

Sister Who's Perspective

Sister Who's Perspective, Issue #51, September 2003, copyright

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*

The Spiral Dance

Approximately two years ago, we all woke up one morning to hear that acts of unimaginable violence had struck. For a few moments, we forgot who was gay or straight, rich or poor, republican or democrat, pagan or christian. We were simply members of humanity who--for one blessed moment--had a common cause to unite us and we were better than we've ever been.

I do not expect there to be any agreement, within the abundance of social critiques coinciding with this anniversary, on whether any lasting progress has been made or not, in terms of the ways we treat each other only two years later. My personal opinion is that "the more things change, the more they stay the same," not because they have to, but rather because we don't believe in each other enough to make it otherwise.

We still have policemen and firemen who are unmotivated bigots when it comes to extending equal protection to certain minorities. We still have financial ladder-climbers who would rather acquire a larger bank account or a more expensive car than consider for even one moment, establishing a personal "Good Samaritan" bank account, an account which receives a certain percentage of each paycheck to empower one to respond generously to anyone in need. We still have millions of people dealing with excess while others within their immediate communities struggle to deal with never having enough.

I once suggested that one of God's challenges to America, is to learn how to deal responsibly with having an excess of nearly every kind of thing one can name. Churches, businesses, grocery stores, schools, jobs, cars--and yet when we succeed in getting our needs met, instead of turning to help another person in need, we search instead for ways to accumulate and hoard even more.

Until our focus shifts to the welfare each and every human being equally, every act of accumulation plants the seed of a future conflict. Every time we dismiss the emotional, psychological,

and physical pain of another human being, we turn aside an opportunity to peacefully and constructively meet someone's need and ensure that a more violent resolution to the imbalance becomes that much more likely to happen.

On the other hand, it is "crazy-making" to me, to be aware of such problems with distribution within humanity and find myself unable to respond to everything of which I'm aware, unable to solve every problem which crosses my path, unable to balance my abilities and my awareness. To ignore the problems is unthinkable. To solve the problems, I am mostly unable. To coexist with the problem until I become desensitized to it and it is little more than the societal wallpaper with which I live, is psychological and emotional suicide.

So I begin by understanding that the problem is not part of the wallpaper. It is in fact a crisis of the survival of the individual and collective human soul, which is ultimately more valuable than any institutionalized religion's dogmas or any nation's sovereign laws will ever be. We are in fact going through a crisis of such unimaginable implications that it would be terrifying to mentally grasp its scope for even a brief moment, made all the more terrifying by the sense of helplessness which towers over us every time we even think of trying to address the situation in any way.

I am reminded again of the brief story my bodybuilding coach told me, perhaps a year ago, of the little boy on the beach throwing starfish back into the surf as wave after wave of them kept getting washed up onto the beach. "There's too many" a man called, "all your hard work just doesn't matter." In response the boy threw yet another starfish back into the water and called back, "it mattered to that one."

The boy was aware on some level, obviously, that he wasn't going to save every starfish on the beach. Yet he was equally aware that he would in fact save some of them, however great or small a percentage it might be.

A more wonderful conclusion to this story would be that people walking by, stopped to watch, until a very great crowd of people were gathered, watching the little boy throw one starfish after another back into the water.

For no apparent reason, an old woman with a cane hobbled forward and picked up a starfish, a beautiful red and purple one, hobbled to the water's edge and threw it as far as she could, out into the tumbling surf, then turned to retrieve yet another one of a different color.

After a moment, a college student mumbled, "what the hell" and walked out onto the wet sand to help. Suddenly the beach turned into a human avalanche, gathering momentum quickly as more and more stepped out of the crowd and dozens and then hundreds of starfish were being returned to the safety of the sea where they belonged.

In almost no time at all, every starfish had been saved and the beach was instead filled with smiling, laughing, happy people, none of whom had any regrets about being part of the miracle of love. Oh, by the way, to the best of my knowledge, none of the starfish ever said "thank you," but I don't think that mattered to any of the people who were there that day.

The really great thing about such a happy ending is that it really is possible. If each one of us could set aside a blessed moment here and there to do nothing but give whatever we can to those in need, if each one of us were more willing to accept people's help when it was offered, there would never be another starfish dying on the beach. If anyone reading this hasn't figured it out already, we are the starfish.

We find ourselves too often washed up on a strange shore, not knowing how to get back to the sea again before it's too late and we die. We find ourselves dependent upon guardian angels with whom we may never be able to clearly communicate, just as we have sometimes been guardian angels for people who didn't know how to say "thank you" in any language that we could understand.

Why do we do it? Why does anyone do it for us? I don't think anyone knows why he or she does it, but I believe there is a spark of divine love within all things that calls out to the divine spark of love within all other things. If there is connection, good things happen. If there is isolation, something dies.

Perhaps one of the ongoing challenges of being human is that in order to carry with us an

honest quality of happiness, we must also be willing to carry many sad qualities as well.

We must be willing to carry the sadness of living within a nation overrun with political corruption and abusive self-interest while striving to live in contrast to such evilness. We must be willing to carry the sadness of living within a nation within which literally tons of food are discarded each day, as millions of fellow human beings starve to death in other places, for no better reason than we have failed to adequately distribute the earth's bounty. We must be willing to live within a nation in which many people live within homes large enough to function as small hotels, while many others huddle under bridges and on subway grates, trying to simply stay alive until winter passes again.

Even more difficult, we must be willing to go on enjoying life in whatever modest and appropriate ways we can, because it is just as important to sustain experiences of happiness and joy as it is to be aware of sadness and sorrow. Pushing myself down does not lift others up. Birds may feel sorry for humans' inability to fly, but staying on the ground does nothing to give humans wings.

There is perhaps no more important time to sing, than that moment in which grief and oppression most threatens to enslave and suffocate any human soul. Yet it must be a song that draws the soul up from the ashes of despair and such songs can only be truly sung by those with the courage to care.

Within just such moments, divine love shines brighter than any star and in having experienced such moments from time to time, I understand, if only for a moment, why God might choose to allow the occurrence of terrible things. Oh, that we could learn to draw such beauty out of our souls without the provocation that only the deepest grief and sadness seem to bring. Perhaps, however, I could just as easily wish for gold to be purified without fire.

In remembering the tragedy of September 11, 2001, however, we would do well to also remember that if one turn in the fire doesn't adequately purify the gold, another turn in the fire is sure to come.

One way or another, we are destined to become purest gold, dancing in recurring circles and spirals until we finally learn the steps which will take us to a better place and way of being than describes us now. May one and all and everything, blessed and loved ever be.

Personal Danger

I recall having quoted Corrie TenBoom on many occasions, "I try to hold things loosely because it always hurts so much when God has to pry my fingers open."

During times of prosperity, it is easy to say that God's blessing is upon us and that God is taking care of us and meeting all of our needs. I'm not sure, however, that I could with any integrity call out "God will take care of you" to someone during World War II who is being dragged off to a Nazi death camp, or to someone who lives within a household in which molestation and physical abuse are common, or to someone who without any thought of a nice vacation such as many take for granted, must decide nearly every day whether to spend what little money is left on food or on gasoline to provide transportation to a place of employment which insists upon paying less than the local cost of living for basic needs.

If I leave others in need, do I not have good reason to expect that they may at some point steal from me?

On the other hand, if I am one of those in need and am also unable to arm myself with the security that wealthier people take for granted, I may still be the one who is robbed by the one in need. The thief holds no particular animosity toward me; it may just as well have been anyone else; I was simply standing too close to the situation.

Every now and then, someone refers to me as dangerous and although I tend to chuckle, being such a nonviolent, loving, and honest person, I do understand a little that in speaking honestly and in also being willing to discuss absolutely anything openly and directly, I challenge the very systems of thought and behavior upon which most of society's victimizing patterns are based.

Over time, I have worked very hard to equip myself with tools which will allow me to serve the work of personal and spiritual growth within others and I am at times a little paranoid about any circumstances which might cause me to lose these tools. It is not even the tools themselves which concern me, as much as losing the ability to make my own personal positive contribution to the world being a tiny bit better in some way, for the simple reason that I lived.

I find myself repeating all too often of late, "Life is what happens while you're making other plans" yet I rebel against the very idea of suffering such loss that I would no longer be able to make a

positive contribution to the world. Partially, I think I worry about this because I am only familiar with the work I have done and the way I have defined myself within the past.

If there is any danger about which to be legitimately concerned (though probably not necessarily afraid), I think it would be the danger of remaining no more than I am, within the present moment; of remaining no more than the sum of past precedents and experiences which is also rigidly confined to the past expressions of those precedents and experiences.

Yet no single moment of time or life experience is able to contain all of who and what I (or anyone else) is. Those of us who know this are quite specifically a danger to those who don't.

We may bring something new and different to the lives of the latter group. We may provoke them to look at themselves, to look at each other, and to look at life in a way that up to now, is totally unfamiliar to them.

In so doing, we may find that life is more dangerous for each one of us; that perhaps we are surrounded by people who are unable to tolerate such challenges; and that God may require us to reinvent our specific ministry within the world a great many times.

So I remind myself, as often as I can, that being Sister Who goes way beyond makeup and costume, that being Sister Who is not synonymous with living in the mountains at my current address or level of income, and that being Sister Who is the embodiment of an essence which can be expressed in more new ways than it ever has been so far.

The same is true of each and every person on earth, each one a hidden treasure waiting to be discovered within those circumstances which would allow the treasure to come out where it could be shared and magnified.

If you believe in life at all, please, be a personal danger to the world that does not.

If you believe in love at all, please be a personal danger to the world that does not.

If you believe that everyone has value and deserves to be included, please, be a personal danger to the world that does not.

Birth is one of the most dangerous activities in which one can ever engage, but unless we can all agree that current circumstances are good enough, it is high time we give birth to something better.

May the spirit of the Divine be with you and guide you through whatever may cross your path and bless you with a vision of where to go next--as well as with the courage to take the next step.

Yo-yo

*Lying in darkness
taken into light
a warm hand around me.
Spun through chilling air
blinded by dizziness
snapped to spin reversed.*

*Perfectly balanced
as the thread of my soul
is extended for all to see.
Arcing high,
returning to a calloused palm,
reaching to anticipate the next spin.*

*Frozen, perhaps in fear,
trying to breathe,
hoping the string doesn't break.
When last it did,
a resounding crash
carved a scar in my side.*

*It's happened so many times;
I should be used to it by now,
used to the sudden change of state.
A distant memory
of yet another change,
from growing tree to string-wound wheels.*

*The wood grain's measure of my age
beneath bright paint sealed
till such time as a fall may a grain line reveal,
though no measure there
of that holiday morning
in a stocking hung by the fire.*

*A ritual hearkening to days before
when the cleansing of foot clothing
and the receipt of gifts was together sewn;
I am the gift
though the fabric smells rather of storage
than of fresh laundry soap.*

*Round the small finger
goes the end loop
of my soul string,
once a weapon
now a mere plaything,
I do my spiral dance.*

*Does anyone understand?
It is really not even I
who do the dance,
as much as the dance
is done to me
in all places whence I'm carried.*

*I cannot be
but what I am;
not even I understand.
Yet there's the music,
the humming string,
the stretching I cannot prevent.*

*How long can I endure,
this back and forth,
this up and down,
stretching my soul,
a splash of color in the air,
the line of a spiral dance.*

*And so I dance
but never fully understand.*

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--S.W.