

SISTER WHO'S PERSPECTIVE

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Overview

Life isn't always wonderful, but its integrity does not require it to be so. Among what might be described as its signature qualities, however, is that life endures. Again and again, when all seems lost, life finds new forms by which to continue. May these essays likewise be helpful.

Living through Numbness

Signing one's name while unable to feel one's fingers is a most peculiar challenge. In a similar way, going through the motions of daily life while somehow separated from its meaning and purpose, can leave one without otherwise essential reasons and drive to continue. Within such times, future possibilities may be one's only justification for perseverance.

Perhaps this is why I object so strongly to current practices concerning care of elderly persons, who are often physically maintained while being starved mentally, emotionally, and relationally. Finite physical life is inescapably part of each individual's story, but most societal contexts have not included Native populations' ability for individuals to announce, "It is a good day to die." Making one's own choices becomes more important as wisdom and experience are accumulated through personal journeys.

Yet societal practices also sometimes rob those left behind of both physical and emotional resources. I recall, for example, the common occurrence during the early 1980s of a surviving spouse of a gay man killed by AIDS returning from the funeral to find the locks changed, as relatives of the deceased claimed all possessions left behind. Why is being so hateful not considered criminal, as those with no financial need take from those deep in misfortune and tragedy?

As an ordained minister, I can only hope there is a special place in hell for those who profit from others' suffering. Far better would be for such individuals to learn compassion and make restitution, but that rarely seems to

happen. What none of the persons who perpetrate such hatefulness can nonetheless escape are the ways that such involvement eternally defines them.

At the time of occurrence, however, it may be a divine gift that one often feels quite numb, allowing such moments to pass without the sensations of pain that would inescapably otherwise be obvious. Yet if I could feel the pain, at least I would be more able to determine what precisely is wrong. The added aggravation, however, might be that the perpetrators or cause or unwilling to desist and withdraw--because I am considered to be one who doesn't matter.

I recall reading years ago of a judge who sentenced a murderer to only two years in prison, because the victim "was only a homosexual." If a crime is only a crime because of who is affected, rather than because of the action that was done, then true morality is merely an intellectual construction and not a fundamental relational dynamic furthering the existence of genuinely healthy communities. Until a community affirms that "everyone matters," it cannot effectively nurture any Leonardo da Vinci, Albert Einstein, Mozart, or Madame Curie born into its midst.

A curious aspect of numbness, is that it allows life to continue and does not coincide with death--although it may sometimes make such finality seem more attractive. Sometimes one is a witness, inscribing a record or a message to future generations, so that recurrence can be prevented. Sometimes achieving complete understanding requires more contemplation than a single life is able to encompass.

The point is that one is still alive when the numbness finally passes and all the good things which can follow have not been prevented. The story has not ended and earlier events are not the final ones. From one perspective, if nothing else, one has opportunity to begin again--no matter what age or limitations have occurred.

What is most essential is that life remains far more than merely physical.

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

Living through Pain

Standing too close, it would be easy to see nothing other than one's experience of pain, but the definitions of the universe and relationships must not be reduced to such levels. More concisely phrased, pain will never be all that I am nor do I want struggles to be all that others remember. So I am committed to doing good as long as I can and in whatever ways I can.

It may ultimately be that struggles and pain are not remembered at all. This is nonetheless not the same as being insensitive or lacking in compassion regarding another's experience of pain. Yet no amount of love or compassion will stop pain from occurring, because that can only be done by other interventions.

Identifying what those other methods are and whether or not one is able to do them, are very different questions. Placing a price on such methods remains cruel and evil, as affirmed by the witticism I have recalled far too often within the current time: "When money becomes the measure, relationships always suffer." I have yet to find any exception.

What remains most essential during difficulty is truly standing together--not in ways that deny the reality of others' struggles, but equally not in ways that allow those adversities to dominate everything else. Life remains multidimensional in more ways than is ever understood at the time. If I ever allow myself to do only what is convenient, better possibilities will not happen.

Love is not centered or grounded in any sort of convenience, but blossoms whenever one moves beyond into truly giving. It is not a matter of what one does when circumstances are easy, but rather of one's expressions in spite of difficulty, that tell who one truly is. These are what will truly be remembered.

From one perspective, pain points toward death, but truly living is oriented in the opposite direction. A reason pain within the body alerts the brain to conditions that are dysfunctional, is so that death may be actively opposed. Within every moment, opposing pain is affirming life.

Should life without pain therefore be one's goal? Yes and no. As desirable as life without pain may be, a life without any possibility of pain would not be truly living at all.

Humanity grows and evolves by learning how pain can be prevented and addressed. In

the absence of any possibility of pain, love loses meaning and purpose. Without banks on both sides, a river has no course to follow.

A primary challenge is therefore for the river to focus upon flowing, rather than obsessing about any rocks, bends, or dead trees it may pass along the way. Within the life of the river, such things are events to pass and not places to stop, remain, or stagnate. What ultimately is the river is its complete length, growth, and course.

Closely aligned nonetheless is withdrawing from abuse, especially that which has been integrated into others' dysfunctional definitions of basic words such as "family." One's true family is never defined by biological relationship or mere words and cannot include acting abusively, as if allegedly being family grants permission to mistreat any person involved. If there is any truly universal rule, it can only be a mandate to love unconditionally and inclusively.

Compounding living through pain are often shifts by which the true nature of relationships is revealed. Those one only thought were friends, for example, will not be collaborators during times of difficulty. The goal is nonetheless to not only survive the particular challenge, but to effect greater empowerment thereby.

Sometimes this is accomplished by what one learns from the experience. In other cases, one may be freed from burdensome relationships more oriented to enabling problematic patterns of interaction. Loss may ultimately create space for better possibilities.

Yet this is difficult to hear when wounds are too recent and have not yet begun to heal. The most compassionate response may therefore be remaining present but silent, allowing time and space for loved ones to find appropriate if also unconventional resolutions. Doing so may be essential to transforming pain into growth.

The witticism "what doesn't kill, makes one stronger," is only true because of redefinition and proactive response that are wisely employed. If instead life is expected to do the work of growth one is not willing to do, loss is the more likely outcome. Every hospital depends upon healing activities within each individual's body the staff are unable to independently accomplish.

All things considered, pain is never all one is, but rather conveys messages to be heard.

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

Living through Darkness

Perhaps the biggest problem with life, is that it's always initially done by amateurs. Even those who believe in reincarnation must come to terms with how little is remembered from one life to the next. It seems as if everything must be newly learned within ever-shifting contexts.

Yet I continue to believe that each person is a spark of the Divine, composed of the same sort of atoms that burn within each star. Each is thus a candle with a unique light to share. As much as science informs that every snowflake is unique, it simultaneously strives to disbelieve in every dynamic that cannot be replicated, thereby contradicting itself.

The truth consequently remains that every path through darkness is a solitary one. No one can say exactly what will be discovered, nor what experiences are waiting a little beyond the edge of the small circle one's light casts--and it is a relatively small circle created by one's personal light, in comparison to how very extensive the surrounding darkness of unknown possibility is. As stars appear within the sky overhead and other candle-bearers are encountered, one can be certain the darkness is not emptiness, merely because it is unknown.

All that being said, while there was a certain darkness around the relational patterns of my original biological relationships, this was mostly chosen and the resulting overall effect was very abusive in ways that were not especially obvious. One can choose to be ignorant rather than empowered to love, simply because forms of love may be objectionable. Yet this must be distinguished from expressions that are labeled "love," but in reality abusive.

To embrace what was erroneously labeled "love," required committing psychological suicide, so I chose to separate, but leave the door open, so to speak, to positive future developments. Whether more desirable evolution of these relationships will ever occur, remains in darkness, but I persist in maintaining

***"Darkness can't extinguish light.
Love endures despite adversity,
yet may be purified thereby."***

– Sister Who

the possibility. That current forms are abusive, however, is not in darkness at all, but rather shines as a warning light to be avoided.

Sometimes while traversing dark landscapes I remind myself that the ground beneath my feet is the same shape as during times of daylight. I thus move my steps in nearly the same ways and shrug off fear of the darkness itself, since this affects only perception and not any physical or relational reality with which I interact. The presence or absence of perception is not in itself life-threatening, so fear is unjustified, but rather points to the importance of sound investigation.

Conversely, a cursory glance more often invites misperceptions, misinterpretations, and misunderstandings. Glancing is thus most often not truly seeing. Darkness affirms the need to perceive as accurately as possible, even or especially when light is conspicuously absent.

The common response when moments of anxiety arise is to insist that "there's nothing there," simply because anything that is, is beyond the perception of the one speaking. A more appropriate response might be, "When it makes itself obvious, you will be able to wisely and intelligently take action. Until anything does so, no response is required."

The added consideration, however, is that perception is ideally always increasing. Living through darkness is thus ideally a state of intense growth, often in unanticipated ways. To be within a moment that needs more perception than one currently has, specifically invites the development of new perceptual abilities.

A summary statement might therefore be that when light returns, one will be more than one has ever been--which may have a dramatic effect upon all subsequent life experiences. At the heart of such realization it that life is always concerned with growth and not merely with pleasurable experience. There may be a sense, that striving to merely "be happy" interferes with significant and necessary growth.

Additionally central to moments of darkness is the revelation of specific priorities, values, and principles. More concisely, one is invited to consciously know who one is. My full name is consequently an invitation to be more aware of what I believe about myself and ways this continues to change and evolve throughout life.

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

Waiting for Sunrise

The metaphor of days' beginning has been applied to so many transitions from darkness to light and from mystery to knowledge, that it is difficult to decide where to begin. Nonetheless, it is a transition unfolding at its own pace that will not be hurried along. Patience is often a virtue, but at certain times confidence and being active are far more recommendable.

Central to the waiting is taking inventory of any preparations that might prove helpful. The development of abilities, the organization of resources, and choosing possible responses to potential outcomes can all be accomplished while light is insufficient for certain actions. I may never feel completely ready for whatever ultimately comes, but this does not excuse making no effort to be prepared.

Even if I do not need the specific internal resources the preparation has accomplished, I will have greater strength and confidence with which to meet challenges that, for the moment, are mostly undefined. No one ever regrets having more ability than is needed. Having ability, however, never occurs without effort.

Central to waiting for sunrise is developing abilities to truly see and hear--to distinguish between subtle shifts of light and notice the singing of birds who have been silent during preceding darkness. All things considered, it is not only one's self who has been waiting for the new day to begin. What will follow, with or without human recognition, will be collaboration beyond any orchestral performance.

The opportunity extended to each individual is to be part of that collaboration. The world of capitalistic human business affairs, in contrast, barely scratches the surface, generally looking no further than its own narcissistic interests and concerns. Certain researchers and biologists, conversely, are increasingly convinced of how very essential biodiversity is.

With each species that becomes extinct, the fate of the rest becomes more dubious. In a similar way, diminishing diversity means that humanity has increasingly limited ways to respond to future challenges. It may be that diversity is a mostly unappreciated divine gift that humanity must embrace before it's too late.

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

On a Personal Note

I continuously strive toward hope, love, and wisdom, but my circumstances persist in growing ever more oppressive. Prayers seem to go no higher than ceilings immediately above me head so I try to persistently concede that understanding divine love requires similar appreciation of divine perspective--to which I unfortunately do not have access. That being said, I do not wish the general character of my experience to become the definition of my faith.

I persist in urging those around me to work together, but my words seem to fall on only deaf ears as others' behavior remains stubbornly narcissistic. If there were any evidence of my struggles making a positive difference, there might be some justification of adversity I tolerate. Yet I ponder that the feelings and experience of others may be analogous and so I reach for empowering thoughts to convey, in case what I would say to them is what I also need to hear and say to myself.

If I seem to be traversing a maze within which every choice leads to a dead end, I wonder at what point I will have no more strength to try and consequently enact a final ritual of closure. What I must remember each moment, however, is that I'm not there yet. I still have a little more strength to expend first.

If there is anything left to try, it makes no sense to stop. As long as any possibility remains to pursue, I do. Yet using methods that consistently fail cannot continue and finding new ones has become most difficult.

Nonetheless, may one and all and everything, blessed and loved ever be.

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Sister Who a.k.a. Rev. Denver NeVaar, PhD
POB 16074, Golden, CO 80402
E-Mail: dn@SisterWho.com
Internet-Website: www.SisterWho.com

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