

sister who's perspective

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Overview

This month's essays were difficult for me to write and went through a number of versions, titles, and revisions before arriving at the form presented here. My hope and prayer is that my efforts have accomplished a certain effectiveness in bringing inspiration, insight, and ultimately empowerment to the lives of readers everywhere.

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

Contrasting Connectivity

Jigsaw puzzle pieces are often used to symbolize autism and I continue to be impressed by how extensively—literally and figuratively—these have brought meaning and constructive interpretation throughout my life. I find it helpful also that whenever and wherever I have encountered such symbols, it is always an interior rather than an edge piece that is used. One of the things that I draw from this, is the reality of infinite possibility; that I can grow, expand, and interconnect with others in absolutely any direction. The primary question is whether or to what extent others are willing to connect with me.

Within viewing humanity as a jigsaw puzzle of virtually infinite size, a very common dynamic is the tendency to objectify others; that is, to see them as objects with a limited number of qualities and characteristics, designed to serve particular but generally limited purposes—rather than as the living, growing, evolving, multi-dimensional body and spirit each person truly is. One could even say that a development of multi-dimensional perception is one of the primary activities of developing true maturity. Going one step further, when I learn to see both body and spirit in ways that compromise neither, I am much closer to the perception of wholeness (perhaps even holiness) within myself.

While on one hand I wish to allow everyone his or her own honest perceptions of myself, I confess that it is disappointing when I am considered little more than entertainment or merely interesting. In truth, I aspire to be a collaborator in bringing out the best within each person whom I ever meet.

All that being said, it has been intriguing during recent weeks to contemplate parallels between the popular comic book mythology of Superman/Clark Kent and myself in and out of ritual garb. In a very real sense both modes of manifestation are me and could legitimately be considered the constitutive aspects of a truly two-spirited person (as identified within Native American tribal cultural perspectives).

Allowing that metaphor for a moment, I am often puzzled of late at how difficult certain challenges seem to be, which did not seem to be so within earlier periods of my life. Within ritual garb for example, adversarial expressions of autism seem to completely disappear. I tend to experience clarity of thought, focus, and speech that might inspire others to wonder whether it is the same person at all. "What is wrong with me?" I sometimes lament, during moments of intense struggle within which the ritual garb is absent. Supportive friends who were present at such times, however, quickly responded, "Nothing. You're just wrestling with a particular challenge which you will very soon overcome." In virtually every case, a short passage of time proved them right.

It's as if everyone else understands the importance of being who and what I am, even more than I do—so much so that they are very concerned that no struggle (regardless of intensity) ever persuades me to quit. In truth, I'm not sure I would know how to quit, but, regardless, I persist in joining one or more new pieces each day, creating an ever more complex picture of life—of which everyone and everything in the universe is equally a part.

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

Constructively Chaotic

As aware as I may be of how moments of chaos are equally moments of virtually infinite creative possibility, I often find that I am too busy trying to respond to utilize the breadth of peripheral vision that is quietly available. By looking at one particularly challenging aspect, I overlook many others within my reach. One could say that a principle challenge of this physical and material life, is expressing the vast dimensions of one's spirit through the smallness of particular moments.

Having accomplished that translation on whatever number of occasions, it likewise becomes difficult to retain awareness of every other aspect of spirit that remains available to future challenges. An additional aspect of our physical and material lives is that they unfold within the dimension of Time, which makes every individual moment even smaller yet. A primary consideration of Time raised by the convergence of so many individual lives, is that one never knows what will happen next, due to others' uncontrollable ability to contribute to my life experience. Did I give them permission to do "that"? Certainly not, but apparently my permission was not required.

Yet I must make sufficient sense of all these chaotic convergences to avoid writing off this entire life experience as insane (although some have obviously chosen to make that interpretation). It is therefore encouraging to note, in the face of this challenge, that perhaps the greatest single quality of humanity is that we are amazing problem-solvers. The current challenge of this essay is thus the task of responding constructively to chaos.

If I truly believe in (and can thus truly rely upon) my ability to rise to effectively meet every challenge, then I don't have to know ahead of time what my effective response will be. If I truly believe that "everything happens for a reason" and also that those reasons are somehow good, then as painful as it may be to find myself within a moment in which I don't have all of the answers, it is still not a catastrophic failure. If anything, it is one more reminder that I am a complex convergence of body and spirit and that I can thus respond to that moment with the resources of both.

Being constructive in times of chaos is not something one can do while utilizing only a portion of who and what one is. Living life in a way that is authentically holistic is inseparable from the full integration of everything one is—abilities, memories, qualities, and dynamics—and the combined result is usually more amazing than anything anyone has imagined.

This does not, however, happen by accident. Without the addition of positive intention, chaos will never be constructive. In a similar way, without at least a tiny bit of love, every relationship would be a waste of time.

So I begin my days with intentions about the contributions I hope to make, with choices about the particular challenges I will embrace, and with as much awareness as possible of physical and spiritual persons who will be my collaborators within each step along the way. I may wish (and I usually do) that we were in much closer proximity to one another, but I know that distance and time are qualities of material existence that have no significant reality within the realm of spirit. To insist that spiritual realities are somehow less real simply because they are not material, moves me toward being as small as the chaos which each moment may contain, and being thereby more easily victimized. It is when I live within the largeness of my spirit rather than the smallness of my body, that the chaos of life's unfolding once again becomes manageable—so much so that my response can be constructive.

Yet something chaotic remains within the construction I do, specifically because I know neither others' future contributions nor the unforeseen challenges that will arise. It is creativity analogous to the live performance of a play, within which forgetting a line, missing a cue, or unintentionally altering the emotion of a word, can shift the action in unimagined new directions. The performers persist, however, specifically because of their faith in their ability to embrace the chaos and quickly make it constructive—as we must also.

It has long been said within the world of theater that "there are no small parts, only small players." It is not the small players, however, who empower the show to go on.

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

Duplicitously Decisive

Insisting that I truly want others to refrain from ever lying to me, is problematic, specifically because the truth may in fact be that they genuinely don't care. On a similar note, if they are not persuaded by all the evidence and reasoning I present, they may be aware (consciously or unconsciously) of weaknesses I have failed to notice. Logically, if my opinion or observation contained enough light and truth, it would undeniable.

As a young child, I remember reading of a debate between the sun and the wind about which was more powerful. As luck would have it, they noticed a man with a cloak, walking along a road far below them, and chose to use him as the example by which their powers would be demonstrated. The wind went first, sweeping down with astonishing force, striving to tear the cloak from the man's shoulders and almost knocking him to the ground in the process. The harder the wind blew, however, the more tightly the man drew the cloak around his shoulders. Finally, it was the sun's turn, so the wind stepped back to watch and the sun beamed down with fierce intensity through the now calm air. After only a short moment, the man removed the cloak and began carrying it draped over his arm, switching the cloak from one arm to the other from time to time to allow sweat to evaporate.

Superficially, the man was unconcerned about any debate between the wind and the sun; his concern was for moving toward his destination. Had he instead been traveling by boat, pulled along by a sail, his response would probably have been quite different. Either way, his response indicated only a particular relationship with his context and not the full truth of anything other than himself within that context. What he actually demonstrated were the methods and means by which he chose to engage particular challenges.

What this illustrates is that unless one

"Seeing with only the eyes overlooks the best part."

-- Sister Who

considers the details of challenges others face, expectations of particular responses could be accurately described as irrational. Only after considering what others value and why, along with what they believe about their capabilities, can one effectively (and intelligently) influence the complex combination of multiple variables within any particular moment.

If, however, I have considered all such variables (and thereafter made my best contribution), others still fail to respond as hoped, and I conclude by withdrawing from interaction, it may appear that I am apathetic in relation to their struggles—when the truth is more accurately that I am respecting their right to choose their responses and consequences.

Perhaps the resulting experiences are more necessary to their personal growth than is my contribution. If so, I am happy to stand back and allow whatever experiences they will find to be most truly empowering. If I refrain from interaction before another's choice is made, however, I demonstrate a choice favoring the weakness of apathy rather than the strength of compassion. If I generalize a rejection from a previous experience onto a subsequent one, I deny the next individual the ability to make a different choice.

The distinction I am trying to make is perhaps very subtle, but nonetheless extremely important. One path of interaction is victimizing—to everyone involved—while the other is collaborative. In most cases, like Robert Frost's poem "Two Roads," both are equally available—inviting everyone present to make pivotal relational choices.

A final important consideration is that of whether one's offer is tied to issues of ego gratification. Doing the right thing for the wrong reasons, although it may not be obvious at the time, is never without some sort of negative effect. Every repeated action offers a sort of conditioning in relation to a new standard that may be profoundly if also subtly unhealthy. A birthday cake can be appropriate celebration, but eating one every day will yield a diet high in sugar. A more holistic approach, will find many additional ways to celebrate the communal and individual mystery and miracle we call life.

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

Ambivalently Compassionate

I have a long-standing argument with certain persons' perspective of Zen Buddhism that allows them to be unresponsive to others' needs and suffering. The notion of acceptance of things exactly as they are without integration of one's ability to transform bad to good, is reprehensible to me and denies the reality of one's ability to impart healing throughout life.

I insist that the exercise of self-agency and voice are essential to any genuinely true experience of living life to the fullest. Without these, the surrounding world would know only the appearance and never the spirit of any person, place, or thing. Nothing is only the part that can be readily seen; there is always more to be discovered, for those willing to look.

A principle difficulty, of course, is whether others have the ability to hear or to understand one's expressions. Within the movie, "Stepmom," a mother dying of cancer explains to her son that they will still be together specifically because he knows "the magician's secret... just because you can't see it, doesn't mean it isn't there." Likewise, the inability to hear them, doesn't mean that spiritual entities and even material things aren't speaking; similarly, if no one listens, it doesn't mean that what I said was unimportant.

In referring to being ambivalently compassionate, what I am trying to express is a dedication to speaking that nonetheless allows others the choice of ignoring whatever help I offer. In some cases this is wise: my well-intentioned words may not actually be helpful to the situation. In other cases, it is a matter of the other's youthfulness: he or she may not have the maturity necessary to integrate my suggestion. If so, I must allow whatever time is necessary for them to reach the point where my contribution can be effectively integrated. There are a great many things I've heard and read in times past that although meaningless at the time, were vital to my understanding months or even years later.

This is why the past and future are the peripheral vision of the present: to allow us to see more than the moment itself can contain.

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

On a Personal Note

Significant progress has occurred in fixing up the house, but much insulation work is still undone. Nonetheless, bending the house's configuration to my patterns is beginning to make this place feel a bit more like home. Still, I haven't decided whether to be glad that I am in New Hampshire instead of Colorado. To some extent, it seems to be about developing communal relationships so that I do not feel quite so alone here. A basic understanding of development in relationships, of course, is that this process requires significant amounts of time—so one must be very patient while waiting for that to happen.

Plans and preparations for four future ministerial appearances in ritual garb are in process and an additional idea for a creative fair is also being initially explored. A first draft of some of the basic components of the 2016 calendar has been created as well.

Conversely, I am disturbed by contrasts in world-view and patterns of communication within recent conversations. I view humanity in an egalitarian fashion, valuing each person equally, but certain others apparently view humanity hierarchically, holding particular persons and/or occupations as more valuable and deserving of privilege. I'm trying to frame this as merely a sub-cultural difference, but remain bothered by problems of unequal distribution of privilege and opportunity.

I guess it's all just part of learning and growing within this complex thing we call "life."

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

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