

Sister Who's Perspective

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Life is a collaborative effort, encompassing more than we know. In a time of abundant "information overload," news, communication, and travel across great distances, we often talk at each other without listening, communicating, or understanding. Humanity needs its icons, but also its iconoclasts to grow beyond the good and bad qualities that now limit and describe us. The essences of both God and us remain, in the midst of questions, to be discovered, experienced, and expressed. Please share in this ongoing dialogue, remembering to indicate whether and how you wish to be identified. Blessings, love, and peace to you. ---Sister Who

Transcendant Timeless Life

Living forty miles away from my day-job as I do and in spite of being an otherwise punctual person, I am occasionally unable to arrive at work precisely on time. Fortunately my employer does not seem very bothered by this, as long as I still work the full eight hours per day for which I am paid.

Upon arriving at the office on just such a morning recently and remembering that the daily grind is sometimes referred to as "the rat race," I smiled and shrugged to the receptionist, "sometimes the rats win." She laughed lightly and we both went on with our respective duties.

The weekend of October 25, circumstances allowed me to travel to Washington, DC, to be part of a large political event there, calling for the end of the US military occupation of Iraq (among other things). It was a generally positive time for me to make contact with people who had never met or heard of Sister Who before and to impart whatever wisdom or broader perspective I could through countless personal conversations and also by simply being present, in all of my colorful theatrical detail.

I couldn't help but begin by laughing out loud, however, when a media person who was clearly in a hurry to get a good recording, came up to me, abruptly pushed a microphone toward me, and skeptically asked, "So what did you hope to accomplish by being here today?"

My response was that only time would tell what the events and activities of the day would actually accomplish. I was simply here to make the most positive contribution I could. Politicians seem to be notorious for not truly listening to or heeding their constituency unless either the time for re-election is pending or a remarkable degree of solidarity has resulted in the people speaking with one voice (which does happen occasionally though not often).

Whatever was or was not accomplished that day, however, we must go on with our lives. Hard to believe though it may be, humanity has survived

countless unspeakably corrupt political administrations. We must remember not to make any more enemies than absolutely necessary along the way, however, because the one who is an adversary to us at this point, may also be one whom we need as an ally later. As I am so fond of saying, "life is a collaborative effort: we all take turns being the one in need."

The English, French, German, Italian, Japanese, and Chinese people (just to name a few) have experienced a number of different forms of government during their respective long histories. We do not need to be so arrogant as to assume that the current form of government under which we live, is in fact the last word in effective government and the form of government which we will always have.

We may find that we are rapidly approaching the limits of our current form of government, that the needs created by our current population and diversity exceed what the current form can provide. As I responded recently to someone who questioned whether Sister Who was really a nun, "every so often, it's necessary to reinvent the form, to update the program, to put a new face on the timeless essence, in order to continue to meet the need or get the job done."

So on one hand, I was absolutely in the middle of the unfolding of a present moment of life. On the other hand, I needed to be mindful that no matter what happened, no matter what was or was not accomplished by my participation in the events of that place and time, something else would follow. I could either welcome or oppose that something else (thereby shaping my relationship to it as well as the details of both my and its specific definition), but I could not prevent it.

I suppose the most disappointing quality of most politicians with whom I am even vaguely or remotely familiar, is that they persist in playing "king of the hill," trying to be the biggest bully on the block in hopes that no one will dare

ever oppose or even disagree with them.

But it never works out that way. The more they attempt to control others, the more others are inspired to rebel. The more they claim to be the current reigning "king of the hill," the more they indirectly dare someone--anyone--to push them off and take their place. A battle against terrorism which makes anyone more afraid, thereby gives birth to the next wave of terrorists. One must remember that in both "king of the hill" and "survival of the fittest," the end result is that a lot of people (and other creatures) die and rarely among the dead are the politicians who ordered the aggressive and futile actions in the first place.

Some of history's major battles were clearly against oppression and in defense of the citizens' homes, but far more were little more than the expression of a particular leader's (or group of leaders') hunger for power and wealth. I have no objection to laying down my life for something virtuous and noble, but I do not count another's desire for power and wealth as an adequate justification for self-sacrifice.

I have also heard much trumpeting lately, suggesting that it is shameful to run away or retreat from a battle. What seems to be overlooked by the speakers, however, is the basic wisdom of knowing when to walk away from a battle that cannot be won. Wisdom which is not weakness is required within such situations, though the end result is still the withdrawal from violent conflict.

At a more basic level, I remain of the opinion that no one ever wins a war and that there really are not such things as war crimes. War itself is a crime against life and requires first and foremost that potential adversaries avoid looking upon each other with even a minimum of mutual respect and willingness to truly communicate (both speaking and listening) about the issues upon which they disagree.

There is, after all, only one planet earth and we will either learn to share it in a mostly peaceful fashion, or we will destroy each other and ourselves by claiming more ownership of it than is rightly ours. In the oft-repeated words of an historical Native American chief, "we do not inherit the earth from our ancestors; we borrow it from our children."

If Christians could heed the exhortation to "love your enemies," pagans remember that "everything you put forth, comes back three-fold," eastern mystics recall that the I Ching insists there is no true separation between ourselves and all that

surrounds us, and secular-minded people recall that "what goes around, comes around," I believe we could all put our heads together and come up with a way of nurturing the best within ourselves instead of the worst.

But it is not just our children who must live within this world we are daily creating and recreating, it is also ourselves. We may gaze upon the present moment, but we must also retain our peripheral vision rather than tolerate increasing societal glaucoma. The more violence we sow within the present moment, the more forgiveness will be required to accomplish healing of the woundedness we will reap within the days which follow.

As I flew to Washington, DC, and back again, I was once again reminded of the thin layer within which humanity lives. Most are quite unaware of the serene and virtually timeless world above the clouds as well as of the quiet earth into which plants send their roots and rodents dig their burrows, neither of which possesses sufficient air and warmth for the physical bodies within which our spirits travel. A number of years ago, my now ex-life partner and I traveled to Arches National Park in Utah and I was immediately struck by the ancientness of the rock formations, sensing a certain sacredness within the vast amount of time and the vast diversity of life experience, with which the arches' lives had coincided.

I rejoice that in spite of man's violence toward man, there remain for those with the eyes to see, sacred spaces on the earth within which the Divine remains; reaching, longing, and perhaps even weeping at the long separation we must endure on our souls' individual and collective journey home.

That is after all, to what I returned after making the best possible contribution I could. Home is also that to which I return at the end of each day, having made the best possible contribution I could.

Whatever hysteria or stupidity humanity's actions and attitudes may now encompass, I can only hope that I bring a bit of holy contrast to the otherwise dark and dismal picture which is thereby created. Perhaps you and I together can continue to remind the world of what love is, especially in those moments when hatred and anger can be so very distracting.

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

God's Fingertips

Since the dawn of time, humanity has individually and collectively looked upon the night sky, observed the moon, and speculated upon what it is and what its existence means.

Similarly, I have long maintained that God is too big to fit within one religion. Another source I read many years ago, suggested that religions are man's attempts to reach God and spirituality is God reaching deep into the human heart and soul.

It is interesting to me, that within Michaelangelo's depiction of God and Adam, the first man according to biblical literature, God is striving to touch Adam, who reclines lazily, each with an outstretched arm and a single extended finger. The painting suggests that God has always been more interested in touching humanity than humanity has been in touching God.

The painting also suggests that in touching God, humanity generally succeeds in touching only the smallest part, yet considering the thousands upon thousands of volumes which have been written about this tiny point of contact, one would think we know or have learned much more than we actually do or have.

I find that God is too big to fit within one religion, just as the reality of the moon is too big to fit within any single culture's lunar mythology. In discussing spirituality and God with various people I met in Washington, DC, recently, it seemed that God's massive hand was once again reaching through the clouds above the city.

The palm of God's hand had not come into view, however, resulting in fingertips slowly coming into view at great distances from each other.

One fingertip had a bit of dirt and grass stains on it, suggesting God had been out working in the garden only moments before. Perhaps this is what some of my pagan friends see when they look for the Divine, perceiving various masculine and feminine qualities and giving distinct names to each.

Another fingertip wore a lavishly bejeweled ring and a bit of candle wax, perhaps indicative of high rituals performed within cathedrals, giving richly symbolic illustration to divine qualities which have always been and will perhaps always be, difficult for any human mind to fully understand.

A third fingertip was warm and soft yet powerfully muscled, offering comfort to those living under various forms of oppression, offering encouragement to those so afflicted, not to give up on life or suppose that the Divine was somehow unaware of their plight, even if the intervention

which a human mind would have recommended was mysteriously lacking.

Yet another fingertip had multi-colored skin, from light to dark and every shade in between, affirming that the Divine is not the property of any one of humanity's numerous and unique races.

Another fingertip was challenging to gaze upon because its gender definition was unclear. At one moment it seemed soft and feminine and at another calloused and masculine, seeming to suggest that the Divine was both and more also.

The outline of still another fingertip was difficult to perceive, so intense and powerful was its light beyond even the glow of an eclipse.

Another fingertip seemed most known by the peaceful feeling it radiated, calling all who gazed upon it to slow their hurried pace and remember the deeper qualities of the soul, for which life was originally created.

Other fingertips were draped in cloths of diverse hues. Some seemed to reach into deep valleys while others rested on mountaintops.

None of the fingertips were engaged in judgment, choosing instead to allow humanity to judge itself and reap whatever blessing or poison it had chosen to sow.

And yet the mere presence of the fingertips intervened, calling forth the divine spark within each person to find that expression which held the most integrity for the specific individual.

I have to wonder whether it may be that God has been reaching toward humanity for a very long time, hoping that the fingertips could touch in such a way that they could pick us up and lift us to a perception and understanding which simply isn't possible within the small world which exists below the clouds of our earthly atmosphere.

And I have to wonder whether in living my life openly and honestly, as I strive to do, I have also empowered those fingertips to grasp my own soul and the souls of those around me, to make us more alive than ever before.

So I smile at my enemies, whenever I can, and pray that all violence between us will always be prevented.

I smile at my dogs when I return home each evening, as they shower me with loving kisses and do a dance of joy and forgetfulness that pays no heed and gives no strength to the hours we've been separated. And I try to learn from them in such moments, that dancing in the face of disappointment is not a denial; it is my rebuttal.

May love be the rebuttal of hate within your life today.

Reviving the Declaration of Independence

I sometimes tell my dogs, "just because some other dog is stupid enough to bark, doesn't mean you have to be that stupid too."

Turning this back upon myself, I strive to remember that just because someone else wants to be hateful, doesn't mean that I have to be hateful right back to them--or rude or unkind or stingy or selfish or whatever.

Instead of being the rule, I can be the exception. I can do something nice, especially when someone is mean, to battle the replication of his or her meanness.

Instead of forgetting what's truly important and going through life on "auto-pilot," I can choose to remain conscious, to the best of my ability, of the patterns I am allowing to guide my life. I can choose to value people over things, experience over money, and education over ignorance.

Instead of becoming more narrow and limited, as I grow older, I can continue to nurture my arms until they are strong enough and long enough to embrace the entire world.

During my recent visit to Washington, DC, I took time after the events which occurred within the shadow of the Washington Monument, to visit the Jefferson, Lincoln, FDR, and Korean War memorials also. I made a point of reading the words of each relevant personage, recorded within each specific memorial and was inspired was again to go on being all of who and what I am, whether anyone every truly understands or not.

It is perhaps a most wondrous gift of God that such ideals and transcendent principles have been able to survive coexistence with less sacred

times in which selfish motives and actions which were inherently devaluing and destructive prevailed.

Within many countries, even in very modern times, the rise of a new governmental system or leader is accompanied by destruction of all reminders of whatever came before. In this country, thankfully, that has generally not been the case. The memorials and monuments are still there, as if some deep part of us knows that destruction of things expressing disagreement with our current perspective and position is equivalent to the destruction of some part of ourselves.

Perhaps, similarly, it is not so much that we must shout and scream at those who do not wish to listen as that we must stand our ground, for as long as we are able to do so, while various forms of evil march by. Even during the most difficult of times, we shall be visited by those individuals whose hearts are hungry for something better than the evil which always shouts ever louder in direct proportion to the increase of emptiness within itself.

As servants of all that is good, the Divine will use us to help its committed remnant to survive, all the while retaining the final word on how things shall be, which evil in its arrogance, always supposes to be under its more immediate control.

Yet no matter what religious or secular robes in which evil may dress itself, all that is holy and good will yet survive whatever drought, fire, or flood may come against it, even as all the pesticides on earth have yet to succeed in rendering the dandelion extinct. Grasp a dandelion and pull all that is visible away and in the spring, two more shall grow in its place. Winter may come, but spring will follow.

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--S.W.