Autumn, resting through the cold Winter months, and sending out newness in every possible direction whenever Spring finally returns.

Because of the unseen but everywhere-available substance of God, we have the ability to engage in the unlikely activity of loving both our enemies and ourselves and of thereby helping to heal the world, one person at a time.

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

Radiance

Life is a combination of what comes to us and of how we respond. The effect of our response, however, goes way beyond the direct impact of our hands and feet. A word of love spoken to a person in need may in fact echo into eternity. A smile and a helping hand just when the world has gone dark, may spark a better day for more people than we could count, if each keeps passing along every act of kindness received.

Imagine, if you will, a crowded room at a party and everyone is talking. The noise, the confusion--but here comes someone wearing just a trace of the most beautiful perfume or cologne, who passes through the midst of the room without saying a word. As the person passes, however, heads turn and smiles appear, as each looks to see from where the fragrance is coming.

Even so, each of us can move through a crowd with a fragrance of hope, of love, of gentleness, or of wisdom, thereby giving everyone we pass a reason to forget their troubles for at least a moment and remember that better things are possible. Similarly, I have sometimes found great encouragement in being able to honestly call a problem a problem, rather than putting so much energy into white-washing or denying the negative impact the problem is having. Only once I have acknowledged the problem for what it is, am I then able to listen and discover both what is needed and also how to transform the circumstance into something better.

We each have a spark of divine light and love somewhere within us. We can pull the shades because it is somehow embarrassing to own such a spark or we can shine like stars in the night, allowing our radiance to be someone's guide--someone we didn't even know was looking in our direction.

It is not a question of whether our light is large, small, typical, or unconventional, but rather of the simple need to shine in whatever ways and with whatever brilliance we can. The light within you which you do not share is the God-given light which the world will never know. The light which you share, as it travels outward through space and time, is the light which will outlive you and bless the lives of people who have not yet even been born. Whatever its characteristics, your light is your light and God meant for it to shine.

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

On a Personal Note

Judging by the comments I've received from those who've listened to my CD album, "My Soul Knows its Face," it seems the recordings are much better than I thought. Because I have not often listened to recordings of myself in the past and because my voice doesn't sound the same to me as it does to everyone else, my confidence in my album was weak. Thanks to all of you who have enjoyed and been inspired by the album and who have also taken the time to tell me so, my confidence is growing.

As to video production, it is my sincere hope that footage for a new introduction for my ongoing TV show, "Sister Who Presents..." will be recorded in late March and perhaps edited into a finished product by the end of April. At the present moment, however, I am still searching for an available camera operator so a minor delay may become a reality. Either way, once videotaping is accomplished, production of new shows can be done as quickly as I'm able to find interesting guests or topics to discuss. In other words, "Full speed ahead!"

Since this unconventional ministry relies upon individuals such as yourself to support and expand its scope, range, and volume, feel free to request a supply of brochures or calendars to give to friends and acquaintances who are unfamiliar with myself or the work which I do.

The good which is thereby accomplished will be a combination of God's blessing and our collective participation in nurturing and healing the world around us. Love's healing can indeed happen--one person at a time.

As to the March 15 presentation featuring Sister Who in the Chapel at Iliff School of Theology, rehearsals have gone very well and everyone is anticipating a wonderful event. If any of you would like to attend and need more information, feel free to contact me. This event is open to the public and free of charge.

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

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