

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

While we often cope with challenges within life by reframing our interpretation of the particular challenge, there are many times when the better path is the embrace of what one might call "the truth which makes us free" (drawn from John 8:32).

For myself, one such truth was when I began to see and understand myself as being a gay man. For others the truth could be anything from discovering one's passion to recognizing some of the true nature, abilities, and limitations of an adversarial circumstance or person. Within this newsletter, I offer thoughts related to the latter.

Often we are so busy dealing with symptoms of a particular challenge that we fail to address the deeper causes from which those symptoms spring. Unless we wish to sink deeper into cycles of enslavement, however, it is imperative that we discover once again, the particular truth which will make us free.

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

The Law of Attraction

Within each season of popular psychology or religious practice, there seem to be trendy phrases or strategies which although genuinely helpful within some limited context, generally fade from popularity when humanity once again discovers that there is no panacea which will magically solve every problem we face. I believe the so-called "law of attraction" about which I hear so many individuals and organizations speaking of late, will someday soon be another item on that list.

Applied in a moderate and tempered fashion, integrated with other elements of belief, the dynamic of attraction helps to explain many things. Taken as a magic gumball machine that will give us whatever we want if we just insert the right coins, however, the dynamic of attraction is stretched beyond its breaking point, resulting in disappointment at the least and betrayal of trust at the most, both of which are adversarial to the maintenance of faith in ourselves and everything else as well.

For those more challenging circumstances, the best resource we have is still each other. Once again, the common element within all true blessing and ability to survive is love. If love is absent, existence may persist, but genuine life that is worth living, is gone.

This is that of which I try to remind myself during the most difficult of times--that like the first glow of the dawning of a new day that signals at which point along the horizon the sunrise will soon appear, love is the first indication of an impending sunrise within any of our relationships.

Where this metaphor (a sunrise) becomes a bit weak, however, yet in a way that is very good, is that we can contribute to the arrival of love. We can contribute, but we cannot demand, because that would only push love away. It is essential to understand that although we can invite love to be present within our relationships, the actual arrival of love requires a similar response from most (if not all) other participants.

All that being said, therefore, what makes the so-called law of attraction work, is love within each and every one of us. Within such a successful application of love, however, we may find that by living in love with each other we have attracted what was best, even though it is sometimes not that for which we asked. This is an example of the need for attraction to be infused with humility--the recognition of the truth that the world is a shared space and that the best solutions are those which bless every element and aspect of that shared space.

Within a recent conversation with a friend, he noted in reference to misfortune that while everyone always seems to think it will only happen to someone else, there are times when we turn out to be someone else's "someone else."

In regard to love and blessings, we can also be that "someone else," perhaps providing the blessing itself for another or perhaps being the opportunity for others to liberate themselves by engaging in relationships of love--if we once again embrace the truth which makes us free.

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

The Principle of Distraction

Whereas attraction might be considered to be a law--something that requires a particular state or action, threatens a particular punishment for non-compliance, and offers a particular promise as a reward for compliance, opportunities for distraction seems to be everywhere within our world with no such promise to keep.

At its best, distraction is a temporary coping mechanism breaking the paralysis that comes from fear of some impending misfortune. At its worst, however, we are reminded that distraction only breaks the paralysis without addressing the threatening circumstance, thereby returning us once again at distraction's completion, to a face-to-face confrontation with the particular circumstance.

If we use distraction to catch our breath, renew our spirits, and psychologically and emotionally prepare for whatever struggle will follow, the effect is healthy and positive. If we look to distraction to be a liberator, resolution, or (God forbid) a savior, we set ourselves up for disaster.

For myself, a distraction which I sometimes employ is the viewing of certain movies which will give me opportunity to vicariously live out and triumph over particular struggles of the characters within the movie, which may also have certain commonalities with my own struggles. At such a movie's conclusion, I often find myself with a new resolve and clarity about what I must do next.

The challenge inherent within any distraction, of course, is that its effect may not be so positive. There are times, for example, when I hoped a particular movie would provide inspiration and clarity, but found no such qualities within myself at the movie's conclusion. This is usually not the fault of the particular movie, however, because each viewing of any movie is always colored by the variables and circumstances within my life, which shape my momentary perception.

Ultimately, that is the most basic core element of distraction: momentary perception. If I manage my momentary perception well, I find myself to be empowered. If I manage my momentary perception poorly, I find myself to be weakened. No one else can say, however, what will be either empowering or weakening to me within any particular moment, because the determination of that depends upon familiarity with memories, thoughts, and feelings which none but God could know unless I tell them.

In some instances, distraction from sadness

is weakening to me because the task which must be embraced is one of mourning a loss and finding a way to let go and move onward with my life. This, especially, is much easier said than done and within such moments the ministry of love's patience is frequently the most essential element.

At other times, distraction is exactly what will jerk us out of the mud of stagnation and get us moving again. An example of this is the wonderful scene within the movie, "Steel Magnolias," immediately following Shelby's funeral, in which Clairee advises M'Lynn (while referring to Ouiser Boudreaux), "Hit this! Go ahead M'Lynn, slap her!" The laughter which followed (in that particular instance, at least) was very healing for everyone present--except of course for Ouiser, to whom Clairee later returned for a more individual healing.

Is there a right or wrong time to employ distraction? I consider that to be a very individual decision, but the criteria I most often use is simply the question of whether it will bring me closer to effective and constructive coping and resolution or whether it will--in all honesty--have the opposite effect. If I allow for the latter, I become my own enemy, making things even more difficult for myself within the bigger picture of my life circumstances, than the circumstances themselves already are.

Frequently in concert with the question of the previous paragraph, I also ask myself, "what kind of person will I show myself to be by doing this?" Is it possible that I will show myself to be a person capable of wise and cunning strategy, such as Clairee, or will I show myself to be running from the truth of my circumstances in ways that can only exacerbate impending disaster?

Disaster never has to happen. Neither distraction nor direct confrontation is the universal always-applicable answer. Loving discernment within each moment recognizes both the individuality of the moments and the community of moments within an overall lifespan. Only by acting as a community which recognizes the sacredness of each moment, can disaster be truly and enduringly prevented.

Similarly, within an era of overpopulation, the vast numbers of individuals can be a distraction from seeing any particular one as being sacred, but life cannot be the shining triumph it was intended to be, if we allow this to ever be true. This is both our challenge and our opportunity.

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

The Rule of Contraction

There is a popular response that "rules are made to be broken" which I interpret similarly to the insight that "there is an exception to every rule." It is, after all, one of the pervasive, consistent, and frustrating characteristics of life and the universe, that everything is a complex and extensively mixed quantity.

The bad person may, when one least expects it, do a good thing. The good person may morally fail us, just when everything we think we know about this person insists that such failure would be impossible. Many things which are a blessing within one context are a burden within another. The complex interdependence and ongoing development of the world in which we live often employs dynamics and components which are named, "necessary evils."

Within the so-called rule of contraction, what first comes to mind are the ways in which reaching, growing, and expanding are both essential to ongoing life and also quite unnatural.

A stretched rubber band left to itself, returns to its former smaller shape. A society undergoing a renaissance of some sort, continues to feel a pull toward familiar patterns and institutions, making the psychological, sociological, and spiritual evolution of humanity very slow indeed. Individuals often refer to themselves as being "creatures of habit" rather than creatures of innovation or (dare I say it so directly?) creativity.

Is creativity therefore the opposite of contraction? Not necessarily. As the servant of creativity, however, one of the things which contraction is attempting to communicate is the pull toward one's center, toward core principles longing to express themselves, and toward healthy and appropriate boundaries.

In referring to "pulling toward one's center," I am reminded of the manner in which I lace my hiking boots each time I don my ritual garb and appear to the world in service to the spiritual and

personal growth of others. Only those who look very closely will ever notice that the overlapping laces run consistently first toward the inside and second toward the outside, reminding me to tend to wisdom, love, and good character within myself before attempting to serve the world around me.

To do the diverse work which I perform within the ritual garb of Sister Who, however, the laces must not only be properly overlapped; they must also contract themselves around my feet in order to provide the necessary support, strength, and endurance to the work which follows.

Similarly, within my bodybuilding training, I learned that developing strength within the abdominal muscles by literally thousands of contractions, is what gives significant strength to the adjacent spine and mostly prevents a large number of problems with my lower back.

Contraction, therefore, at least ideally, is not about restricting but about concentrating strength toward greater accomplishment. When contraction occurs for any other reason, it quickly becomes adversarial to life. The phrase "minds are like parachutes: they function best when open" is therefore balanced by the advice to "not be so open-minded that your brain falls out."

If mental contraction is about concentrating strength toward greater accomplishment, new thoughts and perspectives will be welcomed as opportunities toward greater understanding and empowerment, rather than being rejected by exclusive self-containment that ultimately suffocates the soul. Within such opportunities, however, the advantage is often not what one initially expected it to be.

Being open-minded does not mean blindly accepting whatever one is told. Rather, it is the involvement of one's best mental faculties in dialogue and interaction with something unfamiliar, by which one becomes even stronger. Like a bodybuilder moving weights first one way and then another, a certain intention is brought to each moment along with an uncertainty about how the body will respond. Because bodies respond differently for a myriad of diverse reasons, methods and approaches must be adaptable also.

What remains constant is that without a specific intelligent contraction, no muscle growth will be experienced. Similarly, without intelligent self-restraint, humanity cannot attain the strength it was intended to embody.

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

**"If we do not allow room
for what we do not understand,
we will never become
more than we presently are."**

-- *Sister Who*

Common Sense Suggestion

I've quite lost count of the number of times someone has responded to my declaration that this or that strategy was a matter of common sense, with the statement, "Yes, but common sense is no longer common."

If this is true, then it falls to those in possession of common sense to teach it to others, because a world without common sense is most likely to also be a world of ever-decreasing ability to function in a healthy and wise manner.

Part of the reason that common sense is named as such, is that its answers are usually so obvious and unembellished that they may be almost literally right under our noses and still be overlooked.

When I look for common sense, therefore, I do my best to peel away whatever societal reinterpretation has been added, whatever paint has glossed over underlying form, and whatever artificial dynamics have been employed, to discover the inescapable core truth that is quietly asking to be loved and embraced.

When considering what a team of individuals can accomplish, for example, I must first take inventory of what abilities, aptitudes, interests, and experiences are available within the specific and unique individuals which the particular team includes. Until or unless I have this inventory at my disposal, I may tremble fearfully at the sight of some personal or societal threat for which God has prepared me by placing a person of particular giftedness within the scope of my team.

An example of this is the strategy of building "low tech." Instead of doing things in the most complex, expensive, and electronically advanced manner, the designers look to the natural world and its rhythms to find the least stressful and most harmonious means toward a desired end or goal. Without devaluing the details, which are like the streams watering millions of acres of farmland, awareness is brought to bear on the deep ocean currents, the effect of which is subtle but profound.

Yet life only suggests rather than demands, leaving us to make our choices in whatever way we wish, so that we may continue our growth and development, finding ever more empowering relationship among ourselves and between ourselves and all that lies in anticipation of our arrival, somewhere beyond our current horizons.

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

On a Personal Note

The days are growing colder and my house is also. Financial limitations have similarly limited my available choices and options. In order to stop the roof leaks, the chimney was removed and the roof sealed. This necessitated a conversion to electric heat. Because the roof leaks had damaged the ceiling to the point that collapse was immanent, both the old toxic insulation and the old ceiling material had to be removed. Because of both the new dependence upon electric heat and the need to repair the ceiling, new insulation needs to be installed--but that's as far as I've gotten, which is why there are some mornings when my fingers are so cold that typing on my computer keyboard is painful.

On a positive note, the removal of the ceiling revealed several (now repaired) structural problems which would have otherwise been unaddressed until a greater disaster occurred. I have received some significant help from friends, but much work still needs to be done.

Of perhaps greatest note during the past month was the debut of the portable chapel at the Labor Day Metaphysical Fair. Ministerially, the event was a marvelous success, with many reporting a powerful atmosphere of peace within the chapel's canvas walls. The assistance provided by two local friends to setting up and then removing the chapel was absolutely invaluable. Thank you, thank you, thank you.

With regard to new television shows, many are nearly finished and several exceptional guests are scheduled to be interviewed. Copies of episodes on DVD can be purchased through my website, www.sisterwho.com.

With regard to my ongoing doctoral studies, I have been encouraged by individuals interested in my topics, but it remains very difficult to be simultaneously breadwinner, handyman, doctoral student, and minister. Your prayers and support are very much appreciated.

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

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