

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

Relationships are all around us every minute of every day, in such numbers and with such complexity that complete awareness of all of them is something that is perhaps only manageable for God. Nevertheless, increasing awareness of our relationships--of the ways we parallel, intersect, overlap, and reflect each other--offers great possibilities for expanding our spiritual, emotional, psychological, and social experiences. Our bodies are not immortal, but if by such expansion we can live life to the fullest it can be, we need never fear that anything will be meaningless or easily forgotten when we are gone.

We can know that we live while we do, while simultaneously creating a body of words, deeds, and contributions which will most definitely survive the relinquishment of our flesh. We can be the embodiment of love and wisdom in as many ways and forms as our individual diversity exists.

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

Parallel Struggles

I recall the scene from the movie, "Chariots of Fire," in which a particular runner is about to cross the finish line, looks sideways at a competitor, and consequently loses the race by the smallest fraction. The advice which he failed to heed within that moment was to keep his eyes resolutely fixed upon his goal, upon the finish line, and strain toward it with all of his might.

As helpful as that advice may be within the context of a foot race, such a strategy is more often a hindrance to collaboration between neighbors, coworkers, friends, and members of a family--all of whom depend upon effective collaboration and communication within relationships if those relationships are in fact going to survive or thrive.

Like the wheels of a locomotive on a railroad track, collaboration that is both parallel and balanced is essential to interpersonal connections and the accomplishment of a larger task than any of us could manage all by ourselves. It is our individuality which makes us valuable to our team,

but it is our team which makes us able to accomplish greater goals. How much more so when our team includes invisible persons as well (i.e. historical figures, friends who've passed away but whose example or advice continues to guide us, guardian angels, or some conception of the Divine).

On a slightly different but very related note, it is sometimes the discovery that we are struggling with similar challenges that allows us to form a team or collaboration where previously none existed. The invitation at this point, therefore, is to open our eyes and ears to common struggles experienced by individuals and groups within many different social contexts and even countries.

At a basic level, we all want to get our needs met--food, clothing, shelter, security, happiness, peace, belonging or interpersonal connection. In recognizing that our struggles are at this level quite parallel, we can reach for better solutions that not only meet our own needs but also allow for others' needs to be met in a healthy way as well--essentially preventing certain other conflicts before they even have a chance to occur. The basic dynamic of the rich thriving at the expense of the poor is a paradigm which must be forsaken, if true health and prosperity are ever to bless this earth.

One of the ways this becomes a little more possible, is in the recognition on both sides that regardless of how much or how little wealth or resources one has, we all still need to feel loved, connected, fed, clothed, sheltered, and secure. Because humanity is a species of diverse gifts, none of which are contained within any individual, I insist that there will always be greater security to be found in collaboration than in competition (i.e. being the winner).

It is when we not only love *each* other but strive to love *every* other, in whatever large or small ways we can, that humanity begins to resemble the family it was always meant to be.

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

Intersecting Purposes

I remain generally at odds with the somewhat common statement that each person is capable of creating his or her own reality. I'm even inclined to suggest that it is a gift of grace from God that my reality is sometimes much more than anything I would have imagined for myself. What are most magical of all, in fact, are those moments when my reality intersects with that of another person in ways neither of us had ever envisioned.

Perhaps Jesus' parable of "The Good Samaritan" was just such an intersection. First there is a Jewish man who'd been attacked, robbed, and left by the roadside to die, who'd not imagined when he woke up that morning that he would need anything from anyone. Then there is a Samaritan man who may have been rejected, taunted, and treated shamefully for no other reason than his regional origin, perhaps quite legitimately feeling sorry for himself and wondering what place there was for him within such a divided world. One needed medical attention, transportation to safety, and compassion. The other an opportunity to demonstrate to the world that he was indeed a man of good character and to thereby restore his own sense of self-worth and personal dignity. It wasn't about the money spent on behalf of a wounded man; it was about qualities of spirit which money cannot buy.

Certainly not every story is miraculous, but some of them are and the next one that occurs within the life of any one of us might be one of those. We may think we are simply helping someone in need and be given an insight or perspective on our own struggles that gives a major boost to our efforts to prevail.

That being the case, an opportunity to help someone might turn out to be an opportunity to discover some new resource within ourselves or within the world around us. As much as we may be offered a momentary purpose of blessing someone else, we may find ourselves blessed in return--when we least expect it and from the most unlikely sources.

Being proactive, rather independent, intelligent, free-spirited, and strong-willed too, I react very badly to any attempt to manipulate, or control me made by any other person. A recent demand made upon me therefore quickly brought a most negative reaction. In the end, however, I was forced to concede that my situation was clearly improved by my response. In applying my

creativity to a challenge I would not otherwise have addressed, I found I have one more thing now for which to be thankful. Being thankful came a bit more slowly, however, because it took me a while to be done with being angry about the demand itself--but it was not the demand itself that mattered. Rather, it was the improved circumstances which resulted that mattered.

Does the ends justify the means? Usually I think not, but sometimes I can be more of a winner if I allow this possibility. Ultimately, the very notion of a competition between ends and means is where the problem lies. If one truly believes that all things are interconnected, then there is no choice between the ends and the means because they are parts of each other and cannot be truthfully separated.

The creative challenge which is left to us, is to search out the harmony of all purposes being intertwined and mutually supportive--if we serve them with love and wisdom.

In the case of the day on which I am composing this newsletter, the particular challenge is that my phone line and consequently my access to the Internet is down, isolating me from the worlds of email and Internet and rendering communication with friends near to impossible.

Why today, why now, why me? Is this a discouragement to the composition of this newsletter? Perhaps I'm not supposed to do the newsletter this month at all. Hm. Perhaps it's just a matter of the phone line being down and it has no greater cosmic significance, other than being an opportunity for me to show by my response what sort of person I am.

Perhaps it is because God thinks I need a little more solitude or maybe it's to keep me grounded in less-than-perfect reality and not develop any sort of attitude of entitlement within which I begin to think that if one day is nice, then every day should be nice.

Perhaps, in keeping with the quote, that "life is a collaborative effort; we all take turns being the one in need," my experience of need may be someone else's opportunity to feel needed and valued, perhaps in a small way a sort of hero.

So be someone's hero today or perhaps let them be yours. These are the interactions by which we might even expand the membership of our extended sense of family, by noticing when our purposes intersect.

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

Overlapping Parameters

Eighteen years ago when I first appeared as Sister Who, I was informally associated with a group of activists and performance artists called the Sisters of Perpetual Indulgence (SPI). When I chose to take the work in more spiritual and educational directions, leaving behind satire and aggressively confrontational approaches, the members of that group and I were unable to resolve certain disagreements. In the years since that time, however, SPI has grown and spread around the world, simultaneously experiencing a broadening of its vision, activity, and self-identity. Consequently, when the thirtieth anniversary of SPI was recently celebrated, I was included within more than two hundred persons from many places within the US, England, France, and Germany. Members from Australia and South America were unable to be present. The range of costumes, makeup, and activities was truly impressive. A number of original founding members were also present and the conversations were enlightening, inspiring, and empowering. I was thrilled to discover also, that my work had been much more noticed and appreciated than I'd dared to imagine.

All that being said and even with more than two hundred other theatrical twenty-first-century nuns present, I was unable to find anyone doing any of the sort of work that I am doing--an ongoing educational television series, live performance of modern morality plays, audio recordings of original songs, an annual inspirational calendar, hikes to mountain summits in full ritual garb, a monthly newsletter, extensive spiritual counseling, a ministerial presence within a portable chapel at metaphysical fairs, and the gradual construction of a genuinely interfaith spiritual retreat center.

*"Neither the truth of me
nor the truth of God
is diminished
by any lack of perception;
failure to experience such truth,
however, greatly diminishes
one's experience of life."*

--Sister Who

Because there are nevertheless ways in which the work overlaps, however, we were (and are) able to collaborate. It is not for any of us to approve or disapprove of another's work, if that work is done is being done with integrity, with love, and with wisdom. I can provide logistical support even when I am unable to provide ideological support, specifically because I recognize great diversity within members of the general public and also that my approach is not always effective. Because of this, I am willing to support the chance that another's approach may succeed in areas where mine consistently fails. I do not need to be the doer of the other approach, however, because the fact that it is not my approach suggests that I would be unable to do it with integrity.

This is analogous to taking my car to a particular mechanic for repair. I may know how to design his business card using a graphics program on a computer, but he is the one who knows when my car's engine "doesn't sound right" and what to do in response. I may know how to discuss theology with someone in the waiting area of his business, but he is the one who knows how to negotiate the purchase of quality parts and repairs so that my vehicle will once again be reliable transportation for me.

Another analogy would be traveling to a foreign country, the customs and norms of which are completely unfamiliar to me. It would be very advantageous to have a friend who is native to that country, to intervene on my behalf whenever I'm about to collide with misunderstanding, miscommunication, and any sort of trouble. When that friend comes to visit me within my own country, however, the roles will be reversed and I would consider it my duty to facilitate communication and interaction so that his visit would be as pleasant and effective as possible.

As much as we are all learning, we are also all masters of certain things and the most effective persons available within certain situations. To function societally, we need to be aware of both our abilities and our limitations, but we also need to be aware of abilities and limitations within others. With a little communication and a little compassionate understanding, we can perform like fingers on a hand, coaxing the most beautiful sounds from a flute or a trumpet, covering and uncovering holes to harmoniously direct and redirect the flow of air through the instrument.

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

Reciprocal Reflection

There is a sense in which I am never able to fully see myself until I am able to look at myself through the eyes of those whom I consider to be my enemies. Perhaps it is the mischief of God that they and I are empowered to act as mirrors for one another, if we can remove the curtains and shadows of our animosity, unforgiveness, and expectations, enough to take as unbiased a look as possible of what is really there.

It is only when I allow myself to look through such eyes that I may finally notice those times and situations in which I have been either an angel or an abuser to them; when I have inadvertently stepped on their toes or brought a smile to their faces. An added challenge to such interaction, I have found, is that very often the qualities which we most dislike within others, are the qualities which we most dislike within ourselves--so much so that we are generally unwilling to acknowledge that such qualities exist within ourselves at all. If we do not see them and accept that they are parts of ourselves, however, we will not be able to ever release or forsake them.

Sometimes, others' perception of us may be mostly a reflection of themselves, rather than an accurate reflection of our own truth. At other times, others have made remarkably astute and accurate observations of characteristics within me, which I myself had thus far failed to notice. My first task, therefore, whenever such statements are made, is to discern what genuine truth the words contain or to what discovery they may lead.

If I fail to listen when truth speaks in my direction, I impoverish and perhaps even cripple myself. If I fail to distinguish one truth from another, however, chaos, confusion, and wounding result and the integrity of truth is eroded. For reasons I cannot remember, this is why during my early teens, I adopted the practice of meeting each negative accusation regarding myself with the simple honest question, "Am I really like that? If not, what would make this person say such a thing?" The answers--which were not always quick in coming--generally included a certain amount of personal growth.

In this way, one could say that God used my enemies to teach and nurture me, but only if I could stop being angry long enough to hear the lessons beneath the interactions.

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

On a Personal Note

If I seem a little dizzy of late, it's because life's recent events and experiences have been quite a whirlwind.

The ability to view more than eighty different episodes of "Sister Who Presents" using streaming-video technology and a high-speed Internet connection is very close at hand. At present, only four episodes are playing correctly through the access television organization's website. I will be sure and let everyone know, once complete functionality is achieved.

With regard to my doctoral studies, unfortunately, struggles with adversarial bureaucracy are again slowing my progress, but to the very best of my ability I am persevering.

With regard to my house, which is gradually becoming a retreat center, much has been done but much more remains to be done and the season for a radical increase in yardwork is very close at hand. Considering how dry last winter was, I am concerned that many flowers and trees did not survive, but it's a little too soon to tell yet. The weeds in the meditation garden, however, are already making their first assault. Sigh.

The dogs are well and very much enjoy (well, in Tristan's case, tolerate) the morning jog down the street and back. Being one of the many Americans unable to afford any kind of health insurance or regular medical checkups, I do what I can to remain as healthy as possible and am very thankful for having found an exceptional dentist who is willing to exchange services. I would be happy to recommend him to anyone.

With regard to maintaining reliable transportation, I have been blessed with a new contact with many years of experience and great expertise. I attempted to sell my previous unreliable vehicle, but when no buyer could be found, this man proposed an affordable way of making my Toyota 4Runner reliable again. How much I wish I had found him last September!

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

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