

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

It's often been said that there are two sides to every coin, but of course that assumes that all coins are like those in common use throughout humanity. There is nothing, after all, that says some people or culture could not select cubical dice to use as currency, which would change the phrase to read that there are "six sides to every coin." The point, however, is not how many sides there are, but rather that there is more than one--that there are more ways to consider any and every matter than the one which is most obvious to any particular individual perspective.

Where mere fact-finding transitions into growth, however, is when we begin to ask why any particular perspective or opinion is what it is. Whether or not we agree with the reasoning which supports a particular perspective or opinion, much more empowering relationship becomes possible if we understand what that reasoning is.

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

Secrets

When leaders within spiritual, religious, societal, and political contexts mention the necessity of keeping secrets, I am usually uncomfortable with the resulting relationship. The USA is defined as a democracy, which requires a well-informed citizenry if it is to function well--which is why freedom of the press was regarded as essential. Unfortunately it was assumed that the press would be committed to publishing truth and serving the best interests of the population, but that's another discussion.

I generally cringe whenever someone either withholds or provides information on a "need to know" basis, because the inherent assumption is that the speaker has the wisdom to determine what the other needs to know. I've met many wise people within my life, but I'm quite certain the wisest would decline any opportunity to state such a determination.

After extensive reflection, my conclusion is that what is at stake is whether the information is

being viewed as a responsibility to be wisely served or whether the information is being used as a pawn to serve manipulations of power and control, usually for selfish purposes. To the extent that knowledge is manipulated to serve power, it becomes oppression rather than wisdom. To the extent that knowledge is managed responsibly to serve something greater than one's self, the individual becomes a distinct voice which effectively nurtures and supports the health, growth, and development of truly wise and loving human civilization.

When information is withheld and the excuse is given that this is being done because the information is sacred, what I immediately detect is not that the person is serving the knowledge, but rather that the information is serving the person's ego and being manipulated for purposes of personal power. Stripped of unconditional love and an attitude of service by such actions, all true sacredness and affirmation of life is equally stripped from the information. Additionally, positing the information within a single individual increases the risk that the information and understanding will be lost before it can be effectively transferred to another.

If information is sacred or holy (a form of wholeness), the questions which must instead be asked are whether the enquirer has the maturity and understanding to wisely and responsibly serve that information. If not, wisely serving the information includes being able to lead a student toward such maturity and understanding. Because these are mysterious and intangible qualities, it is also essential to avoid attempts to control, which would dishonor the educational process and turn it into mere indoctrination--which is the substitution of the external form for the internal life-giving essence.

If love and wisdom are the heart of one's creed, then life will thrive. If instead self-serving control is entrenched within communal and interpersonal relationships, death becomes the only reasonable expectation.

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

Protection

For the most part, I am an optimist and an idealist, but I confess to biting sarcasm and perhaps even cynicism whenever passing through an airport and hearing one of the many announcements regarding restrictions intended to create greater security--all of which have only served to erode feelings of security within myself. Instead of fearing the adversary named by security personnel, I find I am more afraid of the security personnel themselves, who generally demonstrate no concern at all for the economic, emotional, and psychological effects of their words and actions. Protected? Actually, I feel more under attack by the administrators of my own country.

Yet at the end of the day, each of these administrators leaves his or her professional employment and returns home as just one more citizen seeking ways to live without fear and without unmet needs. Because they do not know me, however, each of these persons has nothing beyond the instructions given by their employer to inform them of ways to do their jobs. Similarly, I was often told throughout childhood that police officers were concerned with public safety, but the majority of my experiences within the last two decades have instead given a perception of publicly sanctioned bullies more concerned with control and rules than with creating safety. If I were to suggest one revision which could move the focus of police work back toward public safety, it would be the elimination of speed traps and a corresponding increase in fines for reckless driving. Even this, however, does not address any of the causes of such societal problems.

What do we mean when we use the word protection? Is it just about preventing bad things from happening? Is it about removing even the possibility of bad things happening? Is this something life in fact has the ability to provide? Considering that even extremely healthy people occasionally experience cancer, AIDS, and traffic accidents, we may find that by protecting ourselves from every possible danger, we ultimately strip ourselves of the ability to truly live.

In spite of all the recommendations I might make within this or any other article about behavior within this or that circumstance or situation, the bottom line for me is that everyone still have the right to choose and that everyone's choices be (as much as possible) respected. The problem with this is that I sometimes find myself

caught between my ideals and others' right to choose.

We can, therefore, choose to live in fear, in anger, in selfishness, in condescension, or in arrogance. If we do so, we will also have to live with the consequences of such choices, but we can also provide each other with better options.

In considering all of the positive and negative possibilities of life experience, I continue to find that protection is best located within ourselves. From simple practices instilled early such as "look both ways before crossing the street" to extremely complex real estate transactions, we need to be as informed and proactive as possible. Because there are limits to everyone's perception and understanding, however, we are also each others' guardian angels, watching out for those around us in similar ways to how we would like others' to watch out for us and protect us from dangers which we somehow fail to see--not like sheep to be herded from one pen to the next but like people who are open to all kinds of communication and education.

Ignorance does not ultimately protect anyone as well as empowerment does. Censoring what one can see is never as effective as providing skills to constructively respond to whatever might be seen along the way.

A desire to be and feel protected is fairly inherent within each of us, but I suggest that it is one more way in which God continues to call us toward love for one another, toward listening and caring, and toward becoming a family of creative and wise individuals. The so-called protection which leaves us feeling isolated and alone, struggling with perceptions of being overwhelmed by adversarial circumstances and people, is not what it claims to be, but rather is yet one more form which our individual and collective brokenness uses to oppress us.

We cannot return to true protection, however, without being willing to join hands with those around us; without being willing to see the homeless beggar as a real person with a life story to tell; without being concerned by the diminishing availability of affordable housing and employment paying a living wage; or without recognizing the emptiness and absence of purpose within our own lives whenever we ignore just how very interconnected our lives are with everyone and everything around us.

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

Trust

I've often heard ministers and practitioners of various systems of spirituality speak of some form of "living by faith," but to the best of my observation, very few are ever called upon to actually do it. To do so with integrity, within my experience, is even more difficult because one must allow for being angry and in disagreement with God while maintaining a relationship of love just the same. On that note, it may have some similarities to occasionally being angry with other human persons whom we nevertheless continue to love, but this is a dynamic of relationship which has only recently begun to be more publicly discussed and explored.

In the midst of all of this unfinished discussion remains the basic daily challenge of trust, which has at least some commonality with the distinction between knowing and believing, as presented at the end of the third *Matrix* movie. A somewhat elderly black woman identified as the Oracle answers another character regarding the happy ending which has just been accomplished by explaining, "I didn't know, but I believed." This is perhaps similar to the pronouncement often made by Jesus within biblical gospel records immediately after performing a miraculous healing that "your faith has made you well."

Faith, belief, trust--all mysterious and intangible but all very necessary to the more miraculous possibilities of life that from time to time interrupt our usually more predictable, empirical, and logical life experiences.

If we do not allow room for what we do not understand, we will never become more than we presently are. Life has many adversaries by which it learns and grows and faith is simply one of the many words for the mystery that continues to

*"Joy is synonymous
with increased awareness
of the triumph of life
over its adversaries."*

--Sister Who

make all the best things in life possible.

I continue to hold to the belief that somehow, someday, in defiance of probability, statistics, and current circumstances, the interfaith spiritual retreat and conference center revealed to me in December of 1998 will manifest, for the spiritual, psychological, emotional, and social healing of humanity, individually and collectively.

A more immediate example of similar manifestation is that for perhaps three or four years I have envisioned a portable chapel by which I and the unique ministry I offer could be more widely available within local and regional fairs and festivals. The photograph above (taken in my backyard) is the first culmination of that trust and the first public appearance of this portable chapel/tent (complete with a "bell" in the bell tower, thanks to a particular donation) will be the Metaphysical Celebration festival at the Denver Merchandise Mart here in Colorado, August 29-31. An Internet site which will gradually offer more information regarding this upcoming event is <http://www.celebrationfair.com/>.

Hopefully this is only the beginning of more wonderful things yet to come, if I can just find the strength to be patient and to trust until the time is right--from God's perspective rather than from within the limitations of my own.

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



Connection

The purpose of all secrets, ideally, is the creation of positive and empowering relationships, some of which are more endearing and beautiful through time than we may have been able to accomplish within our earthly lives.

In spite of being estranged from her and the rest of my family of origin, my grandmother who was originally from East Prussia, whose earthly life ended last year, continues to inspire me. Her estate provided a token amount and I felt a need to honor her trailblazing sort of spirit, which has apparently found a unique form by which to express itself within me as well. Since my home is gradually being remade into a place of spiritual retreat and contemplation, the funds were used to purchase a fountain for the prayer garden in the front yard, which I now refer to as Oma's fountain. A small clump of eidelweiss grows nearby.

She was a woman of immense internal strength, determination, and conviction, yet also a keeper of secrets, once telling me of a sister who was shot during the relocation of Germans by the Russians when their town in East Prussia was reconfigured into modern-day Poland. Other unspoken memories she took with her when she left. Like each of us, she was a complex person with a myriad of relationships and of ways of relating to the personal, local, national, and international changes and forces around her.

Pausing in the garden at sunset, trusting that the sun will rise again the following morning, granting the possibilities of a new day, I imagine her traversing a more beautiful, wonderful, and (perhaps for now) secret land, than any garden here could ever become.

I invite each of you, should you ever be traveling through the Denver-metro area of Colorado, to pause for a moment of silent reflection at Oma's fountain, to consider your own journey and the ways in which your life too finds connection with all that is around you.

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



On a Personal Note

I recall reading many years ago, although I'm not sure who said it first, that "the problem with life is that it's so daily." My additional observation is that every moment, experience, and component of life is a mixed quantity; an intermingled combination of pleasure and pain, comedy and tragedy, and virtue and vice.

The past month has seen both remarkable accomplishment and increasingly impossible challenges and obstacles. The garden is waking while the roof continues to leak and the central heating system is gone. The refrigerator is usually empty, but I still eat often enough to get by. I continue to apply myself with all of the dedication and wisdom I can find, but wrestle daily with doubts about whether what I do will be enough--to which the only answer is, "I guess we'll find out."

My doctoral studies are proceeding well, there is a suggestion of an increase in educational financial aid which has not yet shown itself, and new episodes of "Sister Who Presents" are in various stages of being edited for cable-access television and DVD distribution. New and powerful songs are in various stages of development for a third album to be entitled "Steps Along the Way" and recent events of a more personal nature suggest that I need both to get working on my next novel and to push toward completion the book manuscript creatively relating some of Sister Who's autobiographical story.

In the midst of all of the above, of course, our country continues to search for its soul, its future, and its most recommendable form. Personal and societal aspects are not nearly so separate from each other as they seemed at other times within my life. I pray that each and every one of us will have both the wisdom and the resources to show to the world, just what sort of persons we are and that what will come through most of all are the unconditional love and wisdom upon which an ever better tomorrow can be built.

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

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