

sister who's perspective

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Overview

There seems to be no argument that the current time is one of transition; that the present and the past are essentially the raw material from which a hopefully better future will ultimately be created. I offer this month's essays in the hope that even in these times of intense turmoil and struggle, the process of enduring and reshaping each day can still be viewed in a constructive and ultimately empowering way. -- S.W.

The Properties of Raw Material

Far too often humanity (collectively and individually) encounters opportunity for growth with agendas and expectations that are ultimately self-sabotaging, specifically because the qualities and abilities that must be present in order for those agendas and expectations to ever be satisfied are, in fact, conspicuously absent. As I learned from a high school art teacher, the first challenge of all creative activity is discovering capacities, properties, and dynamics of the unfamiliar material with which one is working. As much as current pop psychology wants to insist that "anything is possible," this is rarely true.

While infinite possibility may be all around us, it is not synonymous with the hypothesis that everything is realistically and truthfully possible--it is only the assertion that there are more possibilities than one could ever count. Decisions will still have to be made between those that will be pursued and further developed and those that will be avoided because the cost of successful manifestation is simply too high. Hopefully it also goes without saying that what's wrong for one person could be right for another.

The world humanity has collectively created, in general, neither encourages nor supports exploration of a new material or opportunity in a non-judgmental manner. A

wise explorer must therefore prepare for the work ahead of time, by developing skills of perception that are specifically unlike those generally practiced throughout human local and global communities. Phrased another way that is perhaps more direct, if we don't do what has never been done, we won't learn anything we don't already know.

The amazing thing is that the discoveries are already there--hidden within the new material to be explored. It is not *just* a lump of clay, a piece of wood, or a fragment of a melody within a particular musical key or scale. It is a seed with as much potential as an acorn that potentially holds a vast forest of future generations within its tiny shell.

Among the tragedies of life rightly (but not endlessly) to be mourned is that not all possibilities will be realized. Having applied an appropriate amount of reverence and respect within mourning those unrealized possibilities, it is imperative to apply to those which remain, our greatest joy, commitment, perseverance, and love--all of which fuel and empower the greater reality that is struggling to be born. Having made *that* collective investment, the next requirement is to listen.

We must not only move, but also be still; we must not only speak, but also hear; we must not only be readily and obviously available, but also see and grant opportunity to every living thing as we are able. As much as we may be others' teachers about the possibilities we bring to each moment of life in which we participate, we must always be equally students of all that our so-called students are able to teach us. Ultimately the signature quality of all raw material is that it is able to become something else.

Within those who have relinquished all ability to become, life waits patiently--but not endlessly--to be rediscovered. At some point, there will be no more time to wake up.

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

The Possibilities of Raw Material

An oft-debated philosophical tipping point is whether, how, or to what extent "the ends justify the means." As with most other debates, all extremes are bad and the best answers lie within the muddy, murky, and uncertain middle. "Always" and "never" are rarely, if ever, helpful within such contexts.

Actually justifying a difficulty or a time of suffering is a bit different than only tolerating a little discomfort, but it seems wisest to allow the one suffering to determine which it is. Within recognizing that each knows first and foremost his or her own pain and that no one else knows that particular pain as intimately and directly as the one feeling it, a general and inclusive invitation to be compassionate can be found. Dismissing another's pain as trivial or inconsequential serves only to create distance between one's self and one's potential allies, thus weakening any and all future collaboration.

"What does that mean to you" one might ask, "and what will be different if you achieve one outcome instead of the other?" While it may be possible to see potential good within every outcome, there are also solid reasons for desiring a specific result. Nonetheless, no particular result is an appropriate place to stop, but rather is merely a foundation for whatever follows within any individual life.

Whatever else life within time is, it is a sequence that ends only with the end of time itself. Additionally, one could say that everything within time is raw material, awaiting some sort of transformation into something beyond its current form and abilities. It is thus easy to say but difficult to understand that life's possibilities are now and always infinite.

An added layer that sometimes encumbers rather than empowers the creative and transformative process is the question of what the creator or instigator of the work believes to be possible. That which is not believed, is rarely, if ever, attempted; a posture of being open to discovery is not something that occurs by accident, but rather must be continuously cultivated. As much as the human spirit reaches toward upward

expansion, however, human societies and civilizations are typically oriented toward definitions and limitations that are familiar.

A corollary to this is how often those I've encountered have far more faith in negative possibilities than positive ones. In addition to extending at least equal opportunity to both, one must also recognize that within the realm of equality is that either one's own or another's contribution may make the difference in whatever outcome ultimately becomes real--if one perseveres as long as any ability to do so remains. Both taking the initiative and inviting the contributions of others are essential, within transforming raw material into sometimes even miraculous demonstrations of empowerment.

Yet far too much time is wasted arguing about whether or not what has happened was the way things were supposed to be. I may wish to approach each moment devoid of expectations, learning from whatever unfolds whatever I am able to learn, but that which is painful and confusing creates a disconnect between my life experience and wiser and more loving ways of being. To live fully is nonetheless a challenge of moving through time and having sufficient faith in one's self and in life itself to just keep going--especially when it makes no sense to do so.

One's own future may ultimately be the most important raw material available, but it is equally important to prepare and equip one's self to be both present and capable when that future finally arrives. Phrased more concisely, we have to get through the struggles of today in order to be available to the breakthroughs of tomorrow. At times, that which gets me through, is specifically the belief that the potential future is truly if also potentially real.

A final point to remember about raw material is that its inherent properties are not dependent upon one's own knowledge or belief--which is why they are called inherent properties. All that is required of one's self is full engagement and a willingness to learn whatever the particular material has to teach.

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

The Dynamics of Raw Material

In working with any raw material, what must be remembered are interdependent relationships. Without that, self-serving limitations dominate the work, infusing greed and selfishness that render the work small in its true proportions. One might argue that certain individuals have amassed vast fortunes, virtually unlimited political power, and an astonishing collection of experiences, but if they have not invested their lives in something greater than themselves, the world seems irrationally preoccupied with redistributing their fortunes and forgetting them altogether, before their dead bodies even have a chance to cool.

A principle quality and perhaps unstated request of any raw material, therefore, is not how it may be used to satisfy selfishness and greed, but rather how the particular material may be most effectively shared. Within the sustained application of this dynamic can be found the interconnection and sense of purpose that so many people crave. When one's attempts are instead to fill that mental and emotional hole in one's soul with a false sense of independence, the hunger that remains testifies to the hole's persistence.

Conversely, in "listening" to adversarial circumstances, the most amazing insights and understandings can often be acquired--often the very moment one has stopped trying to impose a perspective or favored resolution. What is often found within such struggles, is a good reason to form a positive relationship with the other. In some cases, however, this may composed of actions that

re-establish wise and healthy boundaries.

From a contrasting perspective, as one colleague advised, "what you resist, persists." Well, perhaps sometimes, but what about when resistance is what is most needed? In reading the book, "Star Wars," by George Lucas, so many years ago, what most stuck in my mind was a quote presented within the opening pages of the book, attributed to Princess Leia Organa (one of the fictional characters of the story): "They were in the wrong place at the wrong time; naturally, they became heroes."

The point of the previous statements, from a macrocosmic perspective, is that raw material is inseparable from relationship--reflecting the personalities and forces which either impose themselves upon the material or neglect it. Among those forces is the internal consciousness of the material itself, but to those who have not realized that there is a sense within which everything is alive, this may seem like an absurd comment. I long ago learned, however, that every creative work quickly takes on a life of its own which must be served and respected in order for the best possibilities to be realized--the alternative being a result that is sometimes tragically ill-formed.

What is implied if not implicitly stated within that previous paragraph, is that the material itself may not always have the confidence or self-awareness to know what its capacities are--rendering the artist a sort of teacher about new ways to be. Dynamics are not merely actions, but specifically actions which invite constructive change and growth--which may be superficially opposed while being inwardly embraced. Peter Pan claimed a desire to remain always as he was, but by engaging with Wendy and ultimately discovering love, discovered an absence of satisfaction with the patterns his life had previously adopted.

The essential dynamic was that he was willing to act as wisely and constructively as he was able. Resisting embrace of a raw material's dynamics, conversely, paralyzes and prevents what life has to offer.

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

*"What the poor need most,
is protection from
greed and selfishness,
facilitated by a community
committed to providing
legitimate and effective ways
for all needs to be fully met."*

-- Sister Who

Embracing Raw Material

What is perhaps most important, even while shaping and molding whatever raw material is available, is remembering to always be a student as well as a master of the work that is evolving into being. No matter how much knowledge one has of a particular activity or material, surprises will come and if one is not open and attentive, they will be overlooked--creating dynamics that are self-sabotaging at best. Control will always be an illusion, because too much exists that is simply beyond current human perception and comprehension.

The good news is that control is not required if one is able to fully respect any potential collaborator one meets. Within those hopefully rare events that a potential collaborator decides against being so, what may initially feel like a painful setback can instead be interpreted as guidance toward a different field in which to work, that may be capable of accomplishments beyond the reach of the one left behind. Among my favorite quotes attributed to the singer and songwriter Dolly Parton is her advice to "aim crazy high," because only time will tell what is possible in response to sustained effort.

In addressing the challenge of forming a cup on a potter's wheel while in college, I began with freshly washed hands and clothes. As I wet my fingers and began to firmly embrace the spinning lump on the wheel, however, fully engaging with the clay quickly spattered gray slime in many directions. By the time the cup finally emerged from the lump on the wheel, it was obvious that there would be a lot of cleanup to do, while the cup began its very long and very slow drying process, before being ultimately sent to the kiln for its first firing.

Life is not a neat and tidy creative context, but this is not the measure of life's value or possibilities. Within reasonable limits, one cares not how messy the process was, once the finished product can be celebrated and shared. The goal is to see the result and conclude, "it was worth it."

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

On a Personal Note

For those few people without Internet access who are receiving a printed copy of this newsletter by postal mail, I apologize for the poor quality of the printing. The toner levels of all three colors within my color laser printer are unfortunately almost zero and replacements cost about \$97 each, so printing in color is very problematic at the moment. As much as I'm glad to have completed the annual calendar project, this is also the reason I can't even print a decent copy for myself. Sigh.

On a very positive note, however, my dogs and I have successfully relocated to Longmont, Colorado, and resumed jogging within a nearby park approximately three times each week (which was far too dangerous to ever attempt at our former residence). In some ways the new place is slightly smaller, but a much greater volume of empowering resources are nearby, so we are all very happy to be here.

The set is pretty much all arranged, in preparation for new episodes of "Sister Who Presents..." to be recorded in 2018. Within another nearby park are some absolutely wonderful bronze statues which may prove helpful to photos for the 2019 calendar. As much as I am glad for whatever good was accomplished within the town of my previous residence, I am also inspired by possibilities and resources available here.

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