

SISTER WHO'S PERSPECTIVE

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Overview

I often lament that we are creatures of time when good experiences pass, but recognize equally that this fact works both ways--ensuring that painful moments will pass. A central challenge, of course, is appreciating and making the best of each while its time is occasionally uncomfortably present.

Temporary Family

I'm beginning to lose count of those who've insisted upon describing myself as a member of their family, but been conspicuously absent when familial support was most essential. What makes this so very painful is being unable to forget having been rejected by biological relations for no greater reason than being true to myself. Indeed, I could return to them today, if I could consistently pretend to be someone else.

In contrast to all of that are the dogs who've been family to me throughout the last thirty years, demonstrating loyalty, honesty, and support beyond what any human ever has. Yet it has been well-said that "dogs don't live long enough," because of the fact that I continue to outlive all of them. Conversely, a boy noted that, "We're here to learn how to love. Dogs already know that, so they don't have to stay as long."

The effects of the end result are the same, however, in that the sense of being family is for only a limited amount of time. Yet the effects of the end result are completely different, because some arise from pretense and some from integrity. The former cannot sustain one during times of difficulty, but the latter can.

The objective which therefore becomes clear is to forge relationships which transcend the immediate circumstances of their occurrence. It could even be said that the only relationships which are not temporary are those which are spiritual in nature. That being understood, every interaction within this material world can have both limited and eternal consequences.

What encompasses both is the reality of a constantly fluctuating, evolving, and infinitely

expanding sense of family that is temporary in its particular form, but eternal in its essence. If all were treated as potentially members of one's own family, if the success or failure of each was measured in terms of either fully being or of conversely hiding their authentic selves, would the end result not be the manifestation of greater potential than any has thus far ever imagined humanity to possess? That which is most prominently yet undiscovered is consequently that which is hidden within ourselves.

Such discoveries cannot be made in isolation, because that which is discovered is, in most cases, new and unfamiliar and must thus be measured and documented from as many angles as possible, thereby requiring the perception of every individual within the community. If the particular result seems familiar, there may be an insightful commonality, but equally a detail or unique characteristic that extends beyond preceding examples or forms. Family is the configuration of relationships which fosters the best possible manifestation of one's true self.

Part of the related struggle is the ability or inability to hear specific words spoken at precise times by particular individuals. Thus someone may have something to say within one moment, but nothing further to add thereafter, such that the voice in question ceases to be included within one's life. Allowing that individual to pass to other fields of relational work may consequently be a thankful and loving action, while demanding conformity with a particular definition of "family" would be much less so, corresponding to a more limited understanding of the word.

The ultimate conclusion is that no physical body is created to be immortal, so it is imperative that as much good as possible be done during the many or few days of one's life. Truly being family along the way denotes extremes of commitment that are not always comfortable, but may evoke extremes of commitment that stretch each to new dimensions. The fundamental function of life, after all, is the growth of the soul.

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

Temporary Community

Innumerable episodes of a popular and enduring children's television show stress the importance of cooperation--which is not synonymous with compromise. Personally I think this means not only understanding the concept, but also being careful to consistently do it. The problem with "compromise" is that it avoids conflict rather than resolving it and what is surrendered often should not be, because the other is not respected, understood, and valued as having a worthy goal--more concisely, the individual is insufficiently loved.

Disagreement and discussion are simply ways for diversity to be integrated. What may thereby be exposed are topics and challenges the community has inadequately addressed. It is thus essential whenever a topic creates discomfort to talk about it more rather than less.

It is not the volume of words that matters, however, but rather the depth of understanding which is achieved. The predominant reasons I have left communities, consequently, is when they have identified a commitment to remaining small in their understanding and simultaneously opposed to any further growth or evolution. My creative contributions, not surprisingly, were not welcomed and even openly opposed.

It is not an argument about "right" and "wrong," but rather about being loving, inclusive, and empathetic with those are suffering. Until there is understanding, there might not even be awareness of the suffering. To say that one loves while ignoring suffering, may be the most direct line between integrity and hypocrisy.

Perhaps this is why the biblical Jesus hated hypocrisy most of all. Curious to note is that he never equated societal categories with sin, but always reserved that word for actual behavior. It did not matter whom one loved, for example, but rather whether one truly did.

I am still puzzled by the common and usually practiced rather than stated hypothesis within theological school regarding self-identity as synonymous with categorical association--as if individual identity is to be feared and avoided, even though it is all that is visible whenever one looks into a mirror. Social relationships, the projected expectations of others, and social classifications are never obvious, but rather must be interpreted and assigned. Yet the

advice of the ancient oracle at Delphi persists even thousands of years later with the concise recommendation, "Know Thyself," as if this were foundational for all other knowledge.

And so commonalities are discovered by which collective agreements are selected and formed--sometimes empowering and sometimes limiting all that will follow. When commonalities fade, however, so too do the agreements and the sense of community. As true as it may be that individuals have grown in contrasting directions, it is neglect of constructive and creative integration that more accurately and correctly accounts for any resulting separation.

I have never forgotten the sad request of the one claiming familial forms of relationship, "Don't weird me out," although none of the growth I was experiencing at the time seemed in any way "weird" to me--other than shrugging off any sort of more common societal stagnation. I had already integrated that the particular individual had moved from being merely the parent of a lesbian to embracing a same-gender relationship herself. To me it was merely an embrace of ongoing but clearly unexpected growth.

When has community ever been any more predictable than the individuals of which it is comprised? Nonetheless, the challenge remains of embracing and supporting community while opportunity allows, yet releasing it toward future growth whenever new circumstances require. If it is invited to grow, I only know that I cannot follow into any death-oriented stagnation.

So I support growth whenever I can, but allow others to make contrasting choices whenever they wish and the specific definitions of familial community consequently fluctuate. I can only hope they are happy with their choices--even if I am not. A myriad of contrasting dreams may thereby be prevented, but I am still thankful to be an individual of unlimited visionary possibility.

I realized long ago that I will never be able to do all the good I can imagine, so choices will have to be made. I am thankful for every beautiful moment I have been allowed to experience, but grieve those prevented by others' small-mindedness--which often shaped and shortened the possibilities of community otherwise available. All the difference truly means is that there is still more to do.

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

Temporary Relationship

I have traveled through so many contexts during the peculiar course of my life and no human relationship has been continuous or had the ability to remain present and committed to embracing the diversity encountered. Yet I could not for this reason ever choose to be less than I am, which has increasingly seemed to be the cost of having the usual sort of relationships at all. It is apparently always expected that saying or embodying less than complete truth, is somehow required.

Yet I cannot understand life as an embrace of anything other than truth, which can be expressed in virtually limitless ways and which equally exists in far more than merely physical dimensions. A legitimate interpretation is thus that measuring the dimensions of life's real and potential experience is among humanity's primary tasks. A constant and ever-present danger is nonetheless that what is perceived is all that exists and that what is only potentially real is somehow irrelevant.

Yet what is potential is what beckons toward new growth. Specifically because it is most often unseen, relevant relationships are usually neglected. When they are not, joy may return.

So the lingering question is how far any particular relationship or collaboration can go. I continue to regard my dogs as family, but when we no longer had a home within which to live, I was astonished at the many who were unwilling to intervene unless I was willing to rip these primary relationships apart. Loss within one aspect of life was strangely interpreted as mandating loss within every area of life.

I could not, however, abandon relationships which empowered me to authentically survive the larger devastating loss of a place to call "home." In some ways, they became my definition of "home," which is why Gawain's death continues to leave an emotional hole

around which it is difficult to move. I can only hope that life evolves in positive directions.

This is perhaps among the positive aspects of temporary relationships--that in ways that some are fading into history, new ones can now begin. Yet as long as memories persist, those of the past are never truly gone. Even without such remembrance, however, my interaction with ongoing life has been altered by the ways that loving Gawain affected me.

More concisely, I will never be the same, after experiencing love with him. This is why I sometimes feel sorry for those who will not allow a dog's love into their lives. Ideally, doing so will make them into better individuals.

It is not a matter of merely coexisting within limited space, but rather of truly listening and being concerned for each other's needs. What too many seem to forget is that the amount of time available to do so is not unlimited. At some point, no more opportunity to be or do anything together will be within reach.

Having limited time is inseparable from being human. Redeeming available moments and giving them potentially eternal significance is what makes life worth living. This is impossible within isolation, recommending symbiotic forms of relationship as foundational to meaningful life.

Yet such relationship should never be interpreted as living exclusively within current systems, which like all systems designed by humanity rather than the Divine, have instances where breakdown occurs. From one view, it is only when systems break down that what is truly life can take over--because it's the only dynamic that remains. Those who never question or attempt to live beyond all systems and rules may not discover that which already does.

Relationships designed to live within rules are thus inherently limited and fallible, because anything beyond is inescapably transcendent. I may not have always been consciously aware of such, but my creative life, my preoccupation with the transcendent, and my ministerial work as a Sacred Clown have caused my life to unfold within such undefined spaces beyond the reach of all human expectations. It is thus unavoidable that all such expressions and demonstrations could only be temporary--to be replaced by whatever is the next step of growth.

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

"Integrity requires letting go of what belongs to another time, while retaining what is truthfully timeless."

— Sister Who

Temporary Circumstances

Perhaps the most common illusion that is also easily overlooked is that the perceptions of the current moment will last longer than they ever do. Relationships must consequently be based instead upon commitments. Those with roots that go deeply into love may be eternal.

Circumstances, conversely, by their very nature, are condemned to perpetual fluctuation, no matter how desirable or painful they may seem within their respective times. What matters most is the particular development or growth that consequently occurs. If wisdom or abilities related to love are increased, those moments have been in some sense redeemed.

Any claim that anything is the way it's always been or will be, is consequently always false. If life is constantly growing, then it is constantly changing. If not, it has begun to die.

I remain now and always committed to growth and integration of old and new, of seen and unseen, and of what is known and what has been newly discovered. Fearing what is unfamiliar has never been congruent with life.

The pivotal questions are instead what can be learned and how life can be expanded. This clearly applies to spirituality as much as to anything else. Honesty, truthfulness, and love nonetheless remain eternally applicable. I can only hope that what I have contributed supports continued expansion of wisdom and love.

It has been said that religion is crowd control and spirituality is growth. Learning to trust what is unfamiliar requires intelligent investigation and extensive dialogue, but I wonder with ever greater frequency whether many are too afraid of both listening and speaking to ever do so. I can only speculate, therefore, that the actual reason some respond with fear is not because of some fear associated with my appearance, but rather because at a deeper level they are afraid of both the unknown and true growth.

More concisely, they are afraid of being alive, yet for better or worse have been made inherently so. Their circumstances are merely side effects. Being alive is central.

Existing in more dimensions than are understood, is among humanity's signature characteristics. Our task is to make this good.

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

On a Personal Note

It is well-known that solitary confinement is among the worst experiences that can be inflicted on prisoners, but the last six months has been very close to that for me--seeing only a single person approximately once every four days, having no physical contact since at least last July, and conversing by phone only a few times each day to soften the isolation. What has significantly complicated daily life has been the rapid and inexplicable deterioration of my neurological system--going from traversing three thousand miles by motorcycle last July to being unable to effectively walk, crochet, play guitar, or even sign my own name. Climbing up and down the stairs has become dangerous, but must nonetheless be done several times each day, because no one else is available.

Still there is no official explanation, but certain environmental pollution is suspected, the only solution to which is relocating, but two and a half years of attempting to do so has been repeatedly bureaucratically blocked. The good news is that the intervention of certain friends may finally make this a reality, but after numerous solutions that were yanked away at the last moment, even a current possibility is still besieged with various uncertainties. The puppy retrieved from Michigan in hopes of becoming my next service dog sadly proved to be lovable, but untrainable--even by a professional and skilled canine behaviorist.

I can only hope that life will somehow soon revert to being a more positive progression.

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

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