

sister who's perspective

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Overview

Beginnings are virtually inseparable from struggle, specifically because of how little is known and how much must be discovered within such times. If we run from such struggles, we will never become masters of the new material. We are all inescapably learners rather than experts in relation to the mysterious and multi-dimensional phenomenon of life.

What is vital when such opportunities arise, is finding one's own true way to begin.

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

Beginning with Integrity

It's been said innumerable times that "wherever you go, there you are," but I find that this is only partially true, specifically because I sometimes unintentionally leave emotional and psychological parts of myself behind—that is, preoccupied with previous times and places. I have also lately been encouraged, however, to "remember who you are" and know that this too must make its own positive contribution to my ongoing life experience, if I am to have any hope of moving toward the best that I can be.

In remembering who I am and living in accordance with my own integrity, however, I find that I must also be careful to avoid defining myself by the rejections and exclusions that manage to find their way into my overall life experience, specifically because of the ways these tell me much more about those who express them than about what is true of myself.

While I do extract a certain amount of guidance from such rejections and exclusions, it is up to me (sometimes with the assistance of trusted friends and mentors) to discover corresponding positive possibilities. In a great many cases, the possibilities which are discovered spring from my own inherent integrity, as if to say that they were there all along, just waiting to be discovered.

It may very well be that the reason a lifetime takes as long as it does to manifest, is that there is in fact so much invisible material to discover—both within and beyond ourselves. If I live exclusively according to the dictates and preferences of others, however, much of that invisible material will remain forever invisible.

Sometimes I am provided with new opportunities so wonderful that I forget to pause and consider whether or not this new direction and area of activity is truly mine or whether it would instead lead me in a direction that would abandon integrity in favor of some other probably more superficial and temporary recognition and/or accomplishment. Living with integrity is more specific than simply doing all of the good that one can do, because I will always have too many opportunities to pursue them all. In some cases, it's not even a question of whether I'm the best one for the particular job. I can often think of people who can do what I'm doing much better than I can, but there are innumerable times when I must respect that the opportunity was given to me rather than them, perhaps because it is essential to my development in ways of which I am unaware at the time.

At the heart of integrity is truth, but a deep inner truth, awareness of which current human society often discourages. Distracted by what is available to the senses, the much more valuable and generally invisible qualities that have the ability to answer questions of "why" (but usually not very quickly), become a mostly undiscovered treasure which would otherwise empower humanity to resolve every challenge it ever faces. All too often we trade what truly matters for what is more visible and immediate.

Beginning with integrity is about bringing wholeness back to experiences of life and reintegrating what is seen with what is deeply and persistently true, if also too often forgotten.

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

Beginning with Empathy

It is difficult to separate empathy from interconnection, to separate interconnection from interdependence, and to separate interdependence from survival. A primary corollary to each of these separations is narcissism, yet those who seek truth, wanting to know what makes any person or thing what it is, are especially aware of how inescapably each point of individuality exists within a context of relationships.

In its most basic definition, empathy can be described as awareness of this inescapable interdependence and interconnection, which renders concern for another's welfare a distinctly human quality. In feeling with and for another, we affirm our relationship with that other and hopefully respond by doing whatever we can to ensure the survival and perhaps even the happiness of that other—and indirectly thereby also our own survival and happiness.

When we refuse to feel with and for another, blindly insisting that it's "not my problem" instead of paying careful attention to the ways in which our own life experience is affected by the others, we essentially deny our own humanity and act in ways that can legitimately be described as inhumane.

Stepping in to "fix" things for others, however, denies both the humanity of the other and involvement in the processes by which his or her humanity is nurtured. In the words of a phrase I created many years ago, "whoever wants the muscles, has to lift the weights." A well-trained physical therapist knows that doing the work for a wounded person on a path of healing is inescapably counter-productive. The process of healing is in some respects always "an inside job;" that is, one which must begin from within the person, but one that is ideally supported by others as well as environmental circumstances. Without empathy, however, even the most well-trained physical therapist is not fully present within a collaboration intended to accomplish healing.

Furthermore, a complete experience of healing within such moments, must also embrace less-obvious qualities that frequently coincide with the work such as doubt, despair, discouragement, self-love, perseverance,

hope, faith, and community. All of these are potential partners and collaborators within processes of healing, which are impossible without an initial experience of empathy.

So how does contemplation of doubt and despair nurture one's path to healing? By noting (among other things) the limitations, questions, and interpretations that one's particular experience of such emotions includes. As much as one can doubt the ability to succeed, one can also doubt the ability to fail. As much as one can feel the despair of the moment within which the loss occurred, one can also become aware of how small and temporary that moment was and that it clearly did not have the ability to prevent other things from following. As discouraging as the present painful experience may be, one can become aware of how unable discouragement is to encompass or to negate all of the other realities that populate our universe. Within this greater wholeness, renewed personal wholeness can be found or, if necessary, reconstructed. As phrased by text on the cover of a church bulletin I read while still a youth, "There is not enough darkness in the entire universe to put out the light of a single candle."

If one does not in some sense feel the experience of a candle, the action of lighting its wick can seem trivial at best. Yet in applying this metaphor to our own lives, virtually everyone has experienced having his or her wick occasionally relit by others. To cite yet another phrase from a past newsletter, "Life is a collaborative effort: we all take turns being the one in need." For the one who once again has the ability to shine a light into a darkened world, this can hardly be described as "trivial."

The difficult part of empathy is that it sometimes hurts and it is easy to forget within moments of pain what the broader spectrum is and perhaps even to be thankful the ways that pain keeps us awake to all that life includes. I cannot express blessing with confidence and clarity, however, if I have never known anything else. Constant sunshine with no rain, produces only debilitating droughts. As the rain waters the earth, so too can our tears water dry and thirsty souls.

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

Beginning with Possibility

Too many choices can be just as much of a problem as too few, if we have not done the homework of devising ways to inventory, evaluate, or "deconstruct" (a more academic term) and thereby identify the constitutive pieces and dynamics of any specific challenge.

Equally problematic is the possibility of slipping into "the paralysis of analysis," which refers to using a preoccupation with evaluation as a means to procrastinate actually engaging with the particular problem. If one has not yet identified all of the constitutive pieces and dynamics of a particular problem, however, one has not yet crossed from the essential into the excessive and patience may yet be more important than productivity. Phrased another way, if I do not respect the complexity of a challenge, I will be unprepared for whatever hidden dynamics it nonetheless includes.

Once a particular challenge or context has been identified, possibilities are actually no longer infinite in number--specifically because of the inherent limitations identified by the definition which the challenge or context embodies. Rearranging furniture within a room, for example, is limited by the physical dimensions of the room, the locations and number of doors and windows, and the availability of electrical and/or plumbing resources relevant to the primary activity of the room. Definitions--by their very nature--limit possibilities in ways that can make particular challenges more manageable. Becoming conscious of the specific definition of a challenge can discourage being overwhelmed.

Specifically because possibilities are no longer infinite in number, systematic evaluation of each possibility is an available method. At that point, I could clearly consider the choices available to me. Hopefully it does not need to

"Too much pain makes things seem out of reach, if one thereby loses the drive to reach persistently."

-- Sister Who

be said that embracing possibilities includes--inescapably--making choices. If choice is not allowed, all discussion of possibilities is rendered meaningless. If choice is allowed, then beginnings are the best place to make them, so that one can avoid having to redo significant parts of the work at a later time.

If definitions do not include specific possibilities, however, the definitions one either discovers or assigns, can form a suffocating psychological and/or emotional prison. I recall reading many years ago that "within everything there is a spirit to be free" and have found this to be true more often than not. Beginning with awareness of possibilities could thus be interpreted as demonstrating respect for the spirit of life inherent within each and every thing one encounters.

As a sometimes mysterious yet inclusive phenomenon, life is always greater than ourselves, even when this escapes our awareness. By embracing such awareness, we add to what we are able to do and to ultimately become and we make ourselves collaborators in the creation of specific history, one moment at a time. While particular circumstances may be victimizing, hidden within every such painful moment are also possibilities of transforming pain into personal power. What then remains, is whether we will utilize such power with commendable wisdom.

Without a beginning, however, no such journey of personal growth will ever happen. If that which is deemed to be too unpleasant is censored and repressed, it can never become anything more than it was perceived to be. A certain self-sabotaging arrogance is inherent in the assumption that whatever a particular challenge was perceived to be is in fact all that it is. In truth, there is always more to discover.

This too expresses faith in the existence of possibilities: the belief that there is more to discover within each person and thing we ever encounter. Greeting one another as packages of complex possibilities also lays a foundation and a basis for unconditional love and being inclusive. To do otherwise would be to neglect valuable resources. Ultimately each of us is the reason that good things can still happen

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Beginning with Vulnerability

Within every beginning are degrees and kinds of risk, but the essential point is that a beginning actually finds a way to happen. I have often found that the greatest beginnings occur within contexts of greatest risk, but this is not so much a recommendation to expose one's self to greater risk as it is a plea to give life a chance to do its magic, even if a most uncomfortable degree of vulnerability cannot be avoided. Human bodies and spirits are inherently designed to adapt and heal in response to ever-changing circumstances and adversity. A signature quality of humanity is that we are problem-solvers, but in many cases the possible solutions we could invent, do not become apparent until the particular challenge is absolutely real and unavoidable.

Consequently, at the heart of true faith is an ongoing belief in one's ability to effectively rise to meet any particular challenge, whenever and however it is revealed. In a sense, it is a matter of believing in the positive possibilities of one's own inherent mystery. I do not know all of the things I could do--and never will--specifically because they are infinite in number and do not reveal themselves until such time and place as they are actually needed. In order to learn these in their appropriate times, however, I must be willing to try what has never been tried, whenever opportunities arise.

This is not, however, a recommendation to abandon all that has been learned in times past. Rather, it is an application of all that has been learned in the past to new challenges never before encountered. It is not truly a "generation gap," but rather an opportunity for multi-generational integration, resulting in mutual empowerment.

If we refuse to be vulnerable, enormous quantities of helpful information will slip by unperceived--like wearing such thick protective gloves that we have no perception of texture, temperature, or torque when attempting to open a particular door. We cannot respond to unique qualities of which we are unaware, yet the vulnerability of awareness is often filled with empowering information.

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On a Personal Note

Summer is flying by and work on the new house is not proceeding as quickly or effectively as is widely recommended, but this is by no means due to any laziness or lack of initiative. If anything, it involves wrestling daily with the question of how much can one person do and not being discouraged at the end of the day by how much did not get done.

A few feeble but mostly successful attempts have been made to re-establish a daily habit of going jogging with my dogs. This will again have to wait a few days, however, because I chose to do an inadvisable (due to adversarial weather) hike with two others yesterday to the summit of Mount Moriah. The rain-slicked rocks were quite treacherous and a couple bad falls have left me hobbling around today with my knee bandaged and a nasty forearm scrape. A most important rule when hiking is to respect Mother Nature completely.

Construction of the set for new episodes of "Sister Who Presents" is nearly complete, ideas are beginning to percolate for the 2016 calendar, and it is probable that at least four public appearances will occur between now and the end of the year (not including calendar photo shoots). A particular local theater venue rejected my inquiries about using their spaces, however, due to ties with an apparently more traditional example of the Roman Catholic Church. I hadn't previously thought of being ecumenical as a problem, but apparently there are still areas where this is the case.

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