

# 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

In struggling to relate to the world's vast quantity of diversity, it is easy to forget basics of interpersonal dynamics such as love and wisdom, compassion and discernment, and receptivity and initiative. This month's newsletter offers a reflection, perhaps a deeper contemplation, of some of these all-too-easily-forgotten basics.

We live within a transitional time--career changes, residential changes, communal changes, pending governmental changes, and even religious and spiritual changes challenge and sometimes even threaten us on all sides. International travel, commerce, and communication continue to push us toward global community, but we are way behind in learning each others' stories, experiences, and languages.

Here is one more contribution to a foundation of love and peace, for the essential work before us.

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

## Retaining Innocence

I have often heard mention of "the loss of innocence" as being associated with being exposed to immorality, struggles, and failing within life. These explanations are inadequate, however, because innocence is thereby tied to ignorance.

What is genuinely lost during the supposed loss of innocence? Sometimes it is portrayed as the abandonment of a naive approach to life, but this would make innocence adversarial to wisdom.

If innocence is so good, why should it not be something which by some means or another can be preserved or perhaps even regained, if in fact it has been lost?

If innocence has no more substance or strength than a soap bubble--something which can be destroyed by contact with virtually anything at all, something which can exist only within the most vacuous and empty environment--is it really worth having in the first place?

Certainly there are ideas, events, and forces

which are adversarial to innocence. The pivotal question in such cases is whether a particular person's innocence has the strength or wisdom to survive the onslaught. If not, how can such strength or wisdom be acquired or integrated?

Although I was born in Minnesota, I grew up in southern Wisconsin, which has comparatively fewer lakes. Nevertheless, a common point of safety during the extremely cold winters there was to avoid walking on thin ice. From above, however, there were relatively few clues to indicate precisely how thick or thin the ice was and therefore whether any particular place on a frozen lake would or would not support one's weight.

Similarly, all innocence looks superficially pretty much the same. How innocence bears up under the weight of some contrasting moment or experience, however, quickly makes the truth of that innocence obvious. Untested innocence is therefore unknown innocence and one could even say untrustworthy innocence.

My conclusion, after all of the above and more, was that what is lost or rather must be retained, is the ability to have faith in one's self, in others, in life, and in God to express or produce the very best possibilities and not only the more undesirable ones. Faith has the power to coexist with all of our failings, with all examples of evil within the world, and with the more-or-less infinite amount of mystery that deeper understandings of life inherently include. Faith has the ability to approach new situations and circumstances with an open mind and an open heart, to call forth the best within ourselves and others, and to offer each new moment and day a glorious new beginning.

Faith has the ability to recreate a thick, strong layer of ice so that within the coldest of winters, we can walk across the lake rather than needing to go around it--essentially thereby granting each one of us the power to walk on water. Faith makes innocence worth keeping.

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

## Releasing Cynacism

Nearly every time I go hiking in full ritual garb, as one might expect, interesting conversations happen. On my way down from hiking to the summits of Grays Peak and Torreys Peak last Monday morning, a woman accompanied by a number of others took one look at me and announced, "We're born-again Christians," then turned her back to me and gazed off into the distance.

I was astonished and interpreted that she was expecting an adversarial reaction, which I find to be nearly always unproductive and usually lacking in unconditional love. At a momentary loss for words, I finally decided that since she had offered no explanation of what she meant, I would interpret her to have announced the presence of a group of people of faith. I responded, "Well, that's great." She offered no further reply, but brief conversations with her companions which followed were much more pleasant.

In pondering the experience in the moments which followed, as I continued down the mountain trail, I first thought that I could have recommended the book I read while in college, "Out of the Salt Shaker and Into the World," by Rebecca Manley Pippert, which speaks of being good listeners while simultaneously shining the light and love of Christ within each moment of our lives.

As I reflected further upon an encounter along a mountain trail between Sister Who and a person of presumably theologically conservative Christian beliefs and upon this encounter in particular, I found myself wishing that I had instead responded, "You say that like it's a bad thing."

Why should one's commitment to whichever vision of God one holds, be first and foremost a reason to engage in conflict rather than healing, understanding, and love? Every person whom any of us will ever meet is a combination of experiences, responses, beliefs, fears, accomplishments, and wounds. If our first words are ones of love, we invite all that is good within that person and also identify ourselves as potential healers. If our first words create distance and distinction, however, how will anything constructive or collaborative follow? How will we encourage a positive interaction the next time we meet along any particular trail, when perhaps one or the other of us is in need of assistance?

In words I coined many years ago, "life is a collaborative effort: we all take turns being the

one in need." If I later encounter one who has in times past been my enemy, but who is then simply someone in need, will I have sufficient love and forgiveness within me to offer whatever assistance I can? If I do not, who has now become the oppressor? If I become the oppressor, all that is good within me begins to fade and my value sinks to that of the dust beneath my feet. At least the dust may support the growth of a dandelion or perhaps even a tree. As an oppressor who believes in nothing beyond self-interest, I support nothing beyond my own inherently and inescapably limited existence.

In the words of Jim Elliot, "he is no fool who gives what he can't keep, to gain what he cannot lose." When we give our lives in love and wisdom to all that is around us, we shrug off the cynacism and faithlessness which otherwise make the world ever more a place unfit for any recommendable experience of life.

By wisely and lovingly investing all that we have and are into life around us, the divine mysteries of the universe flow through us and we become part of something much larger and more wonderful than the details of our individual lives will ever be able to contain. By planting a smile within the visual perception and a friendly greeting within the auditory perception of whomever I encounter, I proactively place the seed of better things within the other's mind and heart. Whether or not that mind and heart is willing to nurture and support the growth of that seed in any way, is between that person and God. Regardless of the response, I will have done what I could and cynacism will not have planted itself within me.

The old adage advises, "One cannot keep the birds from flying over one's head, but one can keep them from nesting in one's hair." As human beings living within a broken, troubled, and confused world, we are each and every day exposed to all sorts of things which encourage a loss of faith, of hope, and of the ability to love.

The formation of a better future, however, requires us to be better than that. We must be willing to dance with the word "maybe," using the most positive and inviting steps. Maybe people won't always let me down. Maybe things won't always go wrong. Maybe love will triumph over hate. Maybe life will find a way through even the most adversarial, frustrating, and uncertain circumstances. Maybe, somehow, we will all win.

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

## Nurturing Value

Innocence is very challenging and not at all a simple or easy thing because it brings with it curiosity, playfulness, and a willingness to engage with what is unfamiliar. Innocence is willing to value whatever it sees, just as faith is willing to be grateful for all that has been given, trusting that every part has its place within some greater plan and harmony of unfolding life.

Innocence, ideally, is attentive, noticing every detail as an interesting quality rather than a tedious task of taking inventory. When others are innocently interested in us and therefore wish to include us, we feel valuable.

When others filled with self-interest rather than innocence wish to include us, however, we begin to feel used and therefore devalued. It is not us, which they desire, but only our contributions. Within the interconnected web of life and being, this takes the energy of life from one place in order to stockpile it within another. Rather than the sharing of the candle flame, this is the theft of the candle itself, leaving its former holder completely in darkness.

When candles are hoarded and placed too closely together, the addition or subtraction of a single candle is hardly noticed, making its contribution of minimal importance. Each candle experiences its greatest value by being placed where it is most needed--in a place of greater darkness. If we extend our arms as we hold each others' hands, we can form a very large circle indeed. Similarly, when the circle of one candle's light is placed adjacent to but not overlapping that of another, a well-lit path, ultimately stretching perhaps for miles, begins to form. By journeying from the light of one candle to the next, a great distance can be safely traveled. The color, height, or thickness of any particular candle does not

*"By the power of love,  
faith boldy ventures  
where reason cannot."*

*--Sister Who*

affect the light which shines from it, since the candles all share a more elemental fire. With a sufficient number of candles, one might even be able to travel from one community to another, enabling distribution of greetings, news, and goods of various kinds--ultimately creating a much larger family than would ever otherwise be possible.

If we can walk through a forest and begin to notice that one tree is a spruce, another a pine, and yet another an aspen; if we notice that the trees have individually arranged themselves according to the slope of the hill and the flow of a nearby stream; and if we can feel some emotion for the fallen trunk, the branch torn by a storm, and the seeds scattered across the path before us; then we will begin to understand what a forest is.

If we can look upon each other not as an object to be shaped according to this or that personal or societal whim but as a flower to be nurtured according to the pattern which life has placed within it, if we can listen to each other as to one who is moment-by-moment searching for better ways to be, and if we can insist that nobody really wins until everybody really wins, we will begin to make humanity into something genuinely worth preserving.

In some ways, nurturing value is very easy. We do not need any other resources beyond what we already have, most especially a heart and a mind. If we can love and if we can think, the greatest part of the task is already in place.

In some ways, nurturing value is very difficult. We need to trust, to risk, and to try what offers no guarantee or promise of success. We need to forgive failings, heal wounds, and renew hope. We need to lift up, encourage, and inspire--especially when superficially it makes the least sense to do so. The greater wisdom which must move us within such moments is that which knows that only by lifting up, encouraging, and inspiring will any better outcome become possible.

The temptation to possess, control, or require will always be with us, sometimes masquerading as demanding accountability. By valuing the individual who may be confused by the choices, persuasive arguments, and disconnection more typical within our world, we can speak the truth in love to one another and remind each other within each moment of just how interconnected and interdependent we are--and of how this is a good thing, if we genuinely value one another.

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

## Holding God

How can one hold what is beyond complete description, form, and understanding? Yet how can one not reach for what beckons with unconditional love and unequalled wisdom?

It must not be a reaching with an intention to possess, control, or require, but rather a reaching concerned with the miraculous ability to truly touch, experience, and perhaps embrace.

Why? Because doing so calls us beyond mere human conceptions of innocence, cynicism, and value toward those which are divine. Within those miraculous moments of touching, experiencing, and embracing, we individually and collectively become more than we have ever been, the universe expands, and life blossoms in ways in which we never imagined it could--leaving us filled with humility, reverence, and awe.

Some divine spark within each of us knows this is possible. The reaching which intends to possess, control, or require, however, produces only arrogance, insecurity, and pretense--none of which can encourage, create, or support the miraculous expansion and blossoming which our souls individually and collectively seek.

Beyond money, politics, competition, greed, and self-centeredness--sometimes buried by disappointments, abuse, and deep wounding--are the selves our souls know we could be, the vision of possibilities which that which is truly God hid within us even before we were born, and the seed which could grow to bless the world around us.

When we hold God within our hearts and minds, in whatever limited way we understand that holding to take place, for a moment at least, our limitations fall away and we find resources of love, wisdom, and transformation otherwise hidden.

When we hold God within our hearts and minds, we do not limit God any more than I limit you when I gently take your hand and we walk forward together. As real as our collaboration becomes, our separateness remains intact and we respect that although we have for the moment common intention and activity, the freedom of individuality is not diminished; rather this freedom becomes a most valuable resource.

When we hold God, life is worth living, problems are not nearly so final, and hope flutters about as a million rainbow-hued butterflies, filling us with great wonder and joy.

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

## On a Personal Note

Another very busy month with its own peculiar combination of guiding events. I'm trying to remember that very little is inherently good or bad, in and of itself, but if I could look from God's perspective would make perfect sense within the overall configuration of my life.

My application for participation within further graduate school at Pacifica Graduate Institute was denied, as was any detailed explanation of the reason(s). Because of traveling to Santa Barbara, California for a face-to-face interview, however, I was blessed with several new friendships. One of these provided the means for an introduction of Sister Who to the owner of Landmark Artists Management in Burbank, California. Whether this contact will result in new opportunities, further professional networking, or nothing at all, remains to be seen.

On July 30, every conceivable circumstance collaborated in the successful climbing of Grays Peak (14,270') and Torreys Peak (14,267'), just over an hour's drive west of Denver, Colorado, bringing to twelve the number of fourteeners (mountains reaching above fourteen thousand feet elevation) in Colorado that I have climbed all the way to the summit in full ritual garb. Along the way I met some challenging people, but a greater number of wonderfully open-minded, intelligent, and encouraging people with whom there was frequently profound and insightful conversation. I could not have imagined anything better than the perfect weather, the smoothness with which the hike was accomplished, nor the company I encountered along the way. Additionally, my dachshund, Galahad, accompanied me and thereby accomplished his third and fourth fourteener hikes, although he reached his limit about a thousand feet below (and after) the final ascent and finally requested to be carried at twenty-minute intervals throughout the remaining descent. Pretty good for a dachshund, eh?

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

### Subscription Information:

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