

# 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

Contrasts, self-awareness, and the unanswerable questions which spring from the intersection of these two often provide for a life experience that while occasionally beautiful and wonderfully meaningful, also leave us with an abysmal lack of more usual feelings of security and confidence that everything really will be okay.

In the midst of the passing storm, however, we can still be there for each other, still be each others' guardian angels, and still be each others' teachers and mentors. The next chapter of our history as communities and individuals can be beautiful specifically because God has given us the ability to make it so.

In words written so long ago by a Christian apostle which embody a sentiment shared by virtually every system of religion humanity has ever created, "You shall know the truth and the truth shall make you free."

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

## Honesty from Adversity

Within the rural Wisconsin of my childhood, black walnut trees grew wild in road ditches and fields. As delicious and distinctive as nuts from these trees are, the process of getting the nut meat out of the shell was rather long and complicated.

The first long step was to allow the outer shell to dry out and then to remove it. Some people used their automobiles, driving back and forth across the nuts until the inner shell was completely exposed. My father used an antique hand-crank corn-sheller; a curious red box on four wooden legs with black pinstriping that reminded me of a circus wagon.

The nuts were put into a tray at the top, which funneled them into a narrow space between bumpy circular plates moving in opposite directions, which would tear away the now-brittle outer shell.

On the outside of the machine, were the handcrank and gear wheels which were attached to the axles of the circular plates. I was fascinated by the motion of the gear wheels and--like any curious child--felt the need to touch them.

Mesmerized by the sound and motion, my finger followed along and was caught between the gears' teeth. Thankfully, the machine was old and loose. My finger survived its experience of extreme pain and I learned never to touch the machine in that manner again.

Even though many people seem intent on pretending everything is fine and behaving as if all things unpleasant or challenging are unfit for public conversation, pain strips away all social pretense and provokes honesty.

Similarly, dishonesty is a luxury available only to those able to avoid uncomfortable or painful circumstances. Those who are unable to avoid discomfort or pain, are forced to live honestly and to find other ways to be content and happy. The poor who resort to dishonesty are also attempting to avoid discomfort and pain.

Whether rich or poor, however, the challenge to each of us is to allow our adversity to show us whom we truly are and to respond constructively to whatever it is that we are shown. To resist is most truthfully to be at war with ourselves, no matter what other persons we may blame in futile attempts to move the struggle outside of ourselves.

Until we have resolved the wars within ourselves, however, the wars between ourselves and others can never be finished. Rather, in some difficult but wondrous way, the wars between ourselves and others may be yet one more divine attempt to show the inner struggles upon which we need to focus--if we will only pause to ponder what is really at stake within the external violence.

If we awaken that deeper inner place of discovery, love will shine a light that will allow us to see the beauty and ability which have honestly been there all along. We must be willing to find the good not only within others but also within ourselves. Most importantly, we must be willing to live each moment in truth, in love, and in wisdom, because only by doing so will we find the true, loving, wise, and societally interconnected persons we were originally created to be.

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

## Managing Expectations

Through various forays into Buddhist philosophy and theology, I long ago developed the habitual intention of having no expectations (which is not to say that I successfully live according to that principle within all times, places, and circumstances). Within more common language, this is analogous to maintaining a "wait and see" attitude, applying one's best efforts but being mentally, emotionally, and perhaps even physically prepared for a variety of possible outcomes.

Very close to this behavioral challenge is that of not being "attached to outcomes." This refers to placing a high priority on ideas of how things "should be" as if there were only one right way for a particular thing to be. In religious matters, this might be referred to as dogmatism or religious extremism, examples of which can be found within every religious system ever devised.

As a child, I learned early and reminded myself often that there are perhaps a hundred ways to do any particular thing, although in some cases the other ninety-nine are still waiting to be discovered. Because I believed in the possibility of the other ninety-nine approaches, however, I found no need to immediately define those with whom I disagreed or differed as being adversaries. One of the ways in which I cope with the absurdities and unpredictabilities of life, therefore, is by consciously managing my expectations.

One aspect of this is giving others the freedom to be themselves, to make their own choices, and to follow their own paths. By observing and supporting them in discerning their own choices, each person whom I meet can be a teacher for me, demonstrating advantages, disadvantages, and degrees of effectiveness of the ways they choose to cope with challenges.

Supporting them in their choices does not necessarily mean, however, agreeing with any particular choice they make. Rather, I choose to allow them the freedom to make their choices and to experience the consequences of those choices in as loving a manner as possible. It is perhaps a little too obvious to mention here that there are some things that neither they nor I will understand fully until we have actually done them. In certain cases, however, if we do not fully study them before doing them, doing them will not empower us to fully understand them.

Within my experiences of television production, this was (and is) demonstrated within

the practice of thorough pre-production planning.

Before ever arriving at the studio to begin a video-recording session, I put great effort into selecting guests, crew, set pieces, audio equipment, and even specific angles and shots which I would like to include. It is vital to remember, however, that any number of unexpected circumstances can arise--technical failures, conversational twists, unconventional intuitive choices, and improvised contributions of crew members, to name just a few.

Within such moments, if I were to insist upon adherence to the preplanned script or my notions of what "should be," everyone's levels of stress would increase, the presentation would in fact look very stressed rather than beautiful and confident within the final product, and the ideological and conversational flow of the overall piece would be awkward at best.

If, on the other hand, I am open to the unexpected twist as possibly being "the way it was really supposed to be," I often find that the end result is actually better than what I had previously planned. Even more so, an unexpected twist has often been just what God needed, in order to minister to a particular person in the audience. With such openness to alternatives within myself, the project is able to conclude happily and with an attitude of gratitude within all persons contributing.

There is a very fine line between an expectation and a goal; between an expectation and an intention; and between an expectation and a hope. Having pondered long and hard how one might distinguish between these pairs, what became most clear to me is the emotion which accompanies the results.

An expectation which fails to manifest leaves a pile of ashes and broken glass at my feet, inviting further soiling and wounding. I experience a loss even though I didn't actually possess anything in the first place and I must then process the usual stages of denial, anger, bargaining, depression, and acceptance.

In contrast, a goal which is not reached can be reinterpreted, reframed, and re-attempted with appropriate variations; it does not need to be forsaken. An intention which is disappointed can be preserved and applied to any and every new opportunity which comes along. A hope which is denied can continue its faithful and patient vigil for the dawning of a new day.

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

## Pacing Growth

It is not a new idea or statement to say that we live within an age increasingly conditioned to "instant gratification." Everything seems intent on increasing the pace and speed of life, while simultaneously increasing the length of time life includes. It's as if we want more life even though we haven't yet learned to make the best of what life we already have.

An example of this is the general process of physical healing, which in some cases can last months or even years. Usually, however, all attention and effort is focused upon the life which will follow the healing process rather than also including the life and relationships which accompany the healing process. I am again challenged by Emily's question within "Our Town": "Does anyone know they live while they do it?"

Healing from an injury or illness is also a form of living and there are relationships, personal encounters, moments of spiritual reflection, and a general deepening of awareness and maturity which can frequently happen only within such less-active times of healing and recovery.

In amongst all the rest is a certain need to daily forgive myself for being human; for being a creature that requires enormous amounts of time to heal, to learn, and to grow. If I spend too much time and attention complaining about not having already arrived, I will miss important details of the journey and process along the way.

One summer when I was fourteen years old, I was inspired to make a solitary four-day bicycle ride of more than a hundred and fifty miles. I'd been talking for some time about visiting a friend in a city about sixty miles south of my parents' house and some inner intuition told me the time had come, so I phoned my friend to say I would be there for supper that night. Then I started pedaling. Sixty miles later, late that

*"If you find yourself  
in an empty space,  
fill the void  
by spreading your wings."*

--Sister Who

afternoon, I was there. The next day, I phoned a friend in a town to the northwest and made a similar ride. The trip continued in similar fashion, finally ending on the fourth day back at my parents' house, but it all seemed so ordinary and unchallenging to me that I couldn't understand why anyone made any fuss about it at all.

What I noticed along the way was how much I hadn't seen during other times on the same roads, simply because I had been traveling in a vehicle moving at highway speeds. From the seat of my bicycle, I noticed the colors and shapes of houses, the cars parked in the driveways, the various configurations of flowerbeds, and the varieties of livestock and crops tended by farmers along the routes I'd chosen.

What I quickly understood early that first morning, is that a broader comprehension of the entire trip was too much to imagine. I had to address the journey one mile at a time. So it was that as each mile passed, another one came into view beyond it. Similarly, throughout my life, as one circle of friends has passed, another has followed. Both within that bicycle journey and within my journey through the human topography of my life experiences, I have never reached the end of a flat earth imagined within pre-Copernican times. It has never occurred to me that a relationship with God would be any less.

The thousands upon thousands of prayers, rituals, and times of religious study which have filled my life have comprised a rather eclectic spiritual journey to this present moment and built a relationship between myself and the Divine which I believe is similarly available to every other person.

None of this makes me any more or less important than any other person, none of this conveys any sort of superiority, and none of it could be accomplished by some "quick and easy" recipe for spiritual ascension or development. More importantly, none of it inspires any regret within me, although I am aware of what such spiritual dedication has sometimes cost me.

Within this current time of transition which simultaneously seems to be moving too quickly and also in slow motion, like watching an object fall and wondering whether anyone will catch it before it hits the floor and shatters, we must again embrace that inner wrestling between impatience to arrive and the sometimes tedious need to live life one day at a time, valuing the moments which will most likely not be seen by any other way.

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

## Monitoring Abilities

Can or can't? Will or won't? Is or isn't? How is anyone to make the right choice or interpretation? Some say that all right choices fall within boundaries set by their selected ideology. Any choice the ideology condemns is wrong--but what if the ideology itself is not right for me? What if there are multiple ideologies that are all right at the same time in spite of being completely different, because being right or wrong depends not upon the ideology but upon the individuals and context concerned? What if it is the effect and not the content which determines whether an ideology is right or wrong within a particular context?

To clarify, I am not asking whether "the ends justifies the means," but rather where guidance and value are to be found for the myriad of social, spiritual, psychological, and emotional choices each of us must make--consciously or unconsciously--each and every day.

In monitoring abilities, one also wrestles with awareness of choices, most especially the choices of what and where and when to try any particular activity or belief. If no attempts are made, however, one cannot know the limits of what is possible. I recall a poster I saw when I was in high school which declared "Only those who will risk going too far, will ever find out how far they can go."

Similarly, I often recall how my grandmother would occasionally remark in amazement that I could stretch a twenty-dollar bill further than anyone else in our whole family tree. It took me a number of years to finally understand, however, that it is not so important how much or how little money one has, as of how much good one accomplishes with whatever amount is possessed. Ultimately, the greatest triumph of any life, is how much it creates good things which will outlive it.

In monitoring my abilities and also expanding them whenever I can, I find that I am also an individual striving to make good and effective contributions to the community of humanity around me. We must always remember that individuality and community exist in symbiotic relationship. Communities renew themselves by nurturing individuality and individuals survive by contributing to their communities. When all is said and done, neither can survive without the other and love is what holds it all together.

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

## On a Personal Note

Another month has flown by and summer is upon us here in Colorado. In the memorial garden in front of the house, the lilacs, peonies, and irises have all bloomed and faded; the eidelweiss are just now opening; and the easter lilies are perhaps another month away yet. Against all odds and in spite of adversarial circumstances, I am still managing to make the mortgage payment on time each month, to maintain the website and newsletter, and bit by bit to create new episodes of the television show "Sister Who Presents."

Regarding the auto accident in February, the gap insurance company has finally indicated how little it is willing to pay and the financing company has notified me that I therefore owe them nearly twice the amount of my monthly mortgage. Considering my current state of severe financial limitation, the amount is devastating so any and all prayers for some sort of financial miracle are very much appreciated. Considering how hard I have worked and how frugally I have lived, I'm quite certain someone out there is incurring significant amounts of negative karma for this oppression, but I do my best to leave that matter of justice in the hands of the Divine. All that being said, I suspect my situation is not at all unique in comparison to that of others across the country at this time--which impresses upon me once more that we must all stand together and take care of each other during this difficult time; that as individuals we must be better than our government, better than our economic system, and better than our social and religious institutions.

In contrast, in attending the annual Peoples Fair festival last Sunday, I was very encouraged by the number of people who reported that they are watching the show regularly and the number of interesting organizations and perspectives who said they would welcome the opportunity to be guests within future productions. It was indeed a blessed day of ministry.

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

### Subscription Information:

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