

recommend that anyone cease desiring anything specific. Desire is a motive force and like any other motive force can be used positively or negatively. Generally, the Sacred Clown has the sometimes mixed blessing of seeing both sides of the coin at the same time. Anything good may turn bad, anything bad may be transformed into something good, and ultimately everything has the ability to contribute to personal growth--which sounds like an excuse not to care about outcomes or specific characteristics.

But then there's compassion--which to me is the more likely conclusion of the Sacred Clown than apathy or ambivalence, but this requires a more complete understanding than this single newsletter could contain. Hopefully I'll remember to come back and discuss this point in future newsletters.

Among the other characteristics of Sacred Clowns that my experience, research, and personal analysis has concluded are the following.

A Sacred Clown is often a bridge between diverse ways of perceiving and understanding. Where the shaman may be the one who makes such "journeys" on behalf of others, the Sacred Clown seeks to impart understanding and the ability to see multi-dimensionally.

All paradoxes are true, though it can give one a major headache to try to fully comprehend this within the limitations of current popular understanding of the brain. What is more important to the Sacred Clown is to know that all paradoxes are true, to allow paradoxes to be true even in the absence of acceptable explanations, and to increase the beauty of each and all and everything by being more aware of multi-dimensional perception.

Multi-dimensional perception is what allows someone watching a movie on television to see both the obvious interaction of a man and a woman romantically involved, as well as the less obvious messages about the interaction of masculine and feminine qualities, as well as the possible historical impact of the actions

of these two upon others around them, as well as the comparison between their choices and those of literary figures such as Romeo and Juliet. Seen in this way, the movie becomes a holistic and highly instructive view of life.

Ultimately, the ministry of the Sacred Clown is to encourage awareness and openness to the diversity and potential of life, that each and all and everything may always be fully alive.



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Sister Who's Perspective

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Life is a collaborative effort, encompassing more than we know. In a time of "information overload," news, communication, and travel across great distances is common, yet 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.

Recommended Movies:

Powder. In the presentation of a person such as none of us has probably ever met, is the embodiment of our greatest questions and our greatest potentials. What is both very challenging and also very inspiring to me, are the ways that humanity individually and collectively both rejects and embraces its own salvation. This movie will definitely provide a lot to think about, even as it fills the viewer with an astonishing range of emotions.

Short Circuit. "Life is not a malfunction," the leading figure of this movie continues to protest to those who wish to destroy him. The essential struggle of the movie is whether such a truth is strong enough to overcome the weakness of societal conformity, that insists life is only acceptable in certain forms. In an amazing combination of nearly continuous laughter and deep spiritual and philosophical truth, this movie races to a triumphant ending--but it's for each viewer to decide, just what exactly each person within the movie wins.

The Skeleton of Limitations

I often hear myself complaining about limitations and recommending empowerment. Yet I also often hear myself say--and I really do believe--that almost nothing is inherently good or bad. Limitations are also a sort of protection and empowerment of their own. The more I understand, the more difficult it is to decide.

I will not go so far as to say that everything is good. I have no intention of "white-washing" someone's abusiveness, something painful, or some negligence where compassion could have been shown. On the other hand, I believe that God (in some form or other) really does exist and that because God exists, there is nothing so bad that it can't be somehow transformed into something good (given enough time and energy).

"A skeleton in the closet" has long been used as a slang term for something bad that someone has for whatever reason tried to keep secret. A skeleton is also often used in late October to suggest fear, confrontation with the dead, or even the personification of Death itself.

Yet without a skeleton, no land-dwelling creature would have the ability to dance. Dancing--a perfectly frivolous and meaningless activity at first glance--was among those activities that united early tribal communities and extended families. I wonder whether many people living today have ever danced at all, or if their dancing has ever gone beyond forms of no physical contact in dark rooms to harmonious, symbolic, communal interaction?

Yes, our skeletons do define us. They create a certain height, range of movement, and overall posture. But they also allow us to define our own way of dancing, of creatively expressing and ex-

periencing the joys of intentional movement.

For perhaps most of us, the range and specific nature of movement changes throughout our lives. To obstinately remain in one pattern, however, may be the equivalent of singing only the first verse of a song with five verses. The undiscovered and radically different beauty of another later verse may be hard to understand, and we may long to return to the earlier verses. Yet each phrase of a song comes along in its proper time and I think there would be no disagreement that a stuck phonograph record is not a good thing.

As difficult as it may be, I will one day also face the changing music, movement, and lyrics of a different age and ability than I now possess. I hope that I will accept the beauty of that time, no matter how different it may be from the beauty of the present time of my life.

In all honesty, I often find it difficult to see even the beauty of the present time until it is long past. Why is this? I suppose there are many reasons. For now, it is enough for me to allow that some beauty is only meant to be appreciated in retrospect. In the present space of time I am too busy just dealing with all of the challenges that the present includes. To try to see the good in a painful situation, before the pain is but a memory, is not a particularly compassionate attitude toward myself. It does seem to help a little, however, to remember that the good is nevertheless there and that I will see it when I reach a better vantage point.

It is my skeleton that allows me to climb high mountains and survey with awe the beauty of the world, that always remains hidden from me during the toilsome crossing of the valleys below. May your journeys include enough mountain vistas to keep you moving through the enshrouded valleys you traverse.

“In each moment of life,
there is both
a lesson to learn
and a ministry to perform.”
---Sister Who

Recommended Reading:

CoDependent No More by Melody Beatty. Though the text deals with specific and obvious forms of addiction-related personalities with which I suppose many readers will not completely identify, certain parts (and different parts) of this larger pattern will probably be familiar to everyone. An amazing amount of insight, challenge, and inspiration for personal growth are presented in the pages of this book.

FUTURE EVENT:

For anyone interested, I'm planning to make a second "pilgrimage" (in full costume and makeup) to the summit of Notch Mountain near Vail, Colorado, on August 27, 1998. This is the summit with the best view of the Mount of the Holy Cross, and also a small stone shelter house which has been the destination of innumerable pilgrimages in the past. Please contact me, if you would like more than a chance meeting along the trail.

A Little Bit of Chronology

On June 2, 1991, in Paris, France, at a small restaurant where the opening dinner of the first international convocation of the Sisters of Perpetual Indulgence occurred, Sister Who appeared in full costume makeup for the very first time anywhere.

On the first Wednesday of November in 1992, the first episode of "Sister Who Presents..." was cablecast by Denver Community Television, Denver, Colorado. At the present time, over seventy episodes and two Christmas specials have been produced, and production continues, though now in Billings, Montana.

What is a Sacred Clown?

Please remember as I begin to write this, that such definitions are never completed, as long as one example of such a person is still living and adding to the definition. Nevertheless, what follows is my experience and perspective, relative to this article's title.

I began with talking with anyone who seemed to know anything. Sister X, my spiritual godmother, was (among other things) a Cree Indian and described to me a tradition of Sacred Clowns that included persons within American Indian tribes, court jesters, and archetypal riddlers, ministers, and cross-dressers going back to the beginning of time. Documenting the existence of such people is understandably difficult, however, considering that a huge number of human civilizations have been cultures of almost exclusively oral history--that is, nothing was written down. History was memorized and recited from generation to generation, possibly around a bonfire as part of rituals commemorating important days and past events of the particular tribe or people.

Growing up in the Roman Catholic church, I remember that most religious meetings began with the lighting of candles and ended with the extinguishing of the same candles. Years later, I recognize this as the pattern of religious and historical teachings being passed on to the next generation and refreshed in the memories of the current generation, just as was done thousands of years ago around a bonfire.

What written or printed material I have been able to find, usually dismisses the subject of the Sacred Clown with little more than the explanation that everything is done "backwards." Somehow this has always seemed to be a poor caricature, a faint echo, of what Sacred Clowns really were and are.

Another confusion of our present age, is the preoccupation with comedy and the popular belief that the primary task of clowns of any sort is to make people laugh. As a student at a New York city acting school, I learned that comedy is actually much more difficult to do than tragedy. What makes the best comedy work, is that the person who creates it, is not the one laughing. Indeed, the creator of comedy must be almost

unaware of being comedic.

Thus the Sacred Clown is not concerned with being amusing, but only with being whatever the Sacred Clown is and expressing it in a wide variety of ways.

Allowing these few ideas, numerous conversations with other people, and my own observations of humanity to sift together within my mind, I concluded that Sacred Clowns may be backwards in all that they are and do, but that they rarely recognize this about themselves. Rather, the Sacred Clown is like a mirror, in that the only ones who know that the reflected image is backwards are the ones looking at the mirror. The mirror itself, does not realize it is projecting a reversed image.

Similarly, in that the mirror is only looking outwards, it usually is unaware of what those looking at it actually see. It's actually quite interesting to me to hear from people who see me, what it is that they see, understand, and interpret from the symbols of my face and costume. Often, I am quite surprised at what I hear. When an personal insight or a catalytic moment of growth occurs, however, I am more often unaware of having been part of anything so wonderful. Hearing of such moments reminds me that in choosing to serve the work of being a Sacred Clown, I participate in a greater spiritual, psychological, and emotional work than I will ever completely understand. It is at these times in particular that I try to remember to look up to God and say "thank you" for the honor of having been part of another's growth.

In looking at many different possible examples of Sacred Clowns, another thing that most (if not all) seem to have in common is an inescapable awareness of the interconnectedness of all things. Nothing is bad or good in and of itself. To make such a judgement first requires the selection of a context which includes specifying a desired outcome or way of being. Without the desire for something or someone to be a specific way, what transpires is simply an event or the existence of a particular person with particular qualities.

I do not go so far, though, as to