

When the Dictionary is Thrown into the Paper-Shredder

I'm inclined to think that everyone operates within a framework of expectations and assumptions, but that most of us are not particularly aware of those which we individually possess. Those who are aware of some of them, are always discovering more. As the title character in the movie "Powder" remarks, though I can't remember just how he put it, our actions and words often come from places within ourselves, of which we're not even aware--memories, experiences, opinions, inherited prejudices.

Nevertheless, there seem to be widespread assumptions of humanity having common languages. The more people with whom I speak, however, the more convinced I become that this is almost completely untrue.

A dictionary is basically someone's listing of the meanings to be associated with specific written and spoken symbols--words, I mean. A word or a sound is, after all, just a symbol. Only to the extent that the receiving person understands the symbol in exactly the same way, will the speaker or writer be understood as intended.

I was recently involved in a rather lengthy discussion concerning the distinctions between the words, "presentation, persuasion, and coercion. At what point, we wanted to decide (among other things), was someone's right to independent thinking being compromised? For nearly three and a half hours, four people (including myself) attempted to answer this. I think the only conclusion we were tentatively able to make is that each individual person can be expected to understand each word in each language in slightly different ways. This, of course, is one of the main sources of misunderstanding, differing cultural and sub-cultural contexts being another one that I will not go into at this time.

My conclusion is that it is far more reasonable to expect to be misunderstood than it is to expect to be understood. That being the case, I accept responsibility for what comes out of my own "mouth," for

whatever apology or clarification is appropriate to a particular situation.

Even with all of the obstacles, however, expressing the truth and beauty that God has hidden within each person's heart has never been more important to the survival of the human race in all of its multi-dimensional, multi-faceted, and multi-talented potential. I encourage you to be who you are, to be all that you are, and embrace the shifting winds of communication, because it is they alone who put wind into our sails and carry our boat along.



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Sister Who's Perspective

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Life is a collaborative effort, encompassing more than we know. In a time of "information overload," news, communication, and travel across great distances is common, yet 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

Words of a Song:

"The Sacred Clown Dance"
by Denver NeVaar

On bridges of love and on bridges of life,
always and never alone and together,
as Sacred Clowns we dance to thee.

Backwards and strange, constant in
change,
blindly perceiving, in giving receiving,
as Sacred Clowns we dance to thee.

God in all forms has called us to be.
Light in all forms in you and in me,
walking between the worlds.

An Historic Occasion

The Sacred Clown Dance was performed as the closing segment to a service entitled "The Courage to Create" at the Billings Unitarian-Universalist Fellowship in Billings, Montana, on March 8, 1998. This was the very first time that the dance was publicly performed (and also the first time that I was invited to be present at a Sunday morning church service). After briefly introducing the dance, I and seven others presented the dance to an audience of about forty to fifty people. A total of three repetitions of the dance were done, and the audience was encouraged to sing along using the words printed in their printed programs during the third repetition. We received many compliments afterwards.

The story of The Sacred Clown Dance begins two and a half years earlier with a conversation I had with a particular leader of The Dance of Universal Peace. I understand this to be a spiritual practice begun by Samuel Lewis which combines sacred dances from numerous world religions into an inter-faith celebration of connection with Divine Oneness. My complaint to that leader was that even with well over a hundred dances in the growing Dance of Universal Peace collection, there was not even one which expressed inclusion of specifically Gay, Lesbian, and Transgendered people.

Having read Judy Grahn's book, Another Mother Tongue: Gay Words,

Gay Worlds, it is my understanding that since the beginning of humanity there have been spiritual-social positions of ministry within nearly all human civilizations that may be described as various forms of the Sacred Clown. Perhaps not exclusively but nevertheless predominantly, such positions would be filled by persons described as “two-spirited” or, in today’s terminology, Gay, Lesbian, or Transgenderal.

A fuller presentation of what the archetype of the Sacred Clown encompasses will hopefully follow at some point. For now, I will limit myself to an explanation of this dance.

In presenting The Sacred Clown Dance to others who do not share such characteristics as described above, I explained to that audience, to sing the words, “as Sacred Clowns we dance to thee” is to express a commitment to opening one’s self to new and perhaps radically different ways of perceiving, understanding, and experiencing life. It does not in any way even imply a negation of one’s own inherent characteristics. It is an addition to existing perception; not a substitution.

The actual creation of the dance was a rather amazing gift that arrived during a time of great difficulty in other areas of my life. About one year after speaking with the Dance of Universal Peace leader, I awoke from a sound sleep at four o’clock in the morning and the words and music began to immediately play within my mind. I hurried to my desk, knowing from experience that such things usually don’t come along twice. About twenty minutes later, I had written the words, music, and movements in about ninety percent of the form in which they were presented to the Billings Unitarian-Universalist Fellowship. Considering the time of day, I was tired, went back to bed, and immediately fell asleep again.

When I presented what I had written to several dance leaders during the following month or two, I was told that The Sacred Clown Dance had too many words

and was not part of any ancient religious tradition. Thus it was another year and a half before the dance was ever performed. It actually seems most appropriate, in retrospect, that the first performance would be at a Unitarian Church, considering the lines, “God in all forms has called us to be. Light in all forms in you and in me, walking between the worlds.”

And when we’d finished, all I could do was smile and think to myself, “YES!!!”

Recommended Reading:

The Dreams of Dragons--Riddles of Natural History by Lyall Watson. In a fascinating blend of science and mythology, the author offers new ways of understanding both past and present aspects of humanity and the world in which we live, reminding us of the blessing that even the most unlikely anomalies may be to who we are, how we understand, and ultimately how we interact with each other and all that is around us.

“Life is a collaborative effort.”
---Sister Who

“The Sacred Clown Dance” Movements:

The starting position (before the music starts because the introduction is so short):

All join hands in a circle, right palm upward and left palm downward, facing inward, having people in the circle paired with partners. The left person of each pair then backs under his or her right arm and turns to face outwards, now having arms crossed in front, still holding hands throughout this maneuver.

During the first two phrases (from “On” to “together”):

On the first beat of each measure of music, all dancers switch positions in generally the same manner in which the starting position was achieved; those who are facing outward switch to face inward and vice versa.

During the phrase “as Sacred Clowns we dance to thee.”:

Dancers spin individually in whichever direction they wish (clockwise or counterclockwise) with arms raised, then rejoin hands, all facing inward.

During the next two phrases (from “Backwards” to “receiving”):

Without releasing hands, dancers first face and bow just the head towards their respective partners (meaning one of their hands will be held in front and the other behind their backs), then turn to face and bow just the head towards the other person whose hand they are holding, switching from one to the other on the first beat of each measure of music.

During the phrase “as Sacred Clowns we dance to thee.”:

Dancers spin individually in whichever direction they wish (clockwise or counterclockwise) with arms raised, then all face inward without rejoining hands.

During the phrase “God in all forms”:

All raise arms and look upwards.

During the phrase “has called us to be.”:

Coinciding with the word “called,” all lower their arms, palms facing downward, and spread their fingers widely, suggesting a web of interconnecting lines of energy between all of the dancers in the circle.

During the phrase “Light in all forms”:

Dancers individually form a circular sun symbol using their thumbs and index fingers

and, turning toward the left as they do the following motion, trace a wide arc from the center of the circle (like a rising sun), over their heads, and end the motion by facing directly outwards with their hands still forming the sun symbol at about the level of their foreheads or “third eye” and arms fully extended.

During the phrase “in you and in me.”:

Dancers turn to their respective partners, extend the right hand to touch their partner’s heart, and cover the partner’s hand upon their own heart with the left hand. In that this is an intimate gesture, dancers are encouraged to use their left hand during this motion to guide their partner’s hand to the place on their own chest where they want the point of contact to be made.

During the phrase “walking between the worlds.”:

Dancers assume a namaste greeting position (palms together, fingers pointing upwards, in front of the center of the chest) and move in the direction they are facing (alternate persons thus moving either clockwise or counterclockwise around the circle), passing left shoulders then right shoulders to weave between and past their partners and one more person, making a third person their new partner, and greeting each one with a slight bow or namaste greeting as they pass. At this point, during the musical interlude between the words and singing, all rejoin hands (right palm upward and left palm downward) and move to the original starting position with a new partner so that the dance may repeat. At the end of the dance, all bow once toward the center and once facing outward, hands together in the position of the namaste greeting.

