

sister who's perspective

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Overview

The current age is characterized by an irrational fear of a poverty of money and/or financial resources, which has led to a long list of terrible evils running amuck throughout our world. It is imperative that this particular fear be displaced by genuinely unconditional love for one another, in order for humanity (individually and collectively) to survive. It is my earnest prayer that these essays are helpful toward that goal.

Poverty of Wisdom

Even for my New Age spirituality friends who firmly believe in multiple lives and the notion that one brings wisdom from previous lives into the current one, the understanding remains that wisdom is specifically learned--that somewhere, somehow, at some point in time, one transitioned from not knowing to knowing a particular deep understanding that is empowering to one's self, when faced with various manifestations of adversity. The experience of a poverty of wisdom is thus not only a matter of not knowing how to respond to adversity, but also of being unable or unwilling, for whatever reason, to learn more effective ways of relating, since individuality by its very nature exists within specific contexts and constellations of relationship.

A fascinating but perhaps overlooked quality of such poverty, however, is that it does not include or equate to any inability to love. Even creatures without any wisdom or understanding at all, are still able to express love toward others as well as toward infants of their own species. Further, within the choice to act in loving ways, one opens one's self to even greater wisdom. It is, in fact, not possible to love without also embracing a certain kind of invisible openness.

At the heart of any poverty of wisdom, is

an inability to respond to adversity in ways that do not compromise the very integrity of one's soul. Even if what one is experiencing is a sense of powerlessness, wisdom can often provide meaning and purpose that make even the most tragic moments of life bearable. By whatever means ingenuity or intuition is able to provide, a way must be found to persevere rather than surrender to loss, because, in words often said, "As long as there is life, there is hope."

A fascinating aspect of life is that it is by nature encompassed by infinite possibility, but a primary challenge of being human is that the spectrum of perceived possibilities is usually much, much, much smaller--making faith in invisible realities all the more essential to the positive unfolding of our lives. Even for an atheistic scientist, it is understood that "nature abhors a vacuum," which means that any manifestation of loss will be followed by something else flowing in to fill the void. Among the greatest blessings of being human is one's ability to make choices that can steer that inflowing in more constructive directions.

A very serious danger within the larger scope of life, however, are those who out of their own inner poverty of wisdom, instead of love, seek control--attempting to displace that which is truly Godde (the embodiment of highest wisdom and love) with themselves; finding when efforts go awry that they do not have sufficient wisdom to successfully satisfy the inherent demands of such a role.

Love displaces competitive pursuits of power with collaborative communication and interaction. The poverty of wisdom is then most eradicated by a merging of all the little pieces of wisdom found within the diverse individuals of a community. Ultimately any poverty of wisdom is an invitation to ongoing rediscovery of each other.

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

Poverty of Love

While acknowledging that one's response has a profound influence upon how one's experience of poverty actually manifests, a hopefully common response to sustained experiences of poverty is learning how to more efficiently utilize and extend whatever amount of the valued substance one has. In my case, my Prussian grandmother once complimented me for being able to stretch a twenty-dollar bill further than just about anyone in our family tree. In the case of love, especially if there isn't much available, the effect may be tremendously magnified by the appreciation one has for any love at all.

From this perspective, a poverty of love is not so much a reason for endless mourning as it is an opportunity to learn how even the tiniest bit can work previously unimagined miracles. Those who have never had to do without, may in fact have to work much harder to equally appreciate whatever love is received. It might even be true that an overabundance of love is less helpful, if one is not somehow inspired to utilize this resource to its maximum potential.

All of which could be a reminder that a perfect world would not necessarily be an effective context within which to attempt an allegedly perfect experience of life. What I wish to stress about this within this current discussion, is that it is the imperfections--the poverty of love around one's self--that create opportunities for the miracle of healing even the very deepest parts of one's self, that only love within one's self can accomplish.

If love is insufficient all around one's self, however, how could it nevertheless be sufficient within? Specifically because love is hidden inside of so many other creatures and situations all around us--waiting to be discovered. A question, a smile, or a gentle loving touch may be the "butterfly effect" that completely alters the reality of a particular moment of life for any and every person.

For anyone unfamiliar with the term, the "butterfly effect" is a philosophical notion that everything is so interconnected, that if a butterfly flaps its wings on the other side of

the planet, the effect will radiate outward in ways that magnify its reality like the expanding ripples in the surface of a pond after a pebble is dropped into it. In truth, the smallest things can often make the biggest differences, yet in ways not often noticed by media-saturated crowds of humanity.

A much more serious poverty of love, is any inability to love one's self. While one should not become obsessed with this, since it really is possible to carry on life without loving one's self, it is nevertheless a concern that one is wise to address in whatever ways one can. Especially for those who have experienced sustained psychological abuse, self-love may be no easy task.

Any such inability does not, however, diminish such persons inherent worth. While love is not the basis of existence, it remains the basis of positive relationship. No matter how negative or awful past relational actions have been, engaging in actions of love unavoidably moves one toward healing and greater wholeness in mind, body, and spirit.

Like the flame of a lit match, one does not have to possess a large quantity of love in order to launch a chain reaction. A match lights a candle and each candle lights other candles and in hardly any time at all the room may be filled with light. All that is necessary is a willingness to be both fully present and also willing to try.

It is too simplistic to dismissively argue about whether a drinking glass is half full or half empty, when what is needed is a way to continue filling the glass, whenever the water level falls below a certain point. In my case, this is sometimes accomplished by pausing from the busy-ness of the day to hold and pet my dogs. It seems I need their love and attention as much as they need mine.

A peculiar tragedy common with current spiritual practice, is that pursuits of purity have too often become walls between contrasting perspectives, rather than bridges of love creating ever-more-empowered community. The resulting poverty of love is thus perhaps a final wake-up call to all.

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

Poverty of Dreams

I sometimes refer to a specific dream as being "the organizing principle" of my life, since its inherent value and beauty makes other choices more responsible for being collaborative, cohesive, informed, and finally symbiotically productive. If a dream is concerned only with its own manifestation and not with its relationship to the rest of life, the dream veers toward pathological narcissism--and ultimately dies, as all examples of narcissism eventually do. An additional complication, however, is that even if a dream invites symbiotic relationship with the rest of my life, other components may not cooperate and thereby create the appearance that the dream was somehow wrong from the start.

In and of themselves, however, dreams are never wrong--but they may be incomplete and starve to death specifically because they did not receive the nurturing and sustenance required. A poverty of dreams is even one step beyond all of that, by being a situation in which even the very beginnings of possibilities are prevented in one way or another, often in favor of patterns and methods that are well-established. In considering a forest as a metaphor of this worrisome dynamic, it is sometimes very difficult for a new tree to grow within the shadow of a much older one, until such time as the senior has been removed by age, disease, or disaster.

Until light and air can again enter the space, a dark stillness settles in and all movement diminishes. Some have experienced this as a sort of timeless reverence within which the quietest music of

the heart can finally be heard--and it certainly is that, but that is not all that it is. Within a healthy forest, contrasts are thus numerous and diverse. The overall dynamic is that the areas of quiet reverence and the areas of dynamic redevelopment are continually trading places with one another.

If there is a poverty of dreams in one area of a forest, if the quiet reverence has lingered beyond the time of its helpfulness, nature may need to intervene with adversity in order to restart the process of growth and renewal. If this metaphorically happens within our lives, panic and fear are not as necessary as reaching for whatever follows--planting new seeds, for example, as quickly and as effectively as one can; never clinging to an expectation that the present is eternal.

In Colorado, there are occasional wildfires that clear the land of many years of old dry fallen timber. The time of opportunity for new seeds which follows, however, may sometimes be very short. If new growth has not taken hold before the next heavy rains fall, the soil itself may be washed away, making it far more difficult for those particular places to recover from recent devastation.

While disasters are always tragic, being paralyzed by their occurrence makes them far worse. While a poverty of dreams is also sad, neglecting one's abilities to imagine, engage, and create, magnifies the original experience of loss far beyond its occurrence.

That our world is in need of new and more beautiful dreams than anything humanity has thus far created, seems very obvious--at least to me. That I encounter so many who cling to forms their spirits have mostly outgrown, seems analogous to adults who have refused to leave behind the clothing of their respective childhoods--buttons and zippers now stretched to their breaking points around a larger body. So I find myself often pleading those whom I meet, to try a new style, wrestle with a new question, and engage with a new pattern of their own choosing--specifically so that new and even more beautiful dreams are born.

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

*"Emptiness is not
inherently adversarial;
it is also opportunity;
it is space within which
to begin a new dance."*

-- Sister Who

Poverty of Spirit

When all one has left is the very core of one's being, there is no longer any way to avoid awareness of precisely what, after all, constitutes the very core of one's being. A primary challenge of this, however, is that many do not like what they find. It is specifically a challenge and not a problem, however, because one then is able to choose whether to bury or push it away or conversely to more fully engage.

More concisely, I can either withdraw with a feeling of revulsion or I can reach inward and begin to mold whatever is there into far better forms and patterns of behavior. It will not mold itself, however, so it awaits discovery and intervention. What is most unknown is when and how I will respond.

A poverty of spirit is thus once again an opportunity and an invitation that may turn out to be either a curse or a blessing, as I determine its future form in one way or another. It is not, however, only a question of my own interaction, but also of whatever communal interaction I have allowed, invited, and encouraged that has been similarly willing to respond. Just as I must discover what is at the core of my spirit, communities must rediscover the individuals that together form the core of their spirit.

Neither can exist without the other, but neither is the complete and final definition of the other. An individual spirit does not tell all there is to know about a community's spirit, nor does a community tell all there is to know about an individual. They exist in symbiotic relationship: each of them both shaping and being shaped by the other.

A primary paradox of life is thus that each is a combination of opposites, symbiotically intertwined in ever-expanding manifestations of life and further possibility. Ideally these will turn out to be life-enhancing and constructive, but they would not be truly life at all if there were no risk of destructive effects and manifestations. Ultimately, we choose each moment whether to live or die.

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

On a Personal Note

I have been reminded of late of the need for my self-definition, focus, and efforts to be global rather than localized--perhaps specifically because the new space within which I currently find myself persists in providing overwhelming and adversarial challenges. As much as I prefer the existence of a community that "has my back," so to speak, I more often find that no such community is currently available to me.

The principles to which I cling related to community and narcissism, however, recommend against resigning myself to "going it alone," so even as I do whatever I can to keep putting one foot in front of the other, I know I must also keep my eyes and ears open for new possibilities. Perhaps this is just a brief description of the darkness that currently surrounds me, inviting me to remember what it is to be a star in the night or a lighthouse in a storm--still giving to others in spite of whatever need I myself am currently experiencing.

In spite of such contrasts and challenges throughout the past four weeks, six new episodes and the new introduction of "Sister Who Presents..." have now been completed.

Work on a book manuscript offering a much deeper look into the experiences and development of this ministry is also ongoing.

I remain thankful for such possibilities.

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

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