

SISTER WHO'S PERSPECTIVE

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Overview

As much as many people would prefer that truth be consistent, stable, and (in effect) stagnant, I continue to find that it is contextual, constantly changing, and (at least potentially) ultimately empowering. I do hope that the words I have composed for this month's newsletter will have that effect within your life's experiences and circumstances, as together we again take a deeper look at the miraculous and mysterious ongoing enigma we call "life."

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

True Commitment

If I am not committed to my beliefs, then in what sense are they truly my beliefs? If I do not believe them enough to do them, have I not thereby provided all the evidence necessary to convict myself of hypocrisy? The measure of any particular belief or action's integrity and truth could be described as equivalent to whatever bribe would effectively persuade me to refrain from acting it out. One might persist, for example, in saying that one believes in eating only the healthiest of fruits and vegetables--until one is offered chocolate loaded with fats, sugars, and preservatives.

(Apparently the list of what actually goes into food, at least within the United States, is truthfully quite shocking--but the point of this essay is not nutrition but rather genuine integrity within demonstration of commitment.)

If we say that every person matters, but fail to provide (either individually or collectively) legitimate ways for every person to satisfy basic functional needs and we stand aside while individuals are forced into homeless, starvation, and worse, we are the ones who have made liars of ourselves. It is not Godde or others who have judged us, but rather we who have judged ourselves--using our own actions. If we have more than we need while

others must do without, the existence of injustice is confirmed. To confirm any sort of fundamental goodness within ourselves, we must be seriously engaged in responding to such circumstances whenever they occur.

On the other side of such a conclusion, however, is the realization that reducing ourselves to the "lowest common denominator" in regard to standards of living, in and of itself, does nothing to sustainably provide for those in need. Each of their individual situations would have to be carefully and accurately considered, in order to discern what--specifically--would bring sustainability to them. If we don't know what would truly meet the need, we probably haven't spent enough time conversing honestly with them about their particular life situations.

Here again is a dilemma: if I engage in self-censorship and refuse to disclose my needs to others, I embrace dishonesty, manipulation of truth, and self-devaluation. If, conversely, I speak openly of the challenges I am facing, my experience is that people (even trusted friends) begin to avoid me, essentially agreeing with the societal mandate that unpleasant or undesirable truth needs to be hidden--regardless of whether any alternative means of supporting one's self is available.

Somewhere near the center of this discussion is also the question of how much we are willing to change in response to the challenges faced by those whom we love. Any true demonstration of love includes acceptance of things that are not and never will be particularly convenient. If love is truly present, however, there is no wondering about whether the particular accommodation is worth it.

What matters most--literally more than anything--is not convenience and comfort, but rather nurturing the focus of love. To do any less is to accept that at some point (probably sooner rather than later) the focus of one's love will no longer be present and available.

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

True Respect

I think sometimes the reason people with disabilities exist, is to make subtle challenges more obvious. One example of this is the distinction between being patronizing and being genuinely respectful. Another way of phrasing this is the distinction between treating people as objects and treating people as genuinely multi-dimensional individuals.

Superficially, being patronizing can look like a compliment, suggesting that the one being described is somehow superior or more heroic than most--which also suggests a competition for value; that some are more worthy, honorable, deserving, (or whatever) while others are less so. In a most peculiar way, such perceptions and statements are a sort of societal permission to treat some persons better and others worse.

The only decent standard is the aspiration to treat every person encountered, in the best possible way that one is able--not because of who he or she is but because of whom I know myself to be.

Can one truly respect someone else if one does not truly respect one's self? That's a very difficult question to answer, specifically because of the numerous times when I act with the best intentions but later discover that my motives were (at best) subconsciously mixed.

The other half of respect is complicated by the fact that virtually all relationships and interactions must unfold within a context of extensive ignorance. If I do not know others' stories, experiences, perceptions, memories, and feelings, I cannot truthfully and legitimately claim to accurately and fully understand anything they say or do--leading to the conclusion that human interactions and the resulting collective social reality is little more than an accumulation of best guesses.

It would seem that humility is therefore inseparable from honest and recommendable relationship with all that surrounds us, but this is not particularly evident within most individual and communal human experience.

So why persist? Specifically because the alternative would leave no adequate reason for living; no way to remember the struggles and conclude that the outcomes and

accomplishments somehow justified the great investments of time and energy required. More concisely, I choose to respect others so that life will be worth living.

Going one step further within this discussion, I choose to respect prayer and the diverse ways that people communicate with their perceptions of the Divine, specifically because of the hope and faith that are nurtured thereby--which is also to say that I have little respect for prayers which are superficially performed without any mental or emotional commitment. Praying (by which I mean anything constituting communication between humanity and the Divine, even meditation and spell-casting) is ultimately not a matter of how Godde responds, but rather of how we are changed (hopefully nurtured) by our engagement in the corresponding actions.

If I am not exactly the same person afterward, then I have essentially respected myself enough to engage in activity that is hopefully effective in producing personal and/or spiritual growth. Respecting even the most contrasting spiritual and religious choices of others, could thus be similarly interpreted as supporting their personal and spiritual growth.

Applying this same dynamic to spiritual relationships, I give myself permission to argue with the Divine, in much the same way that I would with any other person, but to also allow that there is much about the other's history, decision-making, experience, and values that I do not fully understand within that present moment. It is reasonable to think, therefore, that as my general understanding grows (which may take significant amounts of time), my understanding and acceptance of peculiar series of events will increase also.

By respecting that my perception and understanding are always increasing, I empower myself to respect and ultimately to accept the occurrence of all sorts of things which may initially seem painfully adversarial.

The pain is real and needs to be respected, but the possible and actual healing which can follow are real also. Where there is one, you can be sure that the other is nearby--waiting to be discovered.

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

True Humanity

It is very peculiar that what is common is so often considered to be normative. An equally respectable thought, using the metaphor of life being a school classroom, is that what is common is the raw material essential to the next lesson. Upon entering a room within which an art class will occur, for example, one might see that the instructor has placed upon every desk a block of oil-based clay (which does not dry out and can be infinitely reshaped). The fact that there is such a lump of clay on every desk makes the clay common, but does not confirm that it is to remain in its current form.

Among the most important thing I learned within my high school art classes is that the first task is to discover the properties and possibilities of the particular material--how much pressure is needed to reshape it, what are its density and consistency, what effects are possible using various tools, and to what environmental qualities it responds (i.e. heat, humidity, air flow, light, etc.).

In considering the creative medium of humanity, it is important to distinguish between present form and future potential--which many consider to be virtually infinite. Within Native American perspectives, animals are often associated with specific human qualities that their own behavior does seem to mimic--which lead me to wonder whether in some sense humanity is the integration and result of combining all of the animal forms.

While the animals do seem to more literally embody innumerable impulses discovered by many within human minds and hearts, too literal of an interpretation could

*"Cynicism is easy and,
like sand, flows
into every crack it finds.
Only faith is hard enough
to provide a solid foundation
in life's most difficult moments."*

-- Sister Who

have us aspiring to be more predatory, less careful with resources, or superficially apathetic to the fortunes and misfortunes of others.

If we are in fact the integration of all else, I suggest instead that "from the one to whom much has been given, much will be expected." That is, if we have infinite potential, we disgrace that which made us if we do not strive toward the greatest excellence and accomplishment possible.

The corollary to this, however, is the extent to which virtually all of humanity wrestles with varying degrees of the fear of failure, sometimes equating to terrifying extremes while at other times dismissing its implications far too lightly. What is especially problematic is that, in various ways, both extremes are true.

My conclusion, therefore, is that our true humanity is to be found within the struggle itself; within the searching out of the qualities and dimensions of each point across the spectrum of human experience--including that part which deals with realities beyond the reach of our five physical senses, much as our understandings of sound now include the super-human extremes that dogs can hear.

I have observed that many who describe themselves as spiritually or financially successful, demonstrate great deficiency of compassion when confronted with the reality of painful experience and inadequacy within the lives of others, often erroneously blaming the victim for things beyond their control. Some even insist that they must not prevent the other from learning whatever the particular painful experience could teach. Considering the further implications of each, love is always more important than lessons (which can be learned in an infinite number of ways).

It is not that non-human animals do not love--in some ways they do a far better job than humans do--but rather that love is the bridge that can carry us beyond ourselves and thus the singular quality by which true humanity is ultimately a matter of embodying true infinity, guided by the inescapable fact that what is good empowers and what is not may prevent the best from ever happening. In the simplest sense, one leads to life and the other to death.

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

True Spirit

Within athletic team competitions of my latter elementary and middle school years, those watching from the bleachers on each side of the playing field would sometimes begin chanting various phrases, allegedly to inspire their respective teams to play more effectively, one of which was the combination, "We got spirit, yes, we do; we got spirit, how 'bout you?"

What is abundantly clear now, is that those screaming these words so loudly, did not truly understand what they were saying. That is, not one of them could have told precisely what was meant by the word "spirit" within that peculiar (and grammatically incorrect) phrase.

I often find myself wondering how often people actually do understand--fully and completely--the words they are speaking. The fact that they are speaking, inescapably confirms the existence of spirit. Choosing words badly, however, also suggests a spirit of deficient maturity, education, or intelligence.

To speak of true spirit is, from at least one perspective, to speak of a spirit that has learned, to at least some degree, to appreciate and embrace truth rather than its inherently insecure imposter: dogmatism.

Granting that truth is contextual and that all one needs to do to change truth is to change the context, there is nonetheless a mysterious interconnection with transcendence that begins to leave its subtle fingerprints all over one's life, the moment one begins to appreciate and embrace genuine truth.

A particularly frustrating aspect of true spirit, however, is that while one of its effects may be self-control, true control of anything else is an illusion. What remains even within illusion, however, is the inner commitment to persist. Why? As stated within the final "Matrix" movie, "Because I choose to."

The adversary in the movie could never choose but rather only calculate. The adversary within the human heart and mind has the same limitation. In holding on to the ability to choose, one can hold on to love and to the spirit that is uniquely one's own, which transcends all limitations of physical form.

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

On a Personal Note

In yet another bewildering reversal, a complex combination of circumstances has allowed for the purchase of a home in Berlin, New Hampshire, and I will thus be moving myself and my canine family from Colorado to that address, departing April 28. Between now and then, life remains a peculiar survival experience. An additional anticipation associated with this move, however, is that since the new address is less than four hours' drive from the attempted residence in New York, I will hopefully be able to reclaim a number of resources that had to be left behind when I fled that place at the beginning of March. Hopefully that house will sell soon after, allowing for the reconstruction of an empowering home life for me and the boys (that is, after we endure yet another long journey in a large moving truck).

A week-long trip to Berlin, New Hampshire, earlier this month, was most encouraging. While there, I met a number of new friends, discovered empowering resources and opportunities, and was happy to help out wherever I could also. In each case, I made a point of including a brief introduction to my unique ministerial work and was gratified that the responses were always positive.

In the meantime, life is a peculiar and adversarial survival experience, but it is now only for a limited number of days--which means I can see "the light at the end of the tunnel" and it does not appear to be an oncoming train.

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

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Sister Who a/k/a Rev. Denver NeVaar, MTS

97 Granite Street, Berlin, NH 03570

email: dn@SisterWho.com

Internet website: <http://www.SisterWho.com>

Additional Informational Internet Websites:

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