

# 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

It has been said that "the moment at hand is the only thing we really own," yet vast industries have been created for the explicit purpose of managing the so-called ownership of material things. Every example of ownership, however, has limitations that prevent the thing owned from being transported or utilized beyond certain boundaries—suggesting thereby that ownership may be a myth or, at best, a convenient illusion which has been declared necessary for physical life on earth.

So who really owns any particular thing to which a person may at least temporarily lay claim? Conversely, does failing to hold a legitimate claim to anything reduce responsibility for one's contribution to it? If money does not genuinely belong to any person, but rather is the property of the world, which will ultimately retain custody when any particular steward's life comes to an end, what gift does true ownership have to give? You decide.

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

## Verbal Ownership

In exercising the ability to choose my own words and to speak my own words, there is the distinct possibility that I can legitimately claim that the words are my own. If I have chosen someone else's words as being synonymous with my own, answers are not quite so clear—especially since I often know very little of the particular words' origins or formative influences. Words which are spoken as a response to this or that circumstance, for example, may take on a very different meaning when spoken within other circumstances—and both meanings may nevertheless be wise, loving, and appropriate to their respective contexts.

All we can genuinely verbally own, therefore, is our decision and action to retain the words within current conversation and interpersonal relationship. Failing to do so, may allow the words to be forgotten, at least to some degree, but even this cannot reliably alter circumstances toward being as if the words were never spoken at all. By speaking,

we shape the memory and life experience of every other person (visible and invisible) within reach of the sound of our voices.

Words can be followed by other words, but they can not be erased from reality once they have in fact been spoken. The words which follow, however, can radically shape the character and integrity of the preceding words. There is always the potential for language to be cumulative rather than merely sequential—and all of this must be owned, if we are to also have the power to push our verbal expressions in a positive direction.

What remains inseparable from owning anything, it must be remembered, is personal responsibility. We cannot own our words without being responsible for our words and, to varying degrees, for the effects of our words. If my words are misinterpreted or misapplied, such that someone is hurt by them, then I have a moral responsibility to do whatever I can to correct that injury and to discourage any further misinterpretation or erroneous application of words that were originally mine.

A common problem, however, is that while many may have been eager to hear the original statement, many of the same people may be unwilling to hear the correction. The aspect of ownership which is obvious within such moments, is that ownership is generally only as good as the extent to which it is respected by others. The government may agree that I own property, but if my neighbors do not also agree, I will have to contend with a variety of abuses. Similarly, I and a lifepartner or spouse may agree upon the words we have spoken regarding health care decisions, inheritance of property, and so forth, but if certain administrators do not also agree, the occurrence of certain negative events will leave us seriously victimized instead of able to cope.

What remains within the reach of all voices is the ability to love. By the power of love, all other powers are brought to harmony and healing rather than conflict and injury.

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

## Mental Ownership

Perhaps the greatest challenge to ownership of any kind is that the less material the object of ownership is, the more contested will its particular ownership be. Words that can be heard or read, therefore, are well ahead of words and / or images that are only thought. Similarly, ownership is generally understood as being exclusive to an individual or group. If the particular object(s) are owned by one, they are understood in most cases to not be owned by some other person or group.

An added challenge, of course, is that my thoughts arise from a myriad of sources—including the thoughts and words of others. In much the same way that my body was originally derived from the bodies of my parents and that throughout childhood I was considered in some sense to be both their property and their responsibility, my thoughts may have arisen from the thoughts of countless others with whom I've spoken or whose writings I have read. At what point does my body and / or my thoughts become my own?

In the case of the body, there are legally and societally recognized ages of adulthood at which, purely due to chronological age, I am societally declared to be no longer someone else's property. In the case of the mind, the distinction is much more vague. There is a sense in which each of us may be the cumulative result of literally thousands of years of human thought. Thanks to human imagination and ingenuity, however, there is also the abiding possibility of thinking something new—something that, as far as anyone knows, has never previously existed or been expressed.

In some cases, it will be a new combination of otherwise familiar things. There is a sense in which each generation stands upon the shoulders of the previous one. The history of humanity's national identities is, from a certain perspective, nothing more than the record of one group displacing another at regular intervals. Often, within such times of transition and development, the ideas and resources of the conquered people are subtly integrated into the general population of the new residents.

In other cases, with flagrant disregard for national boundaries, spiritual choices create affinity between unlikely or perhaps even otherwise adversarial populations. Persons from two very different countries, for example, may therefore hate each other until they discover that they both regularly practice a basically Roman Catholic form of Christianity. Even then, however,

they will still have the challenge of allowing the belief that their faith can exist with integrity within a context that does not include either a common language or common social customs.

When I claim to own my thoughts, therefore, I find that I have the ability, the civil right, and in some cases even the duty to disagree. Allowing misunderstanding to stand and agreement to be presumed, is equivalent to granting "squatters rights" within my boundaries to any contrasting perspective that will ultimately claim to own what was previously considered to be mine. What is at stake within mental ownership is ultimately individuality and basic freedom.

Conversely, of course, as noted earlier, with ownership comes responsibility. I am not only responsible to oppose that which would deny my personal ownership of my thoughts and opinions, but also to nurture and develop the mental resource I claim to own, in ways that are similar to doing home maintenance or tending to livestock. It is not just that someone else is forbidden from presuming upon my property, but also that I am responsible for the welfare of my property, to the very best of my ability.

An unfortunately common circumstance within the world within which we all live, is that innumerable persons are for various reasons eager to disregard ownership of all kinds—resulting in a more or less continuous need to maintain or perhaps even defend certain boundaries. The abundance of religious propaganda and sales-oriented marketing campaigns are only the more obvious examples of attempts to ignore mental and emotional boundaries in order to establish other personal and societal definitions—many of which are at best narcissistic and at worst positively unhealthy for whoever surrenders to their persuasive arguments.

If life is ultimately primarily concerned with the growth of the soul (obviously I believe it is), I insist that the possession of a thinking brain is accompanied by the responsibility to sort through the myriad of available insights that fill our lives and thereby construct ever improving abilities of love and wisdom. The notion of learning something new every day is the recognition that being alive is synonymous with growing. Abdicating one's opportunities to think for one's self, to grow, and to truly be alive, results in mindless death. We can do much better than that. We can be positively miraculous.

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

## Material Ownership

The general agreement seems to be that one cannot give what one does not possess. A challenging corollary to this, however, is that we sometimes have not taken an accurate inventory of what we possess. It is problematic to speak of material ownership specifically because material things are only exclusively material to those who are too short-sighted to see their invisible qualities. To those with limited vision, for example, my dogs are simply pets. To those with open minds and loving hearts, however, my dogs are my family—and the implications of that are extensive indeed.

The small porcelain windmill on a shelf in the corner of my living room is presumably indistinguishable from a million other copies of it, regularly sold to tourists in Amsterdam. What makes mine unique, is that it is a gift from my former lifepartner for my thirty-sixth birthday, when we had traveled to the Netherlands for my participation in the bodybuilding event of the 1998 Gay Games there.

A serious difficulty of material ownership for anyone whose life has been richly blessed, however, is the inescapable fact that human abilities to care for material things are always limited. Few of us have the ability to retain every gift or purchase touched by our hands throughout the changing fortunes of life. Just as annual seasons oscillate between spring, summer, autumn, and winter, a life growing and developing through the passage of time will similarly shift back and forth between accomplishment and loss, collection and distribution.

In seeking to respect this inescapable oscillation of seasons of materiality, like a maple tree dropping its leaves in autumn, I let go of many things when I finished college and decided to move west to Colorado. I simply didn't have the ability to bring all of my accumulated blessings along with me. Years later, through holiday gifts, dating relationships, and personal purchases, I had accumulated a large collection of teddy bears and other stuffed animals and finally recognized that I had reached my limits in this area of my life. My response was to create a ritual within which I

*"Without ownership,  
generosity is impossible."*

--Sister Who

thanked each one for the love it had brought into my life, prayerfully commissioned it to do the same for others, and transported the majority to a domestic violence shelter to provide comfort for children caught within the crossfire of their parents' relational struggles.

Once again, ownership requires that we pay attention to conditions of climate, resources, and relational shifts and act as wisely as possible in order to accomplish the greatest good with whatever has been entrusted to us. Ownership is not and never has been a permanent condition. We may attribute certain words to historical persons. None of those persons, however, have any voice on how their words are now used. No house, possession, or monument has the ability to remain permanently as it is within any particular moment, but rather will be shaped by changing fortunes, weather, and populations according to the force and values of each.

Ownership is not a matter of creating something eternal, but rather of putting our fingerprints upon the moments, places, and people that our lives touch, in whatever ways we can, for whatever amount of time we are able to do so. The best we can generally do, is to show what kind of persons we are and to hope that life is enriched by the ways we demonstrate stewardship of words, thoughts, relationships, and things.

In gradually transforming my home into a genuinely interfaith center where each person can find whatever relationship with the Divine is personally most empowering, I am inviting a different relationship with material reality than the economic systems of humanity are generally able to comprehend. I cannot say whether my methods are appropriate for anyone else, but I have already observed others being blessed by the sacred and peaceful spaces I have managed to create here. Perhaps this place will fuel others' imagination and vision, empowering present and future humanity to do better than has been done in the past.

In order to do what I have done, however, I recognize that ownership was essential. Nothing that has been done could have been done without the consent of an owner. As limited and problematic as owning anything may in some ways be, human civilization seems to require it as a foundation upon which to build constructive relationships. The question which remains, of course, is in what ways or to what extent we will respond to this opportunity and invitation.

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

## Spiritual Ownership

The idea has been around for a long time, of selling one's soul to the devil for social, professional, or material gain. This suggests that until such event, one's soul belongs to God. My objection is the implication that because we do not own our souls, we are not responsible for our souls—and a great amount of theological and social recklessness has followed.

Is my personal consciousness, my soul, or my spirit something I originally received from God? Perhaps, but I'm not sure this can be proven one way or the other, perhaps because it is not particularly important to the living of my life here. The dynamic that I do find to be very important, however, is the sort of involvement that ownership inspires. Specifically because my soul is described as being my soul, even if only for the duration of this life, I have a stake in tending to its development and welfare in whatever ways I can.

For some, the demonstration of this resembles a duty-bound task; the notion that one does whatever one does because one must. Even beyond any notion of paying a debt, living life in this manner suggests a sort of enslavement. No matter how benevolent a master may be, slavery is still slavery and love is more likely to be found in the opposite direction.

For others, the motivation is avoidance of pain or punishment, but a recent conversation with a friend finally made it clear to me how a romanticized notion of "no pain in heaven" was objectionable. It is not that I wish to feel pain, but not having the ability to feel pain would constitute a disempowering insensitivity that would similarly reduce my ability to feel or express compassion. The definition of heaven and hell, therefore, is likely to be found within the presence or absence of God, rather than within any other characteristic.

As the embodiment of greatest love and wisdom, the mystery of God within my life remains the justification for tolerating all the rest. When nothing makes sense in spite of having done my very best, when disastrous threats lay siege to my life and promise annihilation, and when a cloudy sky hides the new day's dawn, I know that God has the final word on every situation and that life is so much bigger than the part that is seen. This is the reality I choose to spiritually own, to order to find the strength to do whatever needs to be done.

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

## On a Personal Note

After receiving some good advice from a former neighbor and friend—and enduring about four or five hours of intense struggle in oppressive summer temperatures on my gravel driveway—the door of the Geo Tracker has been repaired for less than forty dollars and seems to be working well.

On August 9, I successfully reached the summit of Mount Antero, making this the fifteenth "fourteener" that I have ascended in full ritual garb. Curiously, as I was preparing to depart the summit, I encountered a Christian youth group from Kansas that had previously gone to great lengths to avoid any direct contact with Sister Who on the summit of Mount Sherman in July of 2009. Apparently it was sufficiently important to God that we meet, to orchestrate such a precisely timed encounter. I left a calling card with my contact information with each of three of the youths, just in case any further communication might be helpful.

The Labor Day weekend Metaphysical Fair was generally a complete success, although it would have been most helpful to have more assistance with transporting and assembling / disassembling the portable chapel.

A friend has expressed interest in providing camera operation for video production, so I am hopeful that many new episodes of "Sister Who Presents" will be recorded very soon.

The 2012 calendar featuring Sister Who, entitled "Empowering Reflections on Human Life for 2012" is now complete. If you would like me to print and assemble the desktop version and mail it to you (using two first-class postage stamps), please contact me and provide the mailing address to which you would like the calendar sent. If you would like to print your own calendar pages directly from the website ([www.SisterWho.com](http://www.SisterWho.com)), I hope to have the calendar page of the website updated within the next week or two.

All in all, it's been a good month, in spite of limitations, illness, and so forth—so I persist.

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

### Subscription Information:

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