

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

Drawing from contexts of institutionalized Christianity of my youth, within which Christ as "The Good Shepherd" and various interpretations of the biblical text of Psalm 23 were common, my intent this month is to broaden application of such imagery. The role of guidance which is analogous to the herding of sheep is applicable to virtually any belief system, so there is no need for competition or exclusive claims to any particular metaphor.

Far more important is the empowerment, personal development, and spiritual growth which may thereby be accomplished within one's life. The dynamics that are made obvious by consideration of this metaphor have relevance to each and every one of us, no matter what our religious or cultural background. I earnestly hope that you will find insights within these words, to empower your own spiritual journey.

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

Shepherding Anarchy

I recall seeing a wall plaque a number of years ago, that instructed, "Children are God's opinion that the world should go on." From a perspective of even broader application, it is possible that all things exist for reasons that are potentially good. Granting this possibility encourages a shift from deciding what should or should not exist, to discerning to what good purpose a thing or opportunity could be applied. Phrased another way, if we shift from attempting to oppose and to annihilate whatever we don't like, to finding ways to constructively utilize whatever is presented, the probability of empowerment is increased.

Among the things which could benefit from such a shift is anarchy. Whether manifested as a confusing political demonstration, an unanticipated change in one's career or personal health, or a combination of competing emotions and desires within one's self, the occurrence of any sort of anarchy does not necessarily need to be viewed as being inherently adversarial. Like it's close cousin,

the emotion of fear, anarchy may have important things to communicate or bring to our attention. In presuming that anarchy and fear are adversarial, we fail to see any empowerment they might otherwise provide.

So how does one extract the empowerment from the alarming or disturbing appearance? How does one guide the anarchy or fear to become an empowerment to us? How does one act, as a shepherd tending sheep, to bring the multiple competing voices and bodies into constructive or collaborative alignment?

The first step toward any resolution is that of gathering information. One must stop moving and be still in order to listen, look, and measure, to confirm whether one's understanding of circumstances, influences, and components is even correct. It may not be.

Only after one has acquired an understanding of the personalities, preferences, and progression of the particular "sheep" involved, can one begin to see what they have in common, what their actual needs are, and to what they will constructively respond. Armed with such improved understanding, violence is almost never a requirement within any solution.

Among other descriptions, violence is an extension of frustration—a feeling of not being heard or helped while experiencing an oppressive circumstance. Finally being heard, seen, respected, and perhaps even loved, may be enough to provoke peace within even the most violent circumstances—and to initiate a path toward healing. Demanding peace without love, is a ridiculous and futile action.

Anarchy during times of transition is to be expected; it comes with the territory; things are shifting to a new configuration and a certain amount of confusion is unavoidable. When everything seems unfamiliar and alarming, however, the wisdom of love is our best resource and its first action is to stop and listen, rather than to censor or ignore a call for help. If we cannot truly listen, then we cannot truly love.

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

Shepherding Efficiency

Many years ago while a student at the American Academy of Dramatic Arts in New York City, I was told that within the fundamental understandings of plays in ancient Greece, the weakness and ultimately the downfall of the hero or heroine was always a particular strength that was exaggerated or over-extended in some way.

A similar insight is communicated within the common contemporary witticism, "moderation in all things—even your moderation." Virtually anything—done repetitively and compulsively—can have a sabotaging effect. A single example may be helpful, but a second and third occurrence begins to set a pattern for what follows. We must be careful and conscious of the patterns we allow within our lives, reflecting often upon whether and how they strengthen or weaken us.

Additionally, among the primary understandings of any sacred clown, is how very extensively and completely all of life is interconnected. Although I respect the ability of every other person to choose, I also note that the patterns they allow within their lives may affect me and that a pattern of love toward them within my life may affect them. Sometimes that love will make a difference, but sometimes not. My prayers continue to go out, for example, for a gay man I knew years ago, who chose to conclude each day by getting drunk at a local bar. I'm not sure whether he was ever able to see his creative and beautiful potential, of which I was always aware.

In the shepherding of efficiency, what is central is the task of listening, looking, and measuring whether or to what extent the patterns of one's life are effectively meeting one's needs with the appropriate amount of time and energy.

If a greater amount of time and energy are being expended, one has now crossed over into the realm of choice. I myself have occasionally chosen to expend greater personal resources than required, because of the value I held for the particular person, activity, or circumstance. Within such instances, however, I find that I have also crossed over from a concern for efficiency to a concern for investing my personal resources in worthwhile ways. One of the prevailing principles of my personal philosophy of life is to leave the world a better place than I found it and temporary suspensions of efficiency are sometimes necessary to do this.

I am the shepherd of my own life who must choose whether and when to do this. In so doing,

I also demonstrate to Godde, to humanity, and to the rest of creation, just exactly what sort of person I am. By such demonstration, I also act as my own judge over the morality or rightness and wrongness of my life. It is not so much that Godde judges us, as that we judge ourselves by the sort of persons we show ourselves to be—which, I suppose, is also an example of efficiency.

In all honesty, there are areas of my life within which, as named within a deeply meaningful song by Christine Lavin of the same name, I think of myself as "Damaged Goods." The blessing of being fully human, however, is that I retain the ability to shepherd my soul toward choices and decisions which are more than merely the sum of my past wounds. There is, after all, nothing particularly efficient about recreating in others the damage one has experienced within one's self.

The transformation of the past wounds can nonetheless be found within the way memories of these can act as signposts, directing us toward more effective ways of getting needs met, even within the frequently dysfunctional and sometimes even insane circumstances this world provides.

It must be remembered, however, that such transformation rarely (if ever) happens by accident. Generally, some sort of intention or infusion of love is essential. One of the magickal qualities of life, however, is that love is always available if we are willing to engage in whatever treasure hunt is necessary—and to look for this love in more than just the usual and logical places.

A friend granted the blessing of a day of skiing recently and I wondered at one point whether love was acceptable. Unfortunately my hesitation resulted in a missed opportunity, so I will never know. A father and his very small and very frustrated son were walking down the mountain because of the son's difficulties with learning how to ski. I knew that with my skiing abilities, I could easily have carried the son all the way down the mountain, but I was uncertain he was willing to be carried by a complete stranger and it didn't occur to me at the time to just ask—which leads me to the question of whether if a complete stranger offered to meet my need, I would trust and accept the offer. It would certainly be efficient, if it was indeed an honest expression of unconditional love, as mine would have been within the interaction with the father and son on the ski slope.

Shepherding efficiency is therefore as much about taking a chance, as about responding to life.

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

Shepherding Apathy

As tempted as I am to regard apathy as always wrong, a more centered and grounded perspective suggests that apathy is merely a description and not inherently right or wrong, in and of itself. Apathy is simply an absence of emotion, usually made obvious by circumstances within which compassion would be a more appropriate response. Shepherding or guiding my heart and mind around and through such possible occurrences, is thus a matter of educating and empowering my understanding, sensitivity, and responsiveness to situations within which apathy could otherwise occur. When apathy does occur, if I have conditioned myself to pay attention, it can serve as a wake-up call to address an area of concern that I may have previously neglected.

Among the first steps of developing sensitivity by which to appropriately limit apathy, is that of taking time to listen to others' stories. As long as the issue or challenge at stake is no more than a newspaper headline affecting an ambiguous "someone else," it's easy to dismiss the problem from my mind and presume that neither the event nor the people affected matter to me at all; that whatever influence that event or those people have upon the world around them, none of that influence will affect my life in any way whatsoever.

In truly listening to someone's story, however, the challenge is no longer ambiguous but has a name and a face; no longer an illusion, the challenge somehow becomes disturbingly real.

To be a genuine practitioner of compassion, one must be willing to feel disturbed from time to time. A persistent and constant pursuit of happiness is adversarial to any true practice of compassion, specifically because what is required is a willingness to immerse one's self in an unhappy environment in ways that create opportunity for happiness to be infused therein.

What is most necessary for the shepherding of apathy, therefore, is not only an open mind and

heart, but also an educated mind and heart—a mind and heart that are not only willing to look at the world through the eyes of another, but to also learn what the challenges of the other will include, as well as what the personal and societal resources of the other may absolutely fail to provide.

Considering the wisdom of the time-worn adage, "There, but for the grace of God, go I," shepherding apathy is also about recognizing that none of us is immune to misfortune or trouble; that even the wealthiest person can be stricken with devastating illness and reduced to a pauper, if he or she survives at all; and that what redistributes wealth from one generation to the next is never so easy to control as many would like to think. All that being the case, it just makes sense to provide for others the same assistance and support one would wish to receive, if roles were reversed.

An additional important consideration is that apathy and honesty are nearly polar opposites to each other. Apathy requires a belief that a particular circumstance cannot touch me; that I am somehow so invincible and omnipotent that there is no need for me to ever be concerned about a particular challenge. How incredibly arrogant and short-sighted. The honest truth is that life does not come with any guarantees and that greater men and women than I, have already faced more tragic twists of fate. What basis do I have for promising myself that no such misfortune will ever befall me? Apathy is the lie that dismisses all consideration and perception of such questions, metaphorically placing a blindfold across my eyes and leaving me to stumble through life, tripping over every obstacle in my path without any warning whatsoever.

It is by seeing the lie of apathy and avoiding it—by shepherding it into containment—that my mental, emotional, spiritual, and social muscles can be flexed and applied to whatever threatens myself or any other person around me. A basic fact of bodybuilding and all other physical health as well is that muscles which are flexed, grow strong; muscles which are not, grow weak. Compassion is the muscle of love being flexed and applied so that love can grow ever stronger. The shepherding of apathy is thus the task of limiting our weakness.

The entity that is truly Christ is far more than merely an element of Christian theology. Christ is an embodiment of the Divine beyond full human comprehension. In demonstrating compassion and wisely shepherding apathy toward limitation, divine light shines within us and begins to heal the world.

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

"Empathy is the rediscovery of interconnection, within which the best we can offer is deep understanding, wisdom, and being fully present."

-- Sister Who

Shepherding Being

When questions, uncertainties, and changes seem overwhelming, drawing from the wisdom of Madeleine L'Engel in her book, "Walking on Water: Reflections on Faith and Art," I strive to take time to just be. There is something about quietness and stillness that is somehow essential to the health of one's soul. Immersion within nature is often very helpful to experiencing such quietness of spirit. Innumerable conversations with friends and authors, as well as my own direct participation, have taught me that encounters with the Divine are more likely within such environments.

I strive to arrive within such moments without theological agendas, however, so that if the Divine chooses to manifest as masculine, feminine, or some completely unexpected form, I will nevertheless be ready to embrace the perfection of love and wisdom that the presence of the Divine always brings. I can think of little that is more ridiculous than a human dictating to the Divine, the way in which the Divine should appear and act.

Specifically because the mystical moments of simply choosing to be are an involvement of my humanity with that which is greater than itself, I find truth within the Buddhist paradox of "doing by not doing." To the extent that I am able to approach such moments of interconnection indirectly, like a child sitting on a park bench, not moving at all until a butterfly finally lands on the child's hand, the beauty I experience is every bit as magickal as the phenomenon of an insect and a human making such intimate momentary contact.

Without language, understanding, or even sustained interaction, the proximity of the butterfly's fragility and the child's strength, is full of meaning. The large photo in my bedroom of a bodybuilder holding a puppy is a similar example. If we ever forget such meanings, we will have forgotten the most essential part of what it is to simply be.

Within this vast universe, we are each less than an insect. Within the unfolding of life upon this planet, however, we may each also be a spark of divine presence with limitless potential. The task of learning to just be, is that of infusing love and wisdom into the ever-fluctuating balance and tension between our smallness and our greatness.

In shepherding, developing, and expressing the unique consciousness of each of us, the miracle of life has opportunity to be magnificently beautiful again. May we all have the eyes to see it.

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

On a Personal Note

The lilacs around my Cathedral are in full bloom. A few days ago, the first spring rain fell, watering the nearly finished reconstruction of the Meditation Garden. The volume of landscaping work which I have done within the last four to six weeks is difficult for even me to comprehend. Much has changed and changed dramatically, but there is a sense that it is somehow all good.

Participation within the Metaphysical Fair at the Denver Merchandise mart a few weeks ago was the best such experience I've had thus far. Conversations and dialogues of remarkable substance filled the majority of each day there and the general mood and energy of the event was amazingly positive and empowering. The three men who assisted with moving the portable chapel into and out of the event space were just about the most wonderful volunteers I've ever had.

So there is much for which to be thankful, but the contrasts of life remain often bewildering.

Veli, my Geo Tracker, pulled my small utility trailer loaded with the chapel and all other supplies to the merchandise mart just fine, but then experienced multiple electrical failures, almost leaving me stranded at one point, until both battery cables had been replaced. My Maytag washer/drier has also experienced much electrical confusion and three visits by repairmen so far, but will hopefully be finally and completely back in service early next week. Still, the impact of this expense has created some serious limitations.

With regard to creating photos for the 2013 calendar, however, I have made several wonderful contacts—including www.ZumaRescueRanch.org and www.ColoradoAdventureSegwayTours.com. The theme for next year is to be "Journeying through Life" with each photo depicting some mode of travel—one of which will be my sheepdog Gareth and his newly constructed dogsled.

Ah, well, whatever the present time is, here I am, to do whatever good I can.

Blessings, love, and peace be with you now and always, *Sister Who*

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