

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

Commitments, measures, reality checks, and dreams--these are among the ways we consciously or unconsciously shape who and what we are, internally with ourselves and externally with the world around us.

The unconscious part of each person's mind is sometimes represented by dark waters, murky and deep, which hide unknown wonders and terrors until they are brought to the surface where light can shine upon them and reveal their ideosynchronacies.

It is specifically within such revelation, however, that the fear of the unknown becomes transformed into the constructive use of new tools. Suddenly, we can do things which were previously impossible and understand things which were previously oppressive conundrums. Suddenly, like a butterfly emerging from a chrysalis, we discover that we can fly in ways previously indescribable.

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

Demonstrating Commitment

What is the measure of one's commitment? In personal matters, the prevalent measure seems to be a sort of exclusivity--purchasing something from only a particular source or engaging in certain activities with only certain individuals. In many governmental matters, the measure is most often tied to either one of two perspectives: that which is committed to internal essence or that which is committed to external form. In spiritual and relational matters, the measure used by some is a sort of blind defense which enables, sustains, and preserves something that is actually quite oppressive. For others, the measure is perhaps best described by words such as honesty, integrity, honor, and truth. A lie would inherently and unavoidably include the psychological principles and emotions most adversarial to true commitment.

Before I say anything more, I need to be clear that freedom of individual choice is extremely important to me and that as much as possible, everyone's individual choices should be respected.

With that in mind, however, I would still like to offer the following comments as food for thought.

I may have good reasons for purchasing what I need from only certain vendors, but by doing so I cannot avoid being a stranger and an unknown element to every other vendor. Since at some level everything is interconnected with everything else, a full awareness of decisions regarding where and how to spend money must also have at least a minimal awareness of who or what is being excluded. An example was when my now ex-lifepartner and I decided to have some portrait photos taken during the early 1990s and decided to go to a suburban shopping mall photo outlet, so that people there could get a close look at an openly gay couple. From that moment onward, gay couples were no longer merely an intellectual concept for the photographer involved. By being present, we became real and we demonstrated our inclusion within the larger world around us, without sacrificing any personal integrity.

In regard to patriotism, one perspective seeks to understand what the true essence of patriotism is and to hold one's country accountable to genuinely being good. The other perspective believes that by opposing any and all criticism or fault-finding with regard to one's country, that this projection of perfection somehow also creates strength. The form is protected but only to a point. History is filled with examples of terrible personal and societal wounds that ultimately resulted in stronger, wiser, and more courageous warriors--not all of whom employed any sort of external violence as their weapon of choice, I hasten to add.

Regardless, to be fully committed to those around us, we must also be fully committed to all that is good within ourselves. To do any less would be to return the wondrous gift of life to God in an unopened and undiscovered state. Most of all, that to which we must be most committed, is to be truly living for as long as the breath of life is within us; for as long as we are in any way alive.

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Choosing the Measure

When we make money the measure of our contribution, we become worthless the moment we have none to give. If we do not daily involve ourselves in the struggles of someone other than ourselves, we will find that we are not really a part of anything and be quickly forgotten the moment we leave the room.

If money is simply a tool and not a measure, however, we have the opportunity to instead be defined by character qualities such as generosity, wisdom, thriftiness, compassion, vision, and love.

A friend recently lamented the necessity of having to pay for human contact in the form of getting an occasional massage. Ideally, we should all be getting a massage once each week or so, considering the discouragement to all sorts of stress-related illnesses and the significant encouragement to general health that massage can provide.

A greater concern that is often overlooked within this overall discussion, however, is the myriad of ways in which perhaps the majority of individuals continue to make themselves less and less physically available to each other. To the extent that we allow our communications and interactions to diminish to no more than disconnected electronic or organizational (rather than personal) means, we begin to forget who we are and with whom we are inherently interconnected.

Most people, it seems, would rather write a check than touch anyone directly and many would prefer to not even do that. It's as if the limit of our interactions is supposed to be nice conversation that doesn't include or even acknowledge anything that would require a response. Unfortunately, if "you get what you pay for," the relationship which results from such absence of deeper exchange, is basically worthless.

It would be very good for both individuals and communities if each and every person was directly engaged in helping another human being every day. If congressional representatives were required to spend one day per week working in soup kitchens, stores, and factories, doing the same work the others do and talking with them in order to have a full understanding of their worlds; much wiser administrative decisions would be made and poverty would be more than merely an intellectual concept occasionally mentioned within newspaper headlines. If one day each week was required to be given to another individual within

one's community--cleaning house, doing yardwork, or whatever--the volume of needs within a community would plummet and the strength of that community to quickly, effectively, and collaboratively resolve its challenges would skyrocket. I think it is because such relationships are not part of our ongoing awareness, that the world is falling apart so badly as it now is.

A significant part of working toward such communal collaboration, however, is maintaining the freedom to disagree, to argue, and to be respected in whatever choices one wishes to make. Being respected does not mean, however, being shielded from the consequences of any choice I might make. During certain political demonstrations, for example, one might choose to be arrested for a cause in order to make a political statement. The consequences must be enforced, but there is no need to belittle or devalue the person within that process. I recall reading somewhere years ago (and apologize that I cannot recall exactly where), that the measure of a society may sometimes be the manner in which it treats its marginalized populations, anomalous individuals, and even those it names as criminals. Within few other contexts is the general character and virtue (or lack thereof) of a society more obvious.

Similarly, within the many conversations I have had with transgenderal individuals over the years, I continue to find that the issues with which they struggle are basic issues of self-definition and self-expression that are extremely relevant to everyone, but seldom so directly addressed. For the transgenderal person, the issues become unavoidable and glaringly obvious. For the rest of us, it is all too often our weakness that we can and do avoid coming to terms with such basic issues as determining what shall be the measure of our gender, of our sexuality, and of our interpersonal relationships.

For the apostle Paul, the measure was largely socially and societally determined. For Buddha, the measure was largely internally determined within a particular integration of mind and spirit. For Jesus, the measure was largely determined by a particular integration of heart, soul, and mind; of love, faith, and hope.

The question which remains, of course, is what will be the measure for each one of us? Considering the limitations and punishments of societal measures and rules all around me, what I would most like is to be the positive exception.

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

Checking Reality

During early childhood, among the first stories I was told (right after being told the biblical story of creation), was the story of the tower of Babel. Not much importance was placed upon the story, however, other than to note that it was an intersection of human pride and the divine gifts of humility and diversity (not that the gifts were particularly recognized as such at the time).

Perhaps in retrospect, my teachers considered the story naive and silly, with a certain attitude of arrogant condescension that anyone would believe in such a ridiculous possibility as building a tower that could reach all the way into the heavenly home of the Divine. I suggest to you, however, that the current age of humanity is not so different from the builders of that tower, as they imagine themselves to be.

During my high school years, I often heard of medical research which wished to address aging as being a disease which could eventually be cured, resulting in more or less endless physical human life. A very short time afterwards, humanity was confronted with AIDS and for a number of years was nearly overwhelmed with feelings of helplessness, as thousands upon thousands of people died.

"Reality Check!" is a common phrase of late, whenever someone notices another person proceeding in a way that ignores significant elements within a particular personal or societal context. Perhaps this phrase would be unnecessary, however, if we all made a practice of checking reality each step of the way beforehand.

As simple as this sounds to do, a recent insight of a video recording of an episode of "Sister Who Presents" is again very relevant: "How much you see depends upon how close you look."

Among my recent challenges related to

"If I expect my blessings
to be more
than they are,
I may very well fail
to ever understand why
they are blessings."

--*Sister Who*

checking reality, is that of acknowledging simultaneous but radically different realities. On one hand, the experiences of people losing their homes and having insufficient resources for healthy food is very real. On the other hand, the experiences of people who have more than they need and are looking for more ways to spend their resources exclusively upon themselves is equally real. How could I convince any of them of a problem which quite objectively speaking does not exist within their personal reality?

Within the broader scope of time and space, everything is interconnected and the reality of the latter is unlikely at best to be indefinitely unaffected by the reality of the former. As we build the tower of Babel higher and higher, we may live on the upper floors and be unaffected by flooding down below--until the foundation of the entire tower begins to crumble. That such destruction does not happen within one's own lifetime is a poor consolation within the larger scope life. To be oblivious to the reality which extends beyond one's own perception and experience, is to make the mistake of Narcissus, to waste away, and to become not merely the predecessor of the future but also its oppressor.

The story of Narcissus was not one I heard very often during my childhood, in spite of how very much it has to teach the current generation. Essentially, he was very beautiful, so much so that upon seeing his reflection in a pool of water, he became transfixed and stared at his own reflection until finally he was no more (that is, he wasted away and died, his rotting corpse fertilizing the Narcissus flower that grew up from the very spot where he'd been sitting).

What to make of Narcissus? That he was self-aware is true, but only to a point. What he failed to see which also caused his death, is that as a human individual he also existed in dynamic relationship to all that was around him. To the extent that he withdrew from that interactive relationship, he also inevitably withdrew from life.

Similarly, to the extent that we withdraw from the experiences, joys, and sorrows of the world around us, we too withdraw from life and contribute to our own death. Certainly it is not always comfortable or convenient to remain involved in life, but it is how we remain alive. It is also how reality remains saturated in love--the power which never dies and never corrupts but rather heals, individually and collectively.

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

Holding Dreams

Holding a dream in defiance of adversarial hurricane winds is a most difficult thing--not because it is difficult to hold tightly within one's fingers for a moment or two of tearing wind, but because such a dream must be held for a very, very long time, through a storm that has every appearance of never ending.

I have yet to meet anyone, however, who has successfully held a dream, who afterwards concluded that the dream was ultimately not worth holding. Within such dreams is that which cannot be found anywhere else throughout the entire universe of created worlds and forms: a reason for living, for laughing, for enduring, for rejoicing, and for loving--especially during those moments when it makes no sense to do so.

The dreams which are worth holding and the dreams which have the power to give life, however, are always so much bigger than what the dreamer's eyes can see, that the dreamer rarely knows the extent and eventual manifestation of what has been dreamed. Yet as big as the dream is, it will not live to be anything at all if the dreamer does not find not only the courage to dream, but also the perseverance to hold the dream during all of the silent moments of confusion and discouragement along the way.

Reality will have its say, but it cannot say whether or not a dream will find its way. Various measures will chart a course and tell a story but cannot determine the final chapter of any book.

It is the commitment of the dreamer to the dream that ultimately provides the last ounce of strength by which the finish line is crossed and the race is truly won. It is the commitment of the dreamer to all that will follow the dream's unfolding that stretches out a new landscape in which all the other race participants can truly live. It is the commitment of the dreamer to all that the dream means, that creates space for God--the mysterious divine transcendence that is always nearby yet ever just beyond our fingertips--within all of the seen and unseen places we must walk; within all of the seen and unseen places we can walk together, if we choose to do so.

Finally, if we all hold not only each others' hands, but equally each others' dreams, we may yet come to know what it is to be sons and daughters of God within and throughout this earthly life, however long it may last.

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

On a Personal Note

For me and for many, it has not been an easy month. Nevertheless, significant progress continues to be made, most especially in the continued renovation of my home into an effective spiritual and educational workshop. Should I complain that the work is too long, too hard, and too poorly funded? Within the bigger picture of my life, I suspect all of this will be dismissed as irrelevant--but the bigger picture of my life is not yet finished and my perspective from the middle of it, like an ant crawling across the expansive surface of a mural, is limited indeed. So I persist in serving the work in whatever ways I am able, trusting God to provide the opportunities and resources God knows to be best.

With regard to my doctoral studies, I have been richly blessed with a wise and gifted faculty mentor. A virtually incomprehensible amount of writing lies before me, but taken one step at a time, like the ant crossing the mural, I am making progress in a positive direction--not because of certain other circumstances, but in spite of them.

The generosity of a friend has at last put closure on the terrible February traffic accident.

The generosity of another friend has provided sufficient stone to finish the meditation garden in the front yard. Hopefully funds can also be found to add flagstone benches to the garden's perimeter.

New episodes of "Sister Who Presents" continue to be recorded and (judging by public responses) the number of viewers is steadily growing also. As demanding and exhausting as the work is, especially in spite of great financial limitations, a great number of people are clearly being helped. Through it all, your prayers for guidance and strength are very much appreciated.

With regard to the near future, in three years we can celebrate the accomplishment of my doctorate and twenty years of being Sister Who, both of which are good reasons for a great party.

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

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