

Recommended Reading:

How High Can You Bounce--Turning Setbacks into Comebacks by Roger Crawford. Most writers and speakers that I've heard in the general area of positive thinkers and affirmations have seemed a little too close to living in psychological denial. This book, however, was refreshing by presenting maintenance of a positive outlook through determination and a solid understanding of human resourcefulness. The real strength of a bounce does not occur high in the air afterwards but rather during the crunching moment of impact with hard surfaces and without dismissing the reality of difficult emotions. The moment of impact is when the height of the bounce to follow, is truly determined.

The Different Drum--Community Making and Peace by M. Scott Peck. Although I've read only the first half of this book so far, the insights on truly workable human civilization seem both very old and also fresh and new. In that Sacred Clowns were much more common within tribal civilizations, I often lament the deep understandings of being inclusive, diverse, and integrated that seem to have been lost. Much of that, however, seems to be rediscovered in this book as being as timeless as humanity itself. Ultimately, the "different drum" is not a matter of "us" and "them" but of the uniqueness of each of us, drumming all together. From my own experiences of middle eastern drumming, an amazing but common occurrence is when a large number of multiple rhythms are played simultaneously and yet blend perfectly. What a perfect metaphor for humanity!



Subscription Information:

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Sister Who's Perspective

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Life is a collaborative effort, encompassing more than we know. In a time of "information overload," news, communication, and travel across great distances is common, yet 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.

Recommended Movies:

"Edward Scissorhands." In some ways a modern-day fairytale, this movie is also both a serious indictment of the barbarism of modern suburban society and a validation of those who by acting from unconditional love are blinded to differences that are in actuality quite superficial. As an interesting portrayal of what happens when innocence meets denial, it seems there is a little bit of each character of this movie within each of us.

"Chitty Chitty Bang Bang." Though in many ways this movie seems to be a lighthearted and magical adventure, it also asks deeper questions regarding the extent to which childhood--and perhaps the child within each of us--is respected and embraced. There is also the question of just how much dreams can accomplish, if we truly believe in them and let love find its own way through.

Personal Reflections on Being a Sacred Clown

I learn a great deal from each movie I watch and become extremely emotionally involved with whatever is portrayed upon the screen. This being so, I make a point of avoiding movies which contain excessive violence or which are oriented around the emotion of fear.

On a number of occasions, I so completely enjoyed and so fully experienced particular movies that I could quote every spoken line from beginning to end, after leaving the theatre.

It was only a year or so ago that I began to notice a commonality in the movies that most resonated with my soul, that they were in fact nearly all movies about social anomalies who triumphed in unusual ways: Dr. DoLittle, Edward Scissorhands, Powder, Mr. Holland's Opus, Short Circuit, Priscilla Queen of the Desert, To Wong Fu Thanks for Everything Julie Newmar, The NeverEnding Story, Star Wars, Dead Poets Society, and Heidi, to name just a few. People who were and are all quite essential to the mental and emotional health of the world, yet for whom the world has great difficulty finding a suitable place.

A friend I've known for quite a number of years recently remarked that I seemed in some respects like Don Quixote, tilting at windmills. I decided not to digress into whether my adversaries were truly just windmills imagined to be dragons or whether they were malevolent entities to which others chose to be blind. Instead I was reminded of the biblical story of the calling of Jeremiah to be a prophet, and asked "but what if one truly is Don Quixote? Is there indeed anything else that one can do, except that which Don Quixote does?"

For anyone who's forgotten the biblical story of the calling of

Jeremiah, it essentially tells of God finding a reluctant youth, commissioning this unqualified young man to be a prophet, and then mentioning that, "oh, and by the way, no one's going to heed anything you say." I'm afraid my response to this last part would have been a quick, "Excuse me? Uh, God? Before I go driving myself mad with frustration, could you, um, maybe explain just why it is that you're commanding me to do something that's destined to fail? I mean, this doesn't exactly support the popular notion of your transcendent wisdom."

But what is the purpose of failure and what is the purpose of doing any particular thing? First of all, it occurs to me (usually later, when the event itself is long past) that only in the context of a specific goal can I be said to have truly failed. If I set out (for example) to create a social organization of five hundred people meeting weekly to repeat a particular song that I taught to them, and instead the end result turns out to be a dozen people who begin paths of significant personal spiritual growth but who are dispersed by circumstances to distant countries such that none of them ever sees any of the others again, I may have failed to accomplish my chosen goal while succeeding in planting the seeds of worldwide spiritual renewal. The point, much more concisely put, is to ask what was actually accomplished, no matter what the original intention was.

There is no event in which a failure occurs that does not include an accomplishment in some other area. There is no situation in which an anomalous person is ostracized without there being some perhaps less obvious accomplishment of personal growth or human understanding. Sometimes I have referred to this as taking the time to sift one's ashes, much as the burning down of houses may leave lumps of gold where a jewelry box used to be.

Remember, always sift the ashes to see what gifts the fire has left.

So what does all of this have to do with being a Sacred Clown? I find that I am frequently sifting ashes, looking for gold in those places where perhaps most people never look. I believe that I have often found some too, but I am not always successful in persuading others of the value of what I find. So they sometimes laugh at this person in peculiar garb looking for buried treasures in a child's sandbox, because they really

don't believe that there is any treasure there--not even when I actually find it.

At present, in fact, I find myself going through major life changes as my primary relationships are changing and financial concerns loom over me like crumbling towers that seem destined to crush me. Yet like my favorite movies, the best parts of who and what I am are both vulnerable in their honesty yet eternal in their spirit.

The greatest challenge that seems to be always with me is simply that of never having the last word, of always facing one more fire, one more sifting of the ashes, and one more sometimes frighteningly unfamiliar rebirth into someone I never knew that I always was.

So with symbolism layered upon symbolism, with no way to be but that which I find I am, and with a perception of life's ironic and inspiring details that simply won't quit, I continue to offer myself for the education of the human race--individually and collectively. May each and all and everything blessed and loved be!

***"The value
is not
in the skill,
but
in the
participation."***

---Sister Who

Dealing With Economics

I watched the movie "The Greatest Show on Earth" one more time yesterday, and was particularly struck by the inclusion of Emmet Kelly, whom I understand to have been the greatest of all hobo clowns. A friend wandering through the room remarked that hobo clowns were most common following the years of economic hardship known as the Great Depression. The more I thought about it, the more I wondered whether in some subconscious way the hobo clowns allowed people to laugh at their past pain and thereby somehow transcend it. In such a context, Emmet Kelly would thus be more of a high priest than a buffoon.

But what is the relationship between people and their economic resources?

In one sense, I think it's safe to say that the majority of the world's people are engaged in some form of prostitution. At its most basic definition this would be translated "I will do something I would otherwise not, if you will give me money in exchange for my effort." In that our world has made money into a fairly essential thing, the real question most are facing at some point is "what can I do for money and still be able to make peace with my conscience?" More and more, it seems to me, economic success is tied to increasing degrees of dishonesty--sales pitches, undisclosed defects, unrealistic promises. Are we seeking a new kind of savior? But, for now, let's go back to this question of prostitution.

The ideal is to find that particular thing that I enjoy doing so much, that I would do it whether I was ever paid for it or not. Most, unfortunately, do not seem to be so blessed. But this too is (from a certain perspective) nonessential.

Every situation has something to teach. If my ideals reflect a top priority of spiritual growth, then my prayer should actually be that God give me that state which will produce the most growth and ultimately godliness within me--regardless of whether such a state includes wealth, poverty, or moderation.

Yet I am too human to wish for spiritual growth that is also profoundly unpleasant, so my prayers more often are for empowerment of various kinds--wisdom, financial abundance, fortuitous opportunities, and so forth.

Nevertheless, it does seem that answers to my prayers come and go according to something far better than my desires for comfort. I recall the words from the book of Proverbs in the bible, "Give me neither poverty nor riches...feed me with the food that is my portion."

An additional "voice" in this discussion (from still another book I've been reading lately) reflects a Native American tradition, and speaks often of "the fear of scarcity" or the fear that there would not be enough to satisfy everyone's needs. Looking back over the years of my life, I was quite astonished at how often this specter's face lingered behind my actions, driving me to push toward the front of the line, hoard whatever I had, and consider everyone to be a competitor for the essence of life itself, hidden within all manner of material things.

But life is not limited and there really is enough. Starvation of body and soul has a lot more to do with distribution than with supply, but ultimately what I contend with most is not the fact of limited material quantity but rather my own soul's fears, insecurities, and perceptions.

I wonder whether when humanity finally begins to interact with extraterrestrials, the one thing they will have the most difficulty understanding is how we could allow so many of our kind to starve to death when we had more food than we could possibly eat.

What is really needed, I think is for all of us to stop keeping score. If we stopped worrying about what things cost and were more concerned with where things are needed I think we would find a way to meet every need and no one would ever have to wonder again whether what they had to give would be gratefully received.

The one with a sword to give could use it as a plough share and the one with a spear to give could use it as a pruning hook--and the ragged clothing of the white-faced hobo might be recognized instead as the variously shaded brown feathers of the bald eagle.

Then perhaps we would begin to understand what all of our symbols have always been trying to tell us--that life is thoroughly interconnected and all of our fates stand or fall with amazing unity.