

Sister Who's Perspective

Sister Who's Perspective, Issue #65, November 2004, copyright

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

Distinguishing Discernment

Growing up within the Christian faith, I sometimes wondered whether "judge not, lest ye be judged" was the most quoted verse of the Bible, but recognized early that it was often spoken as if it were synonymous with "disagreement is not encouraged."

Within my experience, however, disagreement is one of the things which has helped to keep my brain alive and discouraged me from living life in a sort of "auto-pilot" mode (the computerized system which enables passenger airplanes to follow a preprogrammed course with no person actually operating the controls of the plane).

The biblical verse referred to above, goes on to explain that with the same measure we use to judge others, we ourselves will be judged. To put it another way, by our choices regarding others and our actions toward them, we decide how we ourselves will be judged.

Additionally, it must be noted that rather than referring only to some great courtroom at the end of time, these sorts of judgments are being handed down or enacted each and every day.

It is essentially a corollary of the so-called "Golden Rule," which can be found within nearly every human system of spirituality. My Pagan friends sometimes phrase this cross-cultural warning as "whatever you send out, comes back three-fold." As a child with regard to selecting television programs to view, I was often told, "garbage in, garbage out." Within his letter to the church at Galatia, the apostle Paul used the phrasing, "whatever you sow, you reap." Jesus' instruction was that "whatever you would that men do to you, do also to them." Among the more contemporary versions are, "what goes around, comes around," and "you get out what you put in."

So how many of us are paying all that much attention to what's going around and what we are personally contributing to it, each moment of each day? Evidently, not enough of us, but hopefully as we continue to work at it, things will improve.

All that being said, moments in which discernment is required, sometimes referred to as

"judgment calls", are a significant part of each day of our lives. To refrain from all acts of judgment, leaves life relatively paralyzed and unable to move on through the diverse circumstances and situations we encounter.

So how could we bring a certain "moral tone" to this process of discernment, deciding at least individually for ourselves, what distinguishes right from wrong? Since no two situations are absolutely identical, we would also need to be flexible, bending our personal moral guidelines to the specific details and needs of each situation.

At this point, I am often drawn to examining the relationship a specific situation or challenge has to basic ideas of healing, love, wisdom, and empowerment. How could I respond to this situation which would empower myself and all others involved, toward more love and wisdom? Does my response to this situation leave a lasting opportunity for better things to happen in the future (i.e. "don't throw the baby out with the bath water")? Is the choice of how to respond which I make, something I am willing to own and either explain or apologize later? Does my response postpone in an unhealthy way, dealing with something with which I need to deal?

Avoidance, in and of itself, has never accomplished a positive resolution. Choosing to relocate rather than engage a stronger and more equipped adversary, however, is not the same as mere avoidance.

Specific and reliable answers to these questions may not be readily available. Being able to sit with them, to listen, and to allow them to teach us, however, is a beginning from which better things can come.

To label persons, circumstances, and challenges as categorically unable to be resolved, establishes road blocks which impede and perhaps even prevent further personal growth. A willingness to engage them as we are able, allows us to become more than we have been, to understand more than we have understood, and to love what was previously unlovable.

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

Waiting for the Sun to Rise

At first glance, this is an odd title, especially since we are in that phase of the year during which days are growing shorter and nights are growing longer.

Within last month's newsletter, I related my excitement to be working hard, preparing for production of "The Sister Who Holiday Special." Sadly I must now report that the two other producers with whom I was working (who also owned the necessary equipment), decided a couple of weeks ago to pull out of the project, leaving me with no alternative but to apologize and inform everyone that unless new resources are quickly found, production is not likely to happen.

Yet I know that someday it will all happen, perhaps even better than I have ever envisioned. Perhaps with all of the extreme societal tension concerning the upcoming election, now was simply not the best time for this celebration of mutual respect, diversity, and peace.

Whatever the reason, there is still the more usual work of monthly newsletters, website updates, and photo shoots; helping with charitable fund-raisers and educational events as opportunity allows; and continuing to further self-empowerment with regard to this ministry, in whatever ways I am able.

With regard to the last of these activities, one of the books I have been reading (inspired to do so by the process of seeking out potential guests of diverse spiritual perspectives for the television show), is The Illustrated World's Religions--A Guide to our Wisdom Traditions by Huston Smith.

I recently began reading the section about Buddhism and had not heard before that it was initially a reaction to the "perversions" within Hinduism.

What impressed me most about the author's list and explanation of the so-called "perversions" within Hinduism, is that they are pitfalls available to any institutional or personal system of spirituality.

The first such area the author addressed, was that of authority, the administration and to what degree it has or has not remained true to its core spiritual commitment.

The second area was that of ritual, the expressions and symbols employed to illustrate actions of the spirit, which sometimes degenerate from honest expression to mere superstitious repetition for less than pure motives.

The third area was explanations, which have frequently given rise to dictatorial dogma instead of remaining bridges to deeper insight.

The fourth area was tradition, not in the sense of repetition or volumes of heavy historical books, but rather as the wealth of knowledge and understanding accumulated by those who have preceded us on various spiritual paths, which still has the ability to enlighten our own spiritual growth.

The fifth area was grace, the belief in something good working through all that is around us and within us, something with which we also collaborate, and because of which we go to bed each night able to hope for a better tomorrow.

The sixth and final area the author listed was mystery, the unknown transcendence which beckons us toward ever greater discoveries, which at best point toward their source and are not in and of themselves the objects of our fascination.

Relating all of this to my own up-bringing within the Roman Catholic church, I recall both people who had embraced all of the perverse expressions as well as people who had successfully retained a focus upon the empowering core spirituality.

Although there were those engaged in church leadership with personal agendas, I also recall those who had not forgotten that "whoever would be greatest, must be the servant of all."

Although there were those who performed rituals with the same detachment of a scientist combining chemicals within a test tube to achieve a desired result, there were also those who participated within rituals as expressions of their love for the divine person, around which their lives revolved.

Although there were those thoroughly practiced in reciting dogma for the instruction of any who would listen, there were also persons who pressed themselves to understand from the heart, that about which the particular explanation was speaking, within their own lives and immediate experience.

Although there were those who merely knew the history, there were others who emotionally understood the past experience of the historical persons.

Although there were those who either exaggerated their responsibility and tried to achieve salvation by performing good works or conversely trusted the Divine to do all of the work, there were also those who engaged in a sort of daily dance of

spirit and life, responding honestly to opportunities to love and grow.

Although there were those who obsessed about locations where miraculous things had occurred and strove to find ways to recreate or re-enact miraculous events, there were also those who understood that such things were simply the expressions of an omnipotent source of divine love and wisdom, no more unexpected than acts of kindness being performed each day by a person with a loving heart.

I give gifts to those I love at Christmas time, not because I have an obligation to do so because it is that time of year, but because it is an opportunity to express my love for those persons.

I engage in recreational and collaborative activities with those I love, not because some book on healthy psychology informed me that I must do so in order to be psychologically healthy, but because I enjoy their company.

I remember times I have shared with those I love, not because I am the appointed historian responsible for conveying the record to future generations, but because even the memory of these times brings me happiness, when for whatever reason I and those I love must be apart.

Within all of this, I find the on-going metaphor of watching and waiting for the sun to rise; discerning that moment when all of the disparate elements have come together and it is now up to me to seize the opportunity to let life shine, with all of the brilliance and warmth it has to offer.

Considering how long a night can seem, when a thousand glances toward the eastern horizon showed no obvious change, it is understandable that many become weary and drift off to sleep, awaking only after the sun has risen high into the sky.

"What was it like?" they may say to those who were awake to embrace that moment. But

*"Life is too short
to waste time
running in place."*

---Sister Who

what words are adequate to convey the reality of such a profound transition?

I am reminded of the day the newspaper headlines announced that the Berlin Wall had "come down." Most of the world's people could only watch from afar, wishing they had been there; I was one of those people.

I remember where I was working that day and I remember remarking to numerous customers that I thought businesses should close and there should be dancing in the streets, but everything around me pretty much just followed the usual routine.

The sun had finally risen in one specific corner of the world and only those who had waited through the long preceding night were able to understand what it all meant.

So as we head into a season of celebration and gratitude, of affirming loving relationships and interpersonal connections, and of reconnecting with the deepest parts of who we each are, I wish you the sunrises for which you have waited for so long; I wish you love in both horizontal (humanity) and vertical (divine) relationships; and I wish you that strong confident knowing of who you are and all of the wonderful things you alone can give.

As a gesture opening the holiday season, I offer you the warm embrace of friendship, the power of my prayers for your welfare, and best insight my mental capacities can conjure.

May peace on earth and the extension of life's blessings be to all who live upon the earth, that we may at last realize a global sense of community in which bigotry, competition, war, and hatred no longer have any place.

May our sense of family extend beyond the lines of biological heredity and marriage licenses, to embrace all who are in need of the healthy relationships we can demonstrate.

May our support of each others' gifts be a testament to our valuing of each other, that no more of the diversely colored and patterned packages beneath humanity's holiday tree will remain unwrapped and unopened, waiting for some other morning upon which to join in the celebration of life and the interconnectedness of all things.

May our eyes be filled with light, our hands with strength, our voices with song, our minds with hope, and our hearts with joy, as we travel the coming weeks into new ways of being.

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

Reminders and Redefinitions

Sometimes what sounds like a wonderful opportunity crosses my path, perhaps an opportunity to help someone, and I find myself wondering later, why I did not have the presence of mind to let the opportunity pass, which did not in fact mesh with who I am.

I sometimes prefer the ability to be all things to all people, the answer to everyone's challenges, but any attempt I make reminds me that I am not.

I am just myself: a specific but unfinished list of diverse qualities which include as many limitations as abilities, as many weaknesses as strengths, as many character flaws as virtues, and as many fears as aspirations.

A friend remarked that he could not do what I've been doing since May--living without a day-job or regular source of income. I responded that it was not for lack of trying that I am still without a day-job, but his attempt to compliment my positive attitude in spite of circumstances kept me pondering for the rest of the day. I never really came up with an answer, explaining why I had been able to do this where so many others would find my situation intolerable. I might argue that I had no choice, that circumstances have turned out as they have without my permission, in spite of my contrasting efforts, and in defiance of my insistence upon a better answer.

I began joking with friends recently, that someday I will be asked how I decided to become Sister Who and I will respond that I wasn't allowed to be anything else. Rejected job applications, negative responses to inquiries regarding opportunities, and bureaucratic snarls beyond my control have all conspired at various times, to keep me where I am--at least for now.

I could be angry at such adversarial elements, but it is more empowering to think of them as a sort of indirect guidance.

I am reminded of the reply within the movie "Mothman" to the query of why more advanced forms of life do not simply say what they want to say. "You are sufficiently more advanced than a cockroach. Have you ever tried talking to one?"

A significant element within my faith during recent months, is the belief that there really is a higher order or divine plan for the unfolding of life, even within this very confused time of transition. If I did not believe at least this, I'm not sure I could go on. Past experience says a single phone call can change everything, but for now that phone call has not come.

So is this a terrible time or simply a transition to a new way of inter-relating with the rest of humanity, which is being driven toward global community?

If we can redefine ourselves in ways that are adequate to the challenge, we can all be winners. If we fail to address the challenge of redefinition at all, it is likely we will all be victimized by what is happening all around us.

Do we lose who we are within this process? Not necessarily. Does a person who chooses to wear a new style of clothing or to embrace a completely new approach to life become someone else?

That which is most truly who I am has been equally present within me within predominantly Roman Catholic, protestant, Buddhist, Pagan, and Unitarian-Universalist phases of my spiritual path. I did not change who I was in order to embrace any of these alternative ways of relating to the world around me. I simply changed the ways in which I expressed who I was, who I am, and who I may someday be.

A problem may be redefined as a challenge, an obstacle, a task, or an adversary, but it remains whatever it inherently is, much as a rose by any other name smells the same.

The reminder of this inner constancy during this age of redefinition and expansion to accommodate the development of global community, is what enables me to search out the size, scope, and implication of societal changes. That being the case, I have been raising the priority of taking the time to be alone and just be myself.

Most wonderful of all, within those private moments, has been reconnecting with the divine spark that guides me, those humble small glimpses of the divine person whom I will never be able to fully explain but whose unconditional love and wisdom are there to sustain me when nothing else makes sense. Within this reminder of being connected to divine mystery, everything else is somehow more manageable.

More concisely put, I am able by faith to acknowledge that everything is okay. May one and all and everything, blessed and loved ever be.

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