

SISTER WHO'S PERSPECTIVE

Sister Who's Perspective, copyright, Issue 260, February 2021

Overview

I am fond of the words of the song composed by John Denver which instructs, "And some say love holding on and some say letting go." Within this month's essays I offer suggestions about that complex task of letting go. Hopefully these words are merely the beginnings of longer constructive, empowering, and ongoing conversations.

Releasing Expectations

A viewer recently suggested to me that the purity of one's religious teaching may be directly related to the degrees of violence which practitioners of that religion ultimately embrace. From one perspective, this suggests that the purest examples of any belief system are free from violence. From another perspective, however, is also the suggestion that religion has the ability to perfect one's life experience—which may not be true, because that may not be what any religion is designed to do.

Nonetheless, my answer was that while religion is apparently communally oriented, spirituality is a phenomenon that is intensely individualistic. The ideal would be for both to be equally available, but obviously that is not always the case. More honestly considered, the purpose of any religion may not actually be perfection, but rather growth in relationship.

From another perspective, religion may be analogous to a company creating a unique style of shoe, but allowing the individual to select the length, width, and color, so that a good fit is accomplished. The feet which the shoes are to serve—rather than vice versa—do not truthfully all have the same size and shape. Within art classes in school, this equated to noticing that hair is not all one color; to depict a person's hair truthfully, one must use a variety of shades of color.

This is why coloring one's hair often looks unnaturally consistent. Depicting any congregation or population as having absolute consistency is similarly inaccurate. Close and detailed investigation reveals a virtual rainbow spectrum of diverse possibilities within the individuals any particular group contains.

Nonetheless, regardless of gender, it is imperative for practitioners of every religion to embrace genuinely peaceful and humane practices that allow for respectful disagreement; not pretending that any artificial consistency is characteristic. To do less requires dishonesty within the membership. It is thus always problematic, when one voice speaks on behalf of others who may disagree—although this may indirectly identify areas and ways in which healing and growth are needed.

Avoiding one's own growth and healing, always leads to greater trouble. Being able to peacefully engage in dialogue while truly listening to each other, is the unconditional love that consistently leads toward healing, growth, and wholeness. Yet the freedom to do so, is dependent upon releasing any expectation to behave otherwise.

Every living thing—which includes religions—must be continually engaged in renewal and growth in order to live. The most oppressive demonstrations of religion are those which have forgotten this. Core principles and values may change their faces and clothing from time to time, but in their true essence, they are able to remain constant.

Metaphorically, no matter what mask is worn, it is still the same person within various masks. Ideally, that person is most concerned with pursuing genuine love and true wisdom. At the heart of any honest relationship, is allowing the particular individuals to be themselves, rather than expecting them to embody only the masks of the particular moment.

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

Releasing Conceptions

At the heart of this is allowing one's self to see more than one has thus far seen, specifically because perception is both empowered and limited by preconceived notions that guide interpretation of everything that passes within reach of one's senses. I recall an evening within which I described to another person the ideological dynamics of the well-known Disney movie, "Mary Poppins." After a few moments someone commented, "I think I need to go watch this movie again, because I don't remember any of this."

For those familiar with computers, this may equate to "clearing the cache," which means looking at the newest version of a website rather than a memory of the last time the particular website was visited, so that any and all changes since the previous visit can be noted. If one views other individuals with the expectation that nothing will have changed since the previous occasion, this indicates an expectation of no growth of any kind having occurred—which is essentially an indication of an absence of truly living or of being truly alive. If love is present, the freedom to live will be also.

Oddly, I have encountered a number of occasions when this absence of growth and life, have been written into some level of law—which likewise leads to circumstances that are oppressive to life, even if in very subtle ways. From one view, this calls to mind again words attributed to Thomas Jefferson, that "When oppression becomes law, resistance becomes duty," but from another the blessing of democratic government is that the citizens have the power to amend and improve any legal condition that exists. Central to that ability, however, is creating and maintaining a population that is both well-educated and well-informed; ignorance is not bliss, but rather injurious and detrimental—calling to mind the biblical text, "You shall know the truth and the truth will make you free."

A curious challenge of this truth that

makes free, is that it offers even freedom from those inclined to misuse sacred text of any description, legal codes, and corporate or governmental policies. Going one step further, it may be interesting to note how very often abusing power depends upon maintaining dishonest conceptions. Knowing truth, conversely, often leads to greater integration of practices of love—as long as the shift is toward knowing complete rather than partial conceptions of truth.

Of course, knowing complete truth distinguishes it from mere conceptions. It is then no longer a matter of knowing only what one has been told, but of coming to know what really is. One might wonder whether humanity will ever grow to that state of being, but if one does not believe in this possibility, it becomes less likely to manifest.

If that remains the case, one could say that some example of humanity has been imprisoned by its own conceptions and any notion of freedom, growth, or life is a myth—able to inspire, but never an actual reality. Perhaps that is one possibility that sets me apart from portions of humanity: that in reading countless stories as a child, I interpreted them to be possibilities for life rather than mere distractions. One of the most wonderful cinematic representations of this, can be found within the movie, "The NeverEnding Story," based upon a book composed by a German author.

Another quote that comes to mind is from a Dutch author and World War II concentration camp survivor: "I try to hold things loosely, because it always hurts so much if God has to pry my fingers open." In my sometimes contrasting point of view, however, I sometimes cling to objects with the belief that, in one sense or another, everything is alive and helping me to create the story of my own life. Losing a particular object is sometimes like a separation from a dear friend or a member of my true family.

I can only pray that they somehow progressed to new places of ministry.

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

Releasing Traditions

I have lost count of the number of times I have heard people complain, “But we’ve always done it this way!” What they often fail to recognize is that this may be the reason that certain problems persist. The reassurance that comes from familiarity is sometimes empowering, but one must be able to distinguish the difference between habits that are truly empowering and those that are simple laziness—refusing new approaches that accommodate growth.

If one does not respect individuals who are different, one will never know any more than one already does. The value of traditions is not in repeating methods of the past, but rather in fully understanding those methods, why they were chosen, and the contexts within which they arose, so that they can be further adapted whenever the context has changed. Included, are perceptions and definitions, which are ideally from conscious thought, rather than being blindly copied from one generation to the next.

From another view, allowing traditions to evolve is a very loving thing to do, since this values the particular dynamic enough to allow it to grow. It has not gone away; it has merely dressed itself in new clothes. The external beauty is guided and empowered by an internal enduring essence.

What is perhaps a bit profound within this, is that dressing in new clothes validates the existence of relationships between one’s self and a variety of surrounding people and circumstances. Narcissistic or self-centered dynamics welcome neither interconnection

nor symbiotic relationship of any kind. When adversarial circumstances arise, one’s own resources are the only ones with which one is able to respond—and they may be inadequate.

By embracing interconnection and those relationships which are symbiotic in character, virtually any adversity becomes manageable; traditions grow and evolve constructively. This can be equally true of spiritual relationships, in spite of any inescapable uncertainty or mystery involved. That being said, one must never lie and pretend to have had an experience that in truth was part of someone else’s life.

One’s life is not somehow unimportant or in some way less, just because it does not include someone else’s experience. What is far more imperative to fully discover and fully understand are the opportunities, experiences, and perceptions that one’s own life includes. I persist in my contention that competition is unhealthy and should never be presumed.

I recall assisting in a night of sharing personal talents at a particular church, at the conclusion of which I performed one of my songs. I was very confused by the behavior of an organizer immediately thereafter, however, because he seemed embarrassed by my contribution. What I did, was actually not that complicated, but may have had an appearance of excellence to an uninformed audience.

I did not judge others’ contributions as being in any way more or less than my own. I was thankful and inspired by what everyone had shared, specifically because I did not interpret the evening as a competition. It seems that he and others within the room did.

A new approach, likewise, is not truly in competition with traditional approaches, but is ideally judged by its own merits—its honesty, sincerity, preparation, concentration, cohesion, and completeness. The essential first question needs to be whether one did one’s best. The reality also persists, however, that the next incidence will be even better, if one is learning from each experience one has.

That too is an example of growth.

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

*“Envisioning relationships
as hierarchical
rather than egalitarian,
diminishes abilities to listen,
to speak, and to see.”*

— Sister Who

Releasing Limitations

What may be frustrating for individuals who try to interact or collaborate with me, is that this will usually require doing a specific task in a new or unconventional way. From one view, this means having additional ways that a job can be done; if one way doesn't work, another is immediately available. From another view, this means being flexible about methods, rather than restricting one's self to only one approach.

I do not perceive or understand tasks in exactly the same way as anyone else. I think about particular challenges in ways that are unique to myself. Some people are inspired by the fact that I am unlike anyone else, but others object to my lack of conformity.

Why should someone else's answer ever be exactly right for me? Metaphorically, that would be like expecting me to wear someone else's shoes. One must remember that the goal is not to all wear the same shoes, but rather to have protection on one's feet that effectively serves the purpose of the moment.

Sometimes that means wearing work boots, but at other times visually appealing shoes may be more appropriate. Shoes that match the specific shape and dimensions of one's feet are also very important, because not all feet are the same size. In fact, one's ideal size may change throughout life.

At one time, parents were encouraged to paint baby shoes with bronze in order to preserve them and remember how very small their children's feet once were; that feet were not always the size they are now. Limitations are in many ways inseparable from avoiding growth. Conversely, limitations can also be concerned with requiring effectiveness and not tolerating methods that simply don't work well.

While I encourage being gently intolerant of ineffectiveness, sometimes one must learn by attempting a particular method, that it is in fact ineffective. Ideally, familial relationships help one to recover from those sorts of educational experiences, but in my case those relationships were often not available. Thankfully, my life found other ways of persevering and continuing.

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

On a Personal Note

I have occasionally insisted that one must endure the dark times in order to be present for the dawning of a new day. There seems to be no disagreement that the present time is characterized by darkness, although many—including myself—persist in holding to beliefs in positive future possibilities. I don't think it is true, however, that "the future will be whatever we make it," since there will also be events and persons whom we did not directly create.

Nonetheless, one's response can have a most dramatic effect, so one must still persist in doing whatever one can (such as proceeding with composition of my doctoral dissertation), no matter how much miscommunication and confusion there may otherwise be from others.

The good news is that preparations for the 30th birthday of this unconventional ministry and video production of the 500th episode of the ongoing television series are proceeding well. A small number of people have requested to be present within the audience during recording and the show is planned to include both a few of the many songs I have written as well as extensive reflection upon some of the last thirty years experiences. Of additional note is that the final edited form is planned to be uploaded to my YouTube channel with subtitles in three languages, reaching out to a larger global family.

In regard to my neurological challenges, no diagnosis has yet been made, but current symptoms are minor and thankfully unable to prevent ministerial activity.

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