

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

Hands--used in a wider variety of ways than perhaps any other part of the human body, with the probable exception of the brain; integral participants in nearly every material exchange in which any of us ever participates.

Yet what can these ways mean, within the larger context and unfolding of our individual lives? What does all of the giving and receiving in which hands are frequently involved ultimately accomplish, both within others as well as within ourselves?

We reach, push, embrace, and defend while writing, constructing, sculpting, drawing, and communicating innumerable ideas, shapes, and visions.

Hopefully all of it ultimately adds up to a more beautiful and empowered life for each and every one of us.

Giving a Hand-out

Somehow the term suggests a place or moment of desperation in which none ever wants to be. There is also the suggestion that receiving help often falls into the category of enabling--receiving only enough to maintain the problem and not enough to transcend or resolve it.

Conversely, should such circumstances find me, I hope one with the necessary resources is willing to help. Occasionally I hear someone describe another's negative behavior as "merely an attempt to get attention." If someone is that desperate to get attention, perhaps (to the best of our individual and collective ability) we should be certain he or she gets the attention that is needed.

Nevertheless, I still prefer that my generosity always include some view toward the future, some investment in the particular individual being more equipped to satisfy needs from that point onward--not just a quick-fix but rather a life improvement.

Similarly, one of the best ways to express gratitude for the gift and assistance of someone's expression of generosity, is to succeed, in some way in accomplishing the vision, plan, or product in

which that person sincerely invested. Accepting a supportive gift, therefore, (at least for me) creates a greater sense of responsibility to never give up, to find a way, and to make the dream come true.

Imagine a stairway in which each step is an outstretched hand. I may make the hands a little dirty and may even hurt a little, if the bottoms of my shoes have any sharp edges. In each case, I trust that the person attached to the particular hand was extending the assistance simply because he or she wanted to do so. The sacrifice of time, energy, and sometimes even pain, will only make sense and seem right if I do in fact succeed in some way.

If I do succeed, the person of each step will hopefully never have to wonder whether the strength and ability he or she gave was worth the sacrifice. I think we all enjoy giving if we can honestly tell ourselves that what we gave, made the positive difference; that somehow our contribution made the difference between someone winning or someone losing.

When living by faith, however, we don't usually get to see the difference our individual and collective positive contributions make. God is also rarely inclined to satisfactorily explain the why of events, circumstances, and elements within the unfolding of our individual and collective lives.

So what do I do when I don't know what else to do? I go on being the man God made me to be. If I am falsely accused, I go on being the man God made me to be. If I am misunderstood, honored, incorrectly quoted, or commended, I must go on being the man God made me to be.

Whether I feel strong or weak, ignored or heard, full of faith or full of doubt, clearly guided or thoroughly confused, I must go on being the man God made me to be. Ultimately, the ongoing patterns of my life will describe me to the world around me better than any of my words ever could.

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

Handing Over

For the sake of discussion I will generalize, but I am fully aware that virtually no truly accurate example of a generalization has ever existed--which illustrates the point I'd like to make rather well.

In discussion, I focus upon an idea. In application, all of the generalizations and broad statements of the discussion must be adapted and re-interpreted according to the specific details and qualities of the real persons, events, and observable relational dynamics which are present.

In discussion, I take an idea into my mind, my words, and metaphorically into my hands. I mold it, shape it, and assign words and descriptions to it. Then I must let go and hand it over to the other person(s) involved in the discussion. After many repetitions of such remolding, reshaping, and rephrasing, we may even actually agree upon the understanding which has been thereby forged. Then we must hand over the results of our discussion to be reshaped yet again by those involved in the application of our collectively formed idea.

When first registering copyrights many years ago, the forms were quite specific regarding what could and could not receive a registered copyright. Among things which could not, were ideas. Among things which could, were the specific examples or expressions of ideas.

The superficial suggestion of any copyright is that someone owns the specific combination of words, colors, sounds, and so forth, to which the specific copyright refers. Ownership is a problematic concept, however, since expressing one's ownership too restrictively inevitably chokes all life out of the particular work and limits its ability to be shared. On the positive side, thanks to copyright laws, artists now have the ability to financially support themselves by regulated commercial distribution of their work. On the negative side, too little circulation of their work suggests that their perspective and expressions may die with them rather than outliving them.

I doubt there is any general agreement, but my personal opinion is that it is a far greater accomplishment to create something which outlives one's self. Within the creation of my first novel, Troll Steps, this was very much my intention. Within my perhaps more arrogant moments, I think I may have succeeded, but that is a judgment best left to current and future readers

of my work.

In creating such a manuscript, however, the point that presently comes to mind is that revision can be endless. I was once told that Walt Whitman spent forty years revising his only book, Leaves of Grass. Perhaps only the author knows when the time has come, but for every published work there is a time when what has been created must be handed over for (as one artist phrased it) "public consumption."

In spite of all public education, multi-lingual communication, and innumerable commentaries, the fact remains that many (if not most) artistic works are never fully understood or appreciated. The point at which they are published (in whatever form) is nevertheless when their forms become less malleable, less available to further revision. The artist, from that point onwards, must live with what she or he has done--knowing that as skills continue to improve, improvements which could have been made (but were not) will be discovered later.

The point is nevertheless that there is a point at which the work must be handed over to others, if it is to live beyond the small point in space and time of the particular artist's life.

It is a point of embracing vulnerability, of accepting that the work will always have certain limitations specifically because it was created by a limited human being, and of also trusting (if the work has been done well) that the work will speak to others in ways of which the artist could not have imagined. Every truly great work, as described by Madeleine L'Engel in her book, Walking on Water--Reflections on Faith and Art, involves the artist serving the work, painting more than the artist knows, writing more than the artist knows, and communicating more about the majesty, mystery, and divinity of life than any artist has ever known.

Ultimately, I do my best and find that I must hand over to God the best that I can do, inadequate though it may seem. I say the most loving and honest things I can to those around me and then must hand over to God the ultimate effects of my words and actions within the lives of others. I make myself just as available as I can to the unfolding of life around me (most of which is seriously disagreeable to me) and then must hand over to God what tomorrow will bring. Because it is God to whom I hand over all such things, the possibility of a new and bright tomorrow remains.

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

Hands Off

Humanity seems to have a rather chronic tendency to want to play God with circumstances, people, and living environments. We want events to turn out a certain way, people to behave a certain way, and things to exhibit only those qualities which somehow make our lives easier.

None of which relates very well to our lack of adequate wisdom or understanding nor to the fact that we generally do not have the degree of control we frequently imagine (or perhaps even pretend) that we have.

Attempting to put some sort of rational framework around all of the above, we make interpretations or employ metaphors, boldly making assertions about things we could not possibly know with any reliable certainty. We feel a need to understand and when we don't, we are inclined to grab any logical explanation--which may be unsupportable or even completely false.

"He's crazy." "She just doesn't understand." "They're too selfish to notice the effect they're having on others." Such statements certainly resolve and put closure on certain examples of confusion, but they are not necessarily helpful to healthy or constructive relationships.

All that being true and only when I am able to be attentive and disciplined in this area of my thinking, I strive for a "hands off" policy with regard to things I cannot verifiably know.

Do certain people talk to extra-terrestrials?

*"Neither deny
nor serve
life's problems;
to dispel
the darkness,
shine with a light
that originates
elsewhere."*

--Sister Who

Can psychics really sense things they haven't been told? Is a man whom I've always understood to be straight, truly engaged in self-discovery rather than self-deception when he announces to the world that he is gay or perhaps even a transgenderal woman in need of sexual reassignment surgery? In all such cases, I do not have the perspective I need, to answer either yes or no and thus must either trust the person's report or base my conclusions upon other information.

In pursuit of a loving, open-minded, and yet responsibly inquisitive attitude, I suggest the following three principles for any intelligent, thinking mind, which is willing to engage such investigations.

1. Everything is possible within certain specific circumstances. If the circumstances are there, it might happen (and vice versa)--which leads to the suggestion of asking "what would it take?" instead of insisting "that's impossible."

2. A great many spiritual and immaterial realities may exist beyond the reach of our current senses. On one hand, their existence, actions, nature, etc. are therefore virtually impossible to confirm. On the other hand, perception of them in any way necessitates a response from us of some kind. Having truly perceived and wanting to understand, we can no longer remain indifferent or apathetic to the effects of new information.

3. Within any perceptual working out of life issues may be some degree of symbolic illustration and reconfiguration originating within the subconscious mind, which is nevertheless pursuing health, wholeness, and balance to the best of its ability. The path to any particular person's mental health may seem quite long and convoluted to others, but there is no reliable basis for judging one or another's path as being inherently either right or wrong or for viewing the details of that path as categorically either true or false. All that can really be said, is whether and for what reasons the outcomes and consequences are desirable or undesirable.

The interaction, combination, and ongoing recombination of these three things makes for extremely challenging perceptions, which is why it is quite understandable that many would choose to avoid such challenges rather than embrace them. For those willing to embrace them, however, life will never again be "normal" in the general, usual, or typical sense. Hopefully, because God is real, life will be better.

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

Giving a Hand-up

After years of deep reflection and in spite of all contrary circumstances and events, I am still convinced that there really is something that is truly God--even though I long ago concluded that it must be somehow different or more than what was described within any religious gathering I've ever attended.

From this basic if also sometimes vague belief, it is not too difficult to conclude some sort of involvement of God within the process of creation and therefore--in my sometimes not-so-humble human opinion--a certain responsibility on the part of the creator toward the creation. Just as I am responsible to some degree for the welfare of the dogs with whom I have chosen to share my home, I believe God has a certain responsibility to care for us as well.

This is perhaps a moot point, however, since the words and actions I express toward my dogs are expressions of love rather than of duty, especially since I have the option of either giving them away or terminating their lives at any point.

Similarly, I believe God is most described by the quality of love and just as it is inappropriate in most cases for my dogs to argue with me about the particulars of my care of them, God has a broader frame of reference and a much more advanced understanding of my needs than I will ever have.

My dogs do not understand, I suspect, why their food is rationed and limited, why they are not allowed to roam the streets without any restraint, or why it is important not to chew on every interesting thing in sight. They do not understand the severe health problems associated with obesity, but I remember holding my first dachshund (who was only minimally overweight) on the last day of his life, when a sudden severe, unanticipated, and irreversible spinal injury brought our time together to a close. My dogs do not understand that drivers of moving vehicles do not necessarily see them and even if they do, may not be able to stop their vehicles in time. The newest puppy in my house is unable to anticipate that chewing on the rubber dog door now, will diminish my home's ability to keep out cold winter winds during the months to come. He's never seen a winter yet and doesn't know what it is.

Yes, life is filled with problems, but the Divine has created us to be first-rate problem-solvers. Therefore, when we solve problems, we

are manifesting God's will. When we listen and act responsibly and lovingly toward people, creatures, and environmental resources, we demonstrate the best of divine qualities.

Yet this is not a matter of giving a hand-out, nor of keeping hands off because we have inadequate knowledge or wisdom to "do the job right," nor of handing over to governmental authorities our ability to think, to reason, and to be proactive. In that regard, I know of no time in the history of the so-called United States, when the citizenry actually agreed with its government, nor of any time when the government actually proved itself trustworthy in responding to citizens' needs.

Just as I train my dogs to respond to various commands in order to protect them from danger and harmonize our lives, life is a school in which the goal is not necessarily continuous enjoyment, but rather that we will become wiser, stronger, and more loving by what we experience.

At times, life is fun. At other times, it is not. In all times, life is and we benefit from honest interaction with whatever life is. My dogs are not the victims of my arbitrary demands; they are my family, learning by appropriate reward and punishment to be the best dogs they can be. If I care this much for my dogs, shall I make any less effort for the people whom I encounter each day?

Thousands of people of every racial, ethnic, and religious description within this country have been suffering with serious problems for years. The government has failed to rescue them. In many cases, the people around them have failed to rescue them. It would be easy to also suggest that God has failed to rescue them, but perhaps life is not about being rescued.

Perhaps life is really about living through whatever crosses our paths and not missing the opportunities to join hands, to move forward together, and to find within such positive relationship, a greater fulfillment and expression of the divine spark within each of us than we have yet managed. That, I think, makes God happy.

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

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