

sister who's perspective

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Overview

As humanity continues on its collision course with global community, it would be very easy for understandings to be confused, if we forget or begin to overlook important distinctions. It is, after all, only our own vigilance which protects us from repeating innumerable mistakes of humanity's past.

Within remaining aware, wise, and loving, however, the transitions of the present can lead to a better future than humanity's past would ever suggest is possible.

Distinguishing Cause from Blame

Like the time worn tale of "The Prince and the Pauper," there are so many things that on the surface can appear to be the same, but when one looks at the relationships that make the thing what it is, radical differences suddenly become apparent. One example of this is the human tendency, when faced with virtually anything that feels personally challenging, to question "why" the thing is or occurs as it does.

In wanting to know the cause or causes, however, what is essentially being invited is greater awareness of relationships. One wants to know at least some of the history—how and by what process or sequence of events, variables, and influences the thing came to exist or occur as it did or does. One wants to know about the variables or influences which contributed to the particular result. Finally, one wants the ability to alter the current result, specifically by knowing what raw materials or relational tools are or were involved.

In wanting to assign blame, however, no request for greater understanding is present. The intention, consciously or unconsciously, is much more to express objection or protest that one's (perhaps hidden) expectations were disappointed. Radically simplified, blaming is little more than an emphatic declaration of "This is not how I wanted it to be!"

Within knowing a cause, can be found love, acceptance, and expansion. Within an action of blaming, one's focus, understanding, and empathy is constricted. Whereas understanding a cause may be empowering, engaging in blaming is always limiting. By sharing information and understanding about what causes things to be as they are, new opportunities for growth and development are brought out into the light. By pointing fingers and blaming, conversely, adversarial conflict and separation quickly become the only outcomes available.

Taken to a deeper level, I often find that I myself am among the greatest mysteries I will ever face. If I blame myself for things I sincerely wish I had never done, it is an attempt to shove the objectionable memory outside of myself. If instead I reach for understanding the complex configuration of influences and causes, my self-understanding increases and I am empowered to do better the next time any similar circumstances arise. I cannot reshape my contribution to such incidents, however, without first owning or accepting responsibility for whatever it was that I did in fact contribute. My own responsive choice is as much a part of the resulting memory or action as anyone else's. If I am unwilling to be held accountable, I thereby also make myself into an untrustworthy person.

Trustworthy people do make mistakes, occasionally need to be forgiven, and never have all of the possible answers to any particular relational question. Nonetheless, what helps to make them trustworthy people, is their willingness to keep trying and to remain involved in their own positive personal and spiritual growth and development.

At the heart of the distinction between cause and blame is the question of whether or not we are becoming more than we have been. In body, mind, and spirit, to live is to become.

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

Distinguishing Guilt from Shame

It seems that guilt has been around forever and has been used for manipulation, identification, legal and moral definition, and all sorts of dis-empowerment of individuals, communities, and demographic categories. Shame, conversely, seems to refer to what is superficial, to appearances, and to current social hierarchy. When shame is also used for manipulation, it is generally immediate and temporary rather than available for later reuse.

Metaphorically, guilt is like poisoned ground; shame is like adverse weather. Guilt is a mess to clean up; shame is a sudden burst of hail, wind, and rain while a summer picnic in the park is in process. A good umbrella may shield one from shame, but environmental clean-up is required to remove guilt.

What the two nevertheless have in common is that they are both morally based and can be true or false. An accusation is also not equivalent to a truthful description. A great number of marginalized people have been instructed to feel ashamed simply for being what they are, by administrators and dominant populations who in truth wish that marginalized people would conveniently cease to exist.

I recall seeing a plaque many years ago that instructed, "Children are God's opinion that the world should go on." Paraphrasing that for broader application, it seems to me that the fact that any and every person exists, is an expression of Godde's opinion that there are potentially very good reasons for them being here. Obviously there have been quite a number of cases in which Godde's hopes were disappointed. Still, we're each given a chance.

From that alternative perspective, true guilt is simply the reality of what each has done—which is to say, if you didn't do it, you're not guilty of it, no matter who may insist otherwise.

When accompanied by true guilt, shame takes on some of guilt's qualities and, like a magnifying glass that can be focused upon absolutely anything, makes certain challenges so undeniably obvious that they can longer be either ignored or even tolerated. In that sense, shame could be considered the means by which true guilt finds a voice. If shame is associated with false guilt, it is only a matter of

time until the absence of substance causes the entire charade to crumble in on itself. If true guilt is present, however, even if it is not one's own, environmental cleanup is everyone's job—specifically because the world within which we we all live is a shared environment.

Specifically because false guilt and erroneous shame are based upon lies, persons and relationships may be deeply wounded by them. The battle, therefore, is most accurately not against guilt and shame, but against falsehood and deception. Truth alone is therefore sufficient to combat guilt and shame and to invite the healing touch of love.

What is needed from us, is the discernment of substance, depth, emptiness, superficiality, and trivialness within examples of guilt and shame that cross our paths. What is at stake is quite accurately the health and strength of our communities and of ourselves—and consequently of all of our relationships too.

A curious additional dynamic common to both guilt and shame is that neither is concrete; they are both concerned with that part of ourselves which is specifically non-material, invisible, and spiritual. We cannot address any problems in these areas, nor can we concern ourselves with spiritual, emotional, social, or psychological health, without recognizing that we are in fact constituted and composed of more than merely what our five basic senses or any method of so-called hard science can measure. We are, in fact, multi-dimensional.

It is perhaps one of our inescapable frustrations that we are each guilty of all that we have personally done within the past and that included within this is every mistake we've ever made. I maintain, however, that a central aspect of being human is the ability to transform mistakes into the raw material of future triumphs. The ways we choose to deal with guilt and shame, therefore, can be either limiting or can lead to further expansion. We can either make ourselves smaller and less capable or we can grow larger and more empowered than anything we ever imagined.

Guilt and shame are therefore just the raw material, waiting to be shaped and reformed into something gloriously new.

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

Distinguishing Identity from Name

My own personal experience informs me that names can be assigned, chosen, and changed, but that identity rests more upon reports of my actions—regardless of whether or not those reports are accurate. A time-worn phrase exclaims, "Your actions are so loud, I can't hear what you're saying!" An added task, however, is determining whether the reports are not only inaccurate, but also biased—suggesting that more false reports may follow.

By whatever means, a name is a symbol for a person, place, or thing. An identity, on the other hand, is a combination of personal qualities, patterns of thought or behavior, and chosen or assigned social roles. One is a symbol of the complexities; the other is the complexities themselves.

To move toward greater self-awareness and more positive self-expression, one must take the necessary time to contemplate and ponder the complexities. Racing through life "on auto-pilot" may get you to the end more quickly and efficiently, but you will have less personal and spiritual growth to testify to the value of the journey. Pondering complexities will not necessarily provide more answers; what it will provide, however, is a deeper, more mature, and perhaps even sacred respect for the questions. It is, after all, the questions which fill the universe, while the answers are comparatively minuscule points of orientation; it is the questions which give us places to grow; the answers only provide places to stop.

Therefore, if someone were to ask my name, I could give them a specific answer which will effectively stop the conversation completely—until another question is asked. If

"If we put too much effort into proclaiming that 'we're not like them,' we will soon find there is insufficient time left to be like ourselves."

-- Sister Who

someone were to ask, conversely, the nature of my identity or, more concisely, who I am, the conversation would be potentially endless.

It is not that one is better than the other, but rather that name and identity are not the same thing and that each serves a different purpose. Bearing this in mind, I can be and become so very much more than merely the embodiment of others' ideas about me. It is, after all, within the nature of life to make of identity an ever-receding horizon, toward which we journey, marking our progress by discovery after discovery after discovery. A name is simply a necessary tool of conversation by which we can form relationships with everyone and everything we meet along the way.

From a different perspective, identity may be the role by which we are communally related and a name is the graphic, verbal, and auditory symbol by which we are able to not only interact but also converse with any and all communities we encounter. The conversations are significantly enriched, however, by having the most thorough and complete understanding we can, of the many dimensions and complexities encompassed by our identities.

It may even be that we ourselves are the treasures for which others have long been searching. If that is so, then the reason that treasures can often not be found within places which can be described by maps, is because the treasures are carried within persons, who are making their own respective journeys through life. What most would resist, I suspect, is the notion that we are each—unknowingly—carrying treasures within us.

Even I do not generally see myself in that way. I look into a mirror and see what appears to be an unimpressive and ordinary person, struggling to make sense of a most unusual life and making way too many mistakes along the way. Yet because I allow the possibility that Godde may have a radically different understanding of the purposes that I can serve, I continue to show up for whatever good work it is possible for me to do. I cannot, however, legitimately take credit for the results—but that doesn't prevent the results from continuing to happen.

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

Distinguishing Greatness from Fame

A principle difficulty of distinguishing greatness from fame, is that it is always communally rather than individually assigned. If one is unable to see one's self from the perspective of any surrounding community, no determination can be made. In this sense especially, Narcissus was completely blind.

That being acknowledged, there is a certain (but not fatal) hunger when one has worked very hard to serve wisdom, love, and life within human experience, to know whether or not one has been at all successful. It is in being successful within such service, that true greatness lies, but knowing that greatness has been achieved is of course not essential at all.

Virtually all of the names I was required to learn within various history classes in times past, were of people preoccupied in one way or another, with furthering wisdom and love. As noted by Jesus within biblical text, to be the greatest, one must be the servant of all.

Inescapably central to this discussion is the recognition that bridges must be built between one's self and others. No one can force his or her own remembrance. Even the erection of a monument guarantees nothing, since monuments without meaning to later generations are routinely ignored and in some cases even removed. If love and wisdom have been effectively served, however, no monument is needed; the memory is carried forward within the hearts and minds of an exponentially increasing number of people.

Saint Francis of Assisi identified himself as the poorest of the poor, yet his name is virtually everywhere—on hospitals, schools, and charitable entities of every kind. His greatness is not within his popularity, however, but rather within the ways that even eight hundred years later he continues to inspire love and wisdom.

It is not difficult to be famous for a moment. To be truly great, however, is to be the servant of love and wisdom so completely that no thought is given to whether or not anyone is even noticing. Rest assured that if you do succeed, however, it will be impossible for the world to ever forget you.

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

On a Personal Note

Ministering within the portable chapel at the March metaphysical fair was marvelous, providing solace and encouragement to people of every age, orientation, gender, and description, in relation to whatever their respective spiritual paths needed.

Behind the scenes, a good friend, Pamela, has agreed to take on challenges of marketing, promotion, and business management. I am so very thankful for the wise encouragement and support she brings to my creative and ministerial contributions.

The possibilities between now and the end of 2013 thus include: three opportunities for ministry within the portable chapel, tentative production of twenty-four more episodes of "Sister Who Presents," both recorded and live performance of three modern "morality plays" featuring Sister Who, skiing in ritual garb at Loveland Ski Area in central Colorado, "The Blessing of the Animals" at Cheesman Park (May 4), participation as volunteer staff in two charitable non-profit fund-raisers, and hopefully one or more mountain hikes.

I've also nearly finished the first section (of three) of my next doctoral paper, "The Definition of Morality within Cross-cultural and Inter-religious Contexts."

I remain concerned about financial adequacy, building improvements, and ongoing personal education about autism, but a number of very generous recent donations have given me great hope in those areas as well.

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

Subscription Information:

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