

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

Overview

A mirror reflects back to us, things we would otherwise fail to see. Within this month's newsletter, are thoughts and possibilities which will hopefully bring to light distinctions between things that can weaken us or make us stronger. It is sometimes in merely glancing at things and (metaphorically) failing to see the weeds which have grown up within the field of wheat, which prevents us from reaping a better harvest.

I glance into the mirror every day in order to brush my teeth, but often do not take even a brief moment to invite deeper understanding of the face staring back at me.

Hopefully the words I have shared within this newsletter will provide just such a moment for you, allowing a moment to invest in empowering yourself for more wondrous living than you would otherwise have done.

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

Narcissistic Meditation

There are probably more possible practices of meditation than there are people, since at its most basic core essence, meditation refers to an action of choosing and engaging in mental focus. The object of one's focus can be inner emptiness, general openness, a particular verse of sacred text, a mantra, a prayer, an image, a wish, or anything else that is mentally conceivable (even the mystical, inconceivable, and incomprehensible, to the extent that one can mentally and emotionally send out an invitation for new information). I have frequently observed, however, that significant self-awareness is lacking within many persons' meditative practices.

Such awareness begins with reflection after (or perhaps during) the specific meditative session, when one embraces questions such as "what was I thinking about?" and "why did this or that subject predominate throughout the time of my meditation?" and "what effect does my meditation have upon my overall life?" If there is no effect, is one truly doing meditation or just going through the motions?

There are also times when we are meditating and do not even realize we are doing so; times when our thoughts remain preoccupied with a particular subject or feeling, perhaps attempting to resolve some aspect of it. I recall the brief story of two Buddhist monks, who by their vows were forbidden from touching women at all, who were journeying through China one day and came to a shallow river. A young woman was standing there in a beautiful dress, trying to think of a way to cross over the water without getting her clothing wet. One of the monks decided to be helpful and picked her up and carried her to the other side. The woman went on her way and the monks traveled further as well. An hour later, the second monk finally broke the silence by questioning the first monk's willingness to disregard his vows and carry the woman across the stream. The first monk responded that he had only carried her for a moment, while the second monk had been carrying her ever since that moment.

The problem with narcissistic meditation, therefore, is that it focuses only upon one's own perception and experience, disregarding the interconnectedness of all creatures and life throughout the universe. In actuality, narcissistic meditation not only fails to create genuine connection with anything spiritual or transcendent, but also fails to create genuine connection with the divine parts of the self, which beg for collaborative relationship with life.

If the goal of meditation is no more than self-improvement, we will be unable to help the woman across the stream (if we even see her at all), we will be unable to appreciate the land through which we have journeyed, and we will be unable to genuinely and unconditionally love, as only those with a spark of divinity are able. Thankfully, the divine is magically sprinkled all around, like fireflies on a warm summer night in Wisconsin--more possibilities than we are able to count, all around us, if we will take the time to look beyond ourselves and really see them.

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

Relational Meditation

As a form of communication between the human and Divine, between the limited and the transcendent, and between a student and a source of much greater wisdom, meditation can also be considered to be a form of prayer. Sometimes, possibly without realizing what we're really doing, we might contribute the energy of positive intention to a particular problematic situation. Sometimes, possibly without realizing what we're really doing, we may be boldly or naively conversing with a spiritual beingness far beyond our very limited comprehension. Sometimes, possibly without realizing what we are doing, we may even be shaping the particular integration of spiritual and physical that is each one of us. When the comment was made by a friend, some time ago, that "I don't pray that way," I responded, "I am not so concerned with how you pray, as that you do."

In reaching for relational meditation, therefore, I begin with awareness of what I bring to the conversation, but I do not let the discussion end there. Rather, having identified who I am, what I am feeling at that moment, and what I wish to express, I also take a moment to really look at who and what are around me, to really listen to the conversations, topics, and comments buzzing all around me, and to respond to whatever needs are apparent, with whatever resources are available.

Past and current experience continue to affirm for me that all of life is extremely (if also subtly) interconnected. Reflecting or meditating upon the ways in which my decisions, presence, absence, words, or actions impact the world around me, has the potential to move me toward greater harmony, integration, wisdom, and wholeness. All the persons and things around me are not always an accurate reflection of myself, being each in their own ways distinct from me, but they can serve as mirrors by which greater truths of myself, of the world within which I live, and of the possibilities of each become more apparent. When I remember that I do not exist in isolation, that (to quote this month's calendar page) "My place within time and space is both dependent upon others and depended upon by others," I empower myself to bring greater awareness, greater love, and greater wisdom to each interaction or ongoing relationship.

Within times of economic difficulty or societal unrest, this becomes especially important. Specifically because life is interconnected so

extensively, it is imperative that we view each other not just as resources to be used, used up, and replaced, but as team members whose survival is just as important as my own and upon whose survival my own survival depends.

For many, "survival" sounds like an archaic word more related to less technologically advanced eras of history. Failing to see others' needs, however, does nothing to make their experience of being in need less real or less oppressive. What alleviates oppression, is love. Meditating on love is therefore not about sitting quietly in a safe space, reflecting mentally upon a pleasant emotion, but rather about pondering a potential force within each of us which is produced by valuing each other, which drives us to oppose internal, external, societal, or political forms of oppression in whatever ways we are able.

I sometimes hear references to "walking meditation," which generally refers to doing an action meditatively; doing an action with a particular (usually chosen) mental focus, in order to invite a positive effect upon the living of life. In some cases, this may have a positive effect upon those around us. In other cases, the positive effect will be most profoundly felt deep within our hearts, in ways that are quite possibly invisible to others. Once again, it is generally not so important how the effect happens, as that it does in fact happen. Relational meditation, therefore, can be done while performing charitable acts toward others and is identified as relational meditation by the thoughts we hold within our minds while we do the chosen activity.

It is easy to be thrown off-balance by the deluge of demands within each moment that living daily life typically includes--God knows I experience this far too often myself--but the invitation is always present to rise to being better than our circumstances, better than merely instinctive reactions, and better than what we have observed in others at any point within our lives. The spirit of life within us is very much in the business of transforming circumstances, perceptions, and relationships--if we are willing and able to apply ourselves to that shift in focus.

Relational meditation is therefore no easy task, but it is one which is rich with meaning, which reaches beyond ourselves, and which has the divine power to make us healers of the diverse, daunting, and dynamic worlds within which we live.

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

Narcissistic Religion

Imagine for a moment the original Narcissus, staring at his reflection (until it ultimately brought about his death), and donning various liturgical garments with the intention of enhancing that reflection in some way. His image might superficially take on a religious or perhaps even spiritual aura, but the inner qualities of spiritual substance, integrity, and soul would remain out of reach. Time and time again I have observed that when inner substance is lacking, there is an enormous temptation to compensate by employing ever greater forms and degrees of liturgical costuming.

As much as symbolic objects may be employed but are not considered essential within a more genuine sacramental ritual, for narcissistic religion, nothing exists beyond the liturgical costuming. Meanings may be dressed within objects in the same way that persons are dressed within clothing, without embracing the implications of that meaning within one's daily living of life.

Phrased another way, narcissistic religion goes through the motions of attempting to satisfy an inner thirst without ever drinking the water.

It is my understanding that soul existed before spiritual community, that spiritual community existed before church, and that church existed before religion. In each case, the presence of an example created the need or opportunity for the next level to happen. According to this perspective, it was because individuals somehow noticed or experienced their own souls and that others had soul experiences as well, that they began to discuss their experiences openly in hopes of gaining more understanding of what each had in fact experienced. It was because such gatherings of individuals became more common that societal structures were created so that the groups could communicate with each other. It was because these social structures occurred or were created within various cultural settings, that religions' existence became part of humanity's sociological landscape.

When too much attention has shifted to the categorization of communities, churches, and

religions, however, the soul within each of us can too easily be forgotten--along with the yearning to relate to transcendent beingness which is the fundamental spark upon which the survival of each soul's life depends. When that spark goes out, deep inside, we are left cold and empty in ways that no blanket can warm and nothing else can fill.

As the result rather than the cause of this progression, religion is unable to recreate anything more than a lifeless imitation of its original seed. The narcissistic preoccupation with itself, as with the classical tale, results in death. By itself, religion gazes upon the water, but does not drink it, because that might change everything. If the soul is a spark of light, embracing the soul requires the removal of darkness. Far too many people will go to extraordinary lengths, not because they are afraid of the dark itself, but rather because they have imagined too many terrible things to be hiding there. The very extensive history of human experience, however, repeatedly affirms that bringing things out into the light, allows for positive transformation--just as bringing a cup of water to one's lips and drinking transforms the experience of thirst into the experience of feeling refreshed and ready to continue life's journey.

Narcissus avoided his life's journey by remaining with the thin and fragile reflection temporarily painted on the surface of the water. Religion can be similarly thin and fragile or deeply empowering, if one is willing to drink deeply with the guiding intention of nurturing the soul.

While love was waiting, perhaps only a few steps away, wanting to embrace him, Narcissus instead languished at the altar of appearances until there was nothing left to save. His eyes saw nothing beyond his own reflection and the reality and healing power of love were consequently beyond his reach. In closing his eyes to the surrounding world, Narcissus became blind in a way that neither soul nor body could survive.

Religion was not created to command the soul, but rather to serve it. Spiritual communities were not created to be exclusive, to render judgment upon who does or does not belong, but rather to welcome those with questions and to provide a safe place within which to address those questions. Soul is not something to be repressed because of its apparent fondness for uniqueness and incongruity, but rather to be that inner fingertip by which human and Divine can touch and love.

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

*"To those with eyes closed,
all acts of love are invisible."*

-- Sister Who

Relational Religion

Within an earlier issue of this newsletter, I recommended using our religions to support our relationship with the Divine, rather than using our relationship with the Divine to support our religions. While I do not have any particular need for the eradication of this or that religion, if a particular religion is unable to support anyone's relationship with the Divine, it can fade away on its own. My focus and life goal remain with the pursuit of wisdom and unconditional love.

All that being said, it seems a little too obvious to insist that good religion is relational--with regard both to the Divine and to each other. In being relational, good religion must also be inclusive. If God can speak to the prophet Balaam through the mouth of a jackass, the divine word could equally come to each of us through the most unlikely channels. We will miss what God has to say to us, if we cast judgment upon which voice, vocabulary, and visual appearance are used.

While a certain piece of spirituality always begins at home, in private, and where no one but God can see, when we discover that inner treasure and then bring it along to our communal gathering to share with everyone else there the wisdom and love which have been added to our lives, the gathering is enriched and ultimately concludes in a way that gives back to the surrounding world, people empowered by faith.

When any church or religion simply goes through the motions without genuinely facilitating any divine connection, what is given to the surrounding world are people who are still spiritually hungry, people who have only been temporarily distracted from the truth of themselves, and people whose souls are still in need of God.

Even relational religion, however, cannot demand that God show up. The Divine is not, after all, some giant candy machine in the sky that spits out something sweet for us, anytime we manage to insert the correct coins.

Relational religion is exactly that: a religion of relationships between ourselves and persons, rather than between ourselves and programs, objects, or repetitious actions--all of which are only there to help us perceive and experience the invisible. What makes any religion live, therefore, is the love and wisdom emanating from its inner light, bringing that light to the souls of each of us.

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

On a Personal Note

This has been a month of peculiar contrasts with possibilities that have all been partly wrong and partly right (or vice versa).

With regard to bodybuilding preparations, my exercise machine broke and was replaced by the manufacturer with a new machine, but the new machine did not have the same functionality. I'm therefore making modifications that will hopefully get preparations back on track.

With regard to doctoral writing, I am making progress, but not as quickly as I would like.

With regard to ongoing video production, sixteen new episodes have been completed, but three others had to be discarded due to excessively poor quality of content. Each episode strives to dig deeper into a particular subject, to discover timeless principles and insights which could be revisited for many years; to provide food for thought and inspiration for personal growth to viewers of every description.

With regard to ongoing development or transformation of my home into the interfaith spiritual center, "God Space Sanctuary," significant progress in creative landscaping has been accomplished, but much work remains to be done.

With regard to financial circumstances, I'm having to once again revisit doing without and stretching dollars until the faces on the bills scream for mercy, but I am surviving.

With regard to neighbors, prayers for protection are much appreciated, due to recurring bad behavior by certain renters now living nearby.

With regard to my motorcycle, which will hopefully eventually save money by lowering fuel costs, the cycle is now in the hands of a different mechanic with a hopefully greater aptitude for finally solving its electrical and mechanical riddles.

With regard to the dogs, Dinadan had some rather serious ear infection troubles, but everyone seems to be fine now.

I remain as dedicated to this work as ever.

May God's blessings, love, and peace be with you now and always, *Sister Who*

Subscription Information:

"Sister Who's Perspective" is a free monthly newsletter. If you have appreciated this newsletter, please consider making a donation to empower the work to continue. (Make checks payable to Denver NeVaar).

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