

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

Interwoven Spirituality

As an expression of gratitude for the tireless and persistent way that she helped me to accomplish the purchase of my new home within a quiet and safe neighborhood only ten minutes' drive from my office day-job, I made a unique beaded mandala sun-catcher for my realtor (who had by that time also become a good friend). I meant to include a somewhat detailed description of some of its symbolisms but never found the time to do so. Since she is also receiving this newsletter, I hope she will not mind if I provide that initial explanation here.

I describe it as an initial and partial explanation, because I know that every creative and artistic work has more interpretations and discoveries than anyone (even the artist who created it) realizes, at the time of its creation. It is within the nature of creative things to continue to teach us for as long as we listen to them and look upon them (even within the mind's eye of our memories).

Mandala is a word used to describe any of the myriad examples of a generally circular work, which in some way offer a picture of some universe in which we live (yes, there are more than one). A sun-catcher is simply something which is generally hung in a window where it is touched by the light of the sun and thereby empowered to shine and sparkle with new colors and greater brilliance, each time we pause to look at it.

Within this mandala, I wanted to express a little of the universe or range of the light of new life, of love, and of growth, all of which unfolds best within the presence of divine protection and presence.

The initial framework of long glass beads is stretched across a metal ring and forms a seven-point star, which I have come to regard as the star of the guardian angel. Circles in general have been used for thousands of years by many if not most religions and cultures, to request divine protection from the many adversarial forces and events which life typically includes.

Within each point of the star, I placed a flower composed of six green aventurine stones around a lavender amethyst--the hardness of stone yet translucent, allowing itself to be both filled with light and also allowing light to pass through and shine upon whomever stands in its shadow.

In the very center, I included a small white cross, first to show respect for my friend's generally Christian spirituality but also because I have always found the cross to be so much more than just a Christian symbol.

First and foremost, the cross reminds of the intersection of horizontal/human and vertical/divine relationships which each person inevitably holds within his or her heart. For some the cross is dark and never noticed. For others the cross is nurtured and treasured, as we reach both upwards and outwards within the circles of influence of our individual lives. For still others, one or the other axis receives the majority of the person's attention, resulting in either the pursuit of the Divine at the expense of human relationships or the pursuit of human relationships at the expense of one's

relationship with the Divine. The most beautiful example, of course, is when the two are not only in balance but also shining brightly.

The cross also forms the center of every Native American medicine wheel as well as every pagan circle, with each of its arms reaching toward the directions of the compass by which we measure and map the expanse of our physical world and our movement upon it.

In that various qualities have been associated with each of the directions within various systems of spirituality, we may choose to employ movement in this or that direction to actively nurture our spiritual growth in some way also. I often suspect, however, as the world becomes an increasingly global community, that we need to update these interpretations for the sake of those living within the southern hemisphere.

Finally, though there is much more which could be said, the sun-catcher mandala includes a wide spectrum of colors--blue for cleansing and purity, yellow for creativity and empowered new beginnings, green for prosperity and growth, purple for the integration of masculine and feminine qualities, pink for the many forms love takes within our diverse and complex world, and white for divine presence, wisdom, and protection.

All of the beads (I lost count of how many) are suspended in space within the greater circle of the work. If it were not for the tension, they would flop about, gradually severing the thread which runs through the very center of their being, and fall away from the circle altogether. If the tension were too extreme, however, the thread would also break. By maintaining a balance of tension, beauty and harmony are accomplished.

Within our lives, there are a myriad ways we sparkle but because we are the one doing the sparkling, we do not see how we look to others, nor how much light and sparkle and perhaps even hope we bring to them. For that, we must rely on each other to be mirrors by which we can perceive and constructively shape the greater sunlight which shines through us, from a source which is mostly beyond our comprehension.

The final act to every such creative work as the one described within this brief essay, is to charge the object (similar to the way a battery is charged by being connected to a greater power source) with one's prayers, blessing, love, and positive intention. Just as I sign my name to an official document or put my fingerprint upon an official record, through prayer and mental focus I place the fingerprints of my soul upon the things I create for others. I ask that they will be protected from harm, given strength to overcome every adversarial circumstance, guided wisely to the choices and opportunities which will bless their lives, and most especially that they will be sustained in their faith and love, no matter how many times storm clouds may hide the sun. May one and all and everything, blessed and loved ever be.

Cultivating Destiny

I often describe the work of Sister Who as being primarily concerned with nurturing the spiritual and personal growth of others. At an even more basic level, the work is also primarily concerned with teaching others and myself how to see and understand a little more each day, the details and implications of the miracle of life which unfolds within and around each of us, each and every day.

I usually avoid describing things as inferior or superior to each other, because things are one or the other only when measured according to one or two very specific criteria. Changing the criteria can change the outcome of the comparison completely. That being the case, it makes the most sense to choose the criteria which will give the most empowering rather than limiting perspective.

One example of what this would look like in action, was the article I read a number of years ago which described an author who neglected her houseplants in order to finish a Pulitzer-Prize-winning book manuscript. When the manuscript was finally finished, she had dead houseplants--but she also had a Pulitzer-Prize-winning manuscript.

Would she have been able to create the same manuscript in a slightly longer amount of time and also manage to keep her houseplants alive? Perhaps, but I know from my own experience that doing good creative work sometimes requires an intense focus that seems irrational to others and that when a good creative stream of ideas begins to come, I must write as quickly as possible because the same stream rarely comes by twice.

I feel at odds with my own ideals at this point, however, since I am frequently advocating "both..and..." solutions rather than "either...or..." solutions. I rather like the old adage, "moderation in all things" but was recently advised, "moderation in all things, including your moderation." From time to time, a burst of creative energy appears and must be welcomed or its contribution will be forever lost.

This then is the true reward for being an artist of any description: collaboration with something greater than ourselves, to produce something which will not come into being any other way.

Much as a woman carries a child in her womb for nine long tedious months, before giving birth to someone who may turn out quite differently than anything the mother would prefer, an artist sacrifices great amounts of time and perhaps even minor degrees of personal health in the hopes of giving new life to the world without really knowing how the work will be received or what its ultimate

effect upon the world will be.

I love my friends, my dogs, and most especially a certain young man with whom I would like to share my life, but again and again I struggle to fit all of this into the mere twenty-four hours each day which each of us is given. I do not know with any certainty, just how things will turn out or what sort of balance I will succeed in achieving.

My life is a great circle around all of this and by the choices I make each day, I cultivate a certain destiny whose ultimate form and description are still a great mystery to me.

A destiny is not necessarily something considered great by the world's standards, however, since the destiny of raising children to be loving and wise people, repairing automobiles and thereby protecting one's community from unexpected breakdowns, and providing healthy affordable meals in a local restaurant are also all means of contributing to the welfare of one's tribal community.

Cultivating any particular destiny is first and foremost the challenge of remaining honest with one's self regarding the life purpose we each serve. Many will offer us life-purposes to serve and many of those purposes will be very worthy indeed, but it is for the spirit of the Divine within us to guide us to which is most truly our own.

The hard part about cultivating destiny is that sometimes it hurts. Like hard dry ground, biting mosquitoes, stinging bees, and biting spiders, working in a garden requires a certain tolerance for unpleasantness, a certain stubbornness about continuing the work, and certain sacrifices.

If I wish to harvest in Autumn, I must till the garden through the hot days of summer rather than going to the lake to swim and ignoring the work to be done. I am hungry for the companionship of those I love during the long hours of work in other places, but neglecting the work will produce a different kind of hunger which I may not have the resources to satisfy in other ways.

Let us stand together in spirit, during these times of great transition, and also stand together in body as opportunity allows. The summer is long and hot, the work may be hard, and the sacrifice resented, but I know from having experienced times of harvest in the past, that there will be no regrets and that the Autumn reunion with those I love will be all the more joyous.

It's okay to resent sacrifices because they usually hurt in some way. To gain the harvest, the victory, and the accomplishment, however, it is not okay to never make the sacrifices required nor cultivate our individual and collective destinies.

Divine Motherhood

My first religious experiences occurred within the Roman Catholic church, known for its devotion to Mary, the mother of Jesus.

Yet, even without Mary, the Bible is filled with descriptions which suggest a feminine side to a God more often described with masculine terms.

Thinking of the Divine as a sort of mother or father can be very problematic, however, since different cultures assign different qualities to the gender-related roles of parents. Even more so, we must remember that a divine parent is often quite different from a human one.

We each have the ability to demonstrate a little of the divine idea of what a mother or father should be, but our understanding and abilities are limited. A mother can give birth, but she cannot guarantee any particular life.

Once we adjust to having no guarantees, however, we can still nurture and support a child's development. The burden of being the more mature one, however, may be the most difficult of all.

Discipline and the setting and enforcement of boundaries is inherent to nearly all parenting relationships. In the heat of the moment, response to this is often negative. Parents must be able to tolerate a child's expressions of anger, even to being told "I hate you" by one for whom they might without hesitation, give their lives.

Do we mean such things when we say them? Rarely, but it takes a mature parent to understand that. Fortunately, the Divine understands every second of our frustration and stumbling and is therefore able to allow us to be human in our continuing quest to discover all that we are--especially when we get angry at the Divine because things turned out neither according to our hopes nor according to our preferences.

All that being said, the Divine remains available to be the mother or father whom we never had, perhaps even the mother or father which we aspired (however unsuccessfully) to be.

Perhaps the calendar holidays of "Mother's

*"If God were not hidden within
everything and everyone,
love would be
the most improbable necessity of all;
but in fact, love is the only shadow
the Source of all light will ever cast."*

--- Sister Who

Day" and "Father's Day" are thus days to delve more openly into our relationships with the Divine as one who guides and nurtures, as life-giver and ultimate teacher about all things wise, beautiful, and loving--especially for those of us who no longer have biological relationships available to us, whether due to death or estrangement.

The greater loss would be estrangement from the idea of having any sort of parent to whom to turn, in times of difficulty; of estrangement from even the basic idea of family. If we leave behind the ability to relate to anything or anyone as mother, father, sister, or brother, we add to our disconnection from the most basic gateways to life's experiences and unfolding.

Left with only ourselves to whom to relate, we find the truth of the I-Ching, which says there is no true separation, that in leaving behind these forms of relationship, we have left behind a certain way of relating honestly and lovingly with ourselves also.

There are times when the best mother to whom we can turn, is the Divine within us and times in which nothing can take the place or fill-in for that maternal Divine within us.

So I offer the following as a sort of Mother's Day meditation, to open ourselves to being nurturers of each other and, when necessary, of ourselves.

"To the Divine Feminine through Whom life was created and through Whom life continues to recreate itself, I call to mind this day the love You have placed within my heart, made real by the kindness and consideration I show to others--those who are dear to me with whom I never get to spend as much time as I'd like and those who seem as adversaries and oppressors also. Both of these have been included within the spectrum of creation so that I may grow wise and strong.

May I not be so held by the winter which is passing, by the adversarial actions which have wounded me, and by the shell of the seed, that I forget to become the flowering and fruitful vine I was created to be. May my eyes be open to the curious way that enemies serve the Divine will for my life (even when they don't want to), that thorns protect roses, and that like the dandelion rising from the crack in the sidewalk, life goes on and is so much bigger than the tiny crack of the present moment. May I also be much bigger than the present moment and grow in beauty in spite of whatever obstacles may fill my path.

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

Divine Masculine and Feminine in Harmony

For anyone who doesn't already know, my faith is the result of a combination of Christian, Pagan, Buddhist, Unitarian, Hindu, New Age, and various other experiences. Before moving to my new home in the city, I created a ritual of protection in an attempt to deal with real and dangerous possibilities surrounding my previous residence. Within the ritual, I created a song addressing the Divine Feminine for the purpose of inner cleansing.

Later, I wanted to incorporate the Divine Masculine also, so that there would be both balance and completeness to the song's lyrics. So I began to ponder the relationship.

I remember talking with a woman once about masculine and feminine energy and on an impulse commented that masculine energy is the lines and feminine energy is the spaces. In terms of the two hemispheres of the human brain, the right is often seen as feminine because of its preoccupation with relationships, beauty, intuition, and artistic expressions. The left hemisphere of the brain is often seen as masculine because of its preoccupation with organization, engineering, definition, pragmatism, and mechanical expressions.

Applying this to my song, I concluded that while the Divine Feminine could be associated with emotional elements of inner cleansing and healing, the Divine Masculine could be associated with protection, societal justice, and external circumstances.

None of which is say that there is no gentleness to the Divine Masculine nor strength to the Divine Feminine. The danger posed by a mother bear protecting her cubs is one of the more obvious examples suggesting divine maternal protection. The seahorse father carrying the young within his body until the proper time suggests a more gentle form of protection of the Divine Masculine.

The general but not exclusive associations of certain qualities with either the Divine Feminine or the Divine Masculine are for purposes of empowering our perception and relationship and not for the purpose of instigating theological arguments. Ultimately, I rather like the bumper sticker I saw on a car in the parking lot at a Pagan gathering I recently attended which said, "All Gods are One God," similar to a bumper sticker I had on one of my previous vehicles which said, "God is Too Big to Fit Within One Religion."

To the people to whom he delivered mail, my

father was simply an employee of the US Postal Service. To the electric company, he was simply someone who always paid his bills on time. At one time when I was very young, my father had a second job working as an "orderly" at the local hospital in the evenings, providing a gentle strength for people in the process of healing from various things. At home, he was the one who took responsibility for discipline and keeping either the grass cut short or the sidewalk shoveled clear of snow (depending upon the season of course).

The point is simply that my father was able to be whatever each of these situations required. Similarly, I understand the Divine to be capable of being whatever humanity individually and collectively needs, within a certain very broad definition.

Much as each of us incorporates a wide range of diverse interests, qualities, emotions, thoughts, expressions, and responsibilities and usually manages to keep all of these relatively in harmony with the total being that each of us is, the Divine also includes all of our ideas of personality, gender, and much more as well, maintaining a harmony which we often are unable to grasp, because of our limited human perception and understanding. Divine justice and divine love seem sometimes to be mutually exclusive terms. Moving forward by taking a step back is an intellectual challenge to me. Looking inside to find an answer of to how to deal with an external situation, is a frequently perplexing process.

All of which is why we sometimes speak of "relationships" with the Divine, with each other, and with ourselves, rather than speaking of life as a predictable formula, by which every action and development of life is simply a calculation.

Once again, in each moment of our lives, the Divine is giving birth to something new--and that something is each one of us.

Make it beautiful, make it wise, make it loving, make it whatever you want it to be--but make it well and make it good.

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

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