

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 Godde 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

As much as scars of any description may indicate where we've been and what we've experienced, they do not have the power to dictate where life will go next. They may change how we do what we do, they may create invitations to be more heroic than we ever thought we could be, but in most cases they cannot prevent us from doing whatever we are most determined to do.

All that taken into consideration, perhaps it is high time we make peace with the reality of our scars and listen to whatever they are able to teach.

The complete truth of who each of us is, after all, includes both the good and the bad, the light and the shadow, the speaking and the listening, the giving and the receiving, the material and the spiritual, and the joy and the sadness within each moment of life. To omit any of it, is to hide from ourselves and from all we can be.

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

The Stories of Scars

Every scar has a story—a process by which it came into being—that includes intentions, emotions, events, variables, relationships, influences, and forces. Scars do not just appear without any cause or indication of the forces which shaped them. Being unfamiliar with the language and vocabulary of scars, however, prevents constructive interaction.

Before such interaction, however, there must be a certain valuing or mutual respect. Dismissing a scar as unimportant will similarly leave all of its needs unmet and all of its wisdom unshared—as well as leaving us to be (perhaps unknowingly) further victimized by our own ignorance. There is something within meeting the needs of a scar, however, which unavoidably always furthers our own growth. As unlikely as it may seem that our growth owes a debt of gratitude to every scar we've either experienced or observed, we would not be who we are without them. Our own story, in fact, would not be whatever it is. Our lives would not have touched each person they have touched.

Like any good story, there is an initial conflict to get the story going, a large collection of action that builds toward a climax, and a reconfiguration of some sort which follows. Like anything else at all, scars can be used or abused. Allowing a scar to become an excuse for no longer trying, a roadblock to further joy in living, or a discouragement to continued interactive relationship, denies the story any triumphant climax it might otherwise have.

An oft-quoted line from the movie, "The Sound of Music," advises that "whenever God closes a door, He opens a window." What we sometimes forget is that the tools by which Godde may choose to open a particular "window" may in fact be our own hands, talents, and ingenuity. Since the beginning of time, humanity has discovered and invented a very wide spectrum of salves, ointments, and remedies for treating wounds and minimizing visible scars. While some of them have obviously been more effective than others, none of them has been equally effective for all people.

What we too often forget is that the application of every single one of these has required at least a minimal amount of love. There is no salve, ointment, or pharmaceutical remedy which can take the place of a human being responding to another with compassion—of a person such as you or me being willing to be a positive and constructive part of the story.

An intriguing commonality within virtually every theological system I've ever encountered is that in some way or another, the Divine itself has similarly been willing to acquire scars on behalf of humanity and creation and to even retain those scars as a sort of identification and testimony to the story which occurred.

In embracing something greater than ourselves—the story of a scar, for example—we thus move toward true godliness, greater wisdom, and the perfection of love. In facing and learning from scars, we rediscover not only ourselves but also each other.

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

The Words of Scars

A quirk of communication in every language is that for everything that is directly expressed, there is always the possibility of simultaneously existing contrasts. Informing someone that I have no cats at my house, for example, leaves the possibility of having dogs, birds, fish, or any other sort of pet. More concisely, the words do say something, but they never say everything.

Within the world of the theater, this is sometimes referred to as "the subtext," meaning the thoughts and understandings which are unspoken but which provide motivation for the way certain spoken lines are delivered within a particular scene or event within a performance. This is why actors and actresses will sometimes imagine extensive histories for the characters they are assigned to play. Knowing the rest of the story of a particular character (even when the audience doesn't), inspires a much more convincing portrayal that comes from deep within the body, mind, and spirit of the performer.

The mystery the audience must therefore unknowingly accept, is that they might not actually know any more of the story than the small part that is presented onstage. Similarly, the mystery we must all accept with regard to the scars of others, is both that we do not know for certain anything more than the part they allow us to see and that there are most definitely other parts they have (for whatever reason) kept hidden.

The first thing to bear in mind in regard to the words of scars, therefore, is that they are the tip of the iceberg, expressed through the limitations of human language, granting us only the briefest glimpse of another's complex life experience. Therefore, if someone ever entrusts such a word to you, do not take it lightly. If it is your own experience that occasionally grants a glimpse into deeper awareness of yourself, perhaps allowing you to at last find descriptive words for an otherwise incomprehensible moment, do not take it lightly. Specifically because of the depth of such experience, things capable of causing scars, are also interwoven with diverse forms of sacredness.

An additional important point to consider in relation to the words of scars is that there is no common language. What causes scars for one person may be inconsequential to another. The meaning one person assigns to a particular form of scarring, may be completely different even from that which would be assigned by anyone else

within the surrounding community. Similarly, the salves, ointments, and treatments that bring relief to each person within a village, may all be completely distinct and even remarkably contrasting to each other. The essential point, however, is not their difference, but rather that each person finds one that works.

Similarly, the words of scars may be different and even uniquely personal to each person, but what matters is not the difference or the variety, but rather the effectiveness in conveying particular understanding. To say that scars even have words at all, is to recognize that they also have something they want to say—something that they want us to hear. One of the inescapable characteristics of language, however, is that it is unavoidably a bunch of approximations; a collection of symbols that are intended to convey specific understandings, but rarely do so with any great degree of precision. Specifically because of the variety of ways people listen and hear, the images a particular word creates within the mind of one unique individual may be completely different from those created within the mind of another.

Additionally, the words of scars are a matter of personal choice. As much as I can choose words that have particular meaning to myself, I would also do well to understand how the words I choose are perceived by others. Failing to do so might have me essentially attempting to talk German to a Frenchman, Italian to a Chinese citizen, or Korean to a Norwegian—nothing is likely to be understood. The more precise my understanding of vocabulary and of the individual becomes, the more I can expect to be understood.

All that being said, scars do not lie. An inordinate amount of human social life is oriented around ignoring, hiding, or escaping various realities of our lives. Society will sometimes even reward us for playing along with the illusion.

By its very nature, truth is often disturbing, uncomfortable, or inconvenient and consequently great energy and ingenuity are generally applied to hiding, obscuring, or evading what is deemed undesirable. Whenever we embody truth, therefore, we risk being suddenly unwelcome.

The paradox is that truth, like the words of scars, can also create liberation, resolution, peace, and empowerment whenever fully and honestly embraced. The arms that can be obstinately folded across our chests, therefore, can also be for open-hearted hugging and genuine healing.

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

The Wings of Scars

It seems almost heretical to think that something painful enough to cause scars, could also grant wings. In opening to this possibility, however, the first thing I must allow is a shift to an entirely new paradigm; an entirely new way of thinking. Having walked upon the dirt and felt gravity's heavy downward pull throughout each and every step of my journey, I must believe that when I finally acquire the means, the virtually unlimited expanse of the skies will all be within my reach.

Similarly, if after such a season of freedom I find that for whatever reason the means is again taken from me, I must give thanks for each blessed memory and not berate it for being temporal rather than eternal. In the words of Alfred, Lord Tennyson, "tis better to have loved and lost than never to have loved at all." Apparently we must accept that neither wings nor love within this earthly life is eternal. For love to last forever, it must also acquire the ability to transcend physical form. Scars, by their nature, are bound to time and circumstance and thus prevented from being genuinely eternal. So must the wings of scars therefore also be temporal rather than eternal, offering certain abilities and usefulness for only limited seasons within the infinity of the universe.

Since learning to ride a motorcycle, I have found that I have much more respect for vehicular speed and that I have consequently become a much safer driver. There are various friends, nonetheless, who have made it very clear that they do NOT ever want a ride on my motorcycle. Similarly, there are those who will choose to avoid the wings of scars.

None of this, however, is genuinely a matter of right or wrong, of morality or sinfulness, or of life or death. As much as anything can be done recklessly, there are also numerous ways to prepare and do things safely. Choosing to ride a

motorcycle or choosing to soar the heavens on the wings of scars may create new experiences and capabilities, but it is difficult to effectively argue that these experiences and capabilities are essential. Perhaps we could consider that labeling anything as being essential, is more related to our personal values, than to any universal standard of truth.

Yet as quickly as I typed that last sentence, I immediately also heard within the hallways of my memories those voices that claim their personal values to be synonymous with a universal standard of truth. Unfortunately (or fortunately, depending upon how one views it), I did make wings of the scars that their definitions of truth created—but from the moment the wings were touched by the winds of heaven, they carried me in quite different directions than the claimers intended. For my part, I flew along making copious mental notes about everything I saw, heard, and felt; having no ability or even wish to effectively argue with the truth that surrounded me. I read many, many years ago the words of Jesus within the biblical gospel of John, "I am the way, the truth, and the life." What argument could I therefore make with truth that would not separate me from the spirit of God demonstrated within Jesus?

There is a curious effect within the physical body, more often than not, that scars create greater stiffness and strength—both of which would clearly be essential to the construction of wings. A challenge has remained with me throughout life, is the ongoing consideration of to what good purpose the stiffness or strength of a particular scar can be applied. Strength of vision and determination may be extracted from experiences of failure and discouragement. Sensitivity to subtle fluctuations and shifts may linger long after specific examples of such things accompanied experiences of oppression or wounding.

In viewing and participating in a wide range of ritual and religious experiences throughout my life, I recall within each a certain sense of divine presence. At times there was even a hint of masculine or feminine personality to this presence, yet in ways that seemed so far beyond weak human conceptions of masculinity and femininity.

Similarly, the primary characteristic of wings is that they carry us into virtually limitless spaces—beyond the reach of previous limitations, prior notions, and preceding expectations. For the moments we dare to fly, we have opportunity to find out how big and free and alive we truly are.

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

*"It is not true
that words will never hurt me.
Yet if words can hurt,
they can also heal.
Please, may my words
be ones that heal."*

--Sister Who

The Soul of Scars

At the heart of every scar is a fierce determination to live, potentially transforming the scar into a chronicle of a struggle against some sort of adversary or circumstance. Those who do not resist, who comply with every oppressive demand, may be rewarded with an absence of scars, but it is easy to question whether they ever truly live. How tragic it would be, considering the inescapably finite quality of our mortal lives, to reach the point of death, to find that time has run out, and to realize that one has never truly lived.

Specifically within truly living, one can learn how multi-dimensional scars genuinely are—integrating physical, emotional, historical, psychological, and perhaps even spiritual elements. There is a sense, therefore, in which avoiding scars inevitably includes avoiding risk, greater understanding, and personal growth—perhaps even avoiding our own unique stories.

It was quite a number of years ago when I first discovered the remarkable specimen called the jade plant. I was warned at that time, however, that it is necessary to trim the plant at least annually in order to give the trunk a chance to get ahead of the development of other leaves and branches. Specifically because the jade plant stores water within its leaves, it is easy for the plant to become top-heavy and tip itself right off the shelf. By allowance for pruning and scars, however, a sturdy over-developed trunk can be nurtured, capable of supporting an ever-larger amount of water-laden leaves.

For the jade plant, the soul of its scars can be found within its ability to stand and to support more weight than certain other houseplants ever could. The strength of the plant is specifically developed by intelligent pruning; by wisely choosing where, when, and how to incorporate scars into an ever-larger work, filled with life.

As much as the creation of scars is generally painful to at least some degree, such events are never only about blaming the perpetrator—who may in fact have limited understanding of the developmental processes in which he or she is participating. For those with eyes that see, a heart that loves, and a mind that understands, even the most painful moments can be formative because growth is always bigger than pain. The scar is thus never as big as the soul whose reality is thereby confirmed and nurtured.

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

On a Personal Note

For nearly three years, Gareth has worn a nose-basket "to protect uppity dachshunds from out-of-control sheepdog tempers." Often during recent years, however, I had the intuition that another dog would be coming. Having grown up within a large family myself, I had no objection.

Several days ago, Bedivere finally arrived. At nine weeks old, this gentle and loving pitbull puppy was instantly part of the family. Gareth's entire demeanor immediately shifted: no possessiveness of toys, growling for dominance, or competitiveness for attention. I was amazed and have no explanation, but a minor momentary flare-up more recently recommends against overconfidence that Gareth's behavioral problem is completely resolved. Little Bedivere is quite intelligent, insistent upon being near me (sleeping under my chair as I type this newsletter), and began using the dog door within the first day. He has already learned his name and to eat from only his own food dish.

In other news, my attempt to climb Mount Columbia a few weeks ago was a disaster—so much that I considered never again making such a hike. As the weeks pass and the scars begin to heal, however, I suspect there will be more hikes to the summits of teenagers—but not this year.

With regard to gay pride celebrations, it has become clear that it is time for the ministerial work to move on to other mission fields. I've often said that no one is the embodiment of a category, but rather that each is an individual. Therefore, it should not hurt to hear that I'm not "gay enough" to be included within that category. The scar of being excluded, however, I hope to turn into wings that carry me where gay pride could never go.

Similarly, by invitation from a friend, I plan to ride my motorcycle from Denver, Colorado to Atlanta, Georgia and back, July 23-August 10. All prayers for safety and protection during this journey of personal growth are much appreciated.

May one and all and everything, blessed and loved ever be. *Sister Who*

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