

SISTER WHO'S PERSPECTIVE

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Overview

Adversity always claims to be more omnipotent than it ever is, but remembering this when standing nose-to-nose with any sort of bully is far from easy. Nonetheless, I hope it is helpful to consider within this month's text, that the truth of any interaction or relationship is generally discovered rather than obvious.

Weakness in Oppression

There is something profoundly unintelligent about bullies and tyrannical personalities engaging in limiting relational patterns, that only hinder them from accessing the best abilities and wisdom of those whom they wound and belittle. They essentially thereby create their own "glass ceilings"--invisible barriers to further personal and professional development, ensuring that others without such barriers will surpass them. It's been said that "no one is completely useless; they can always serve as a bad example"--which is a somewhat backwards sort of way of noting that opportunity exists to become greater than any oppressive person one ever meets.

A central principle of virtually every martial art is "using the greater force of something against itself." The approaching fist within a fight, for example, is redirected past one's self in a way that causes the adversary to lose any sense of balance, stumble, and fall. That is why a practitioner of any martial art will most often not "throw the first punch," because doing so commits the perpetrator to movement that can then be redirected so that it is ineffective.

Unfortunately within various societal circumstances, there is not always a means to move out of the path of the attack. When on multiple occasions I sought to maintain a secure home from which to engage in ministerial activity, for example, I was unable to find any way to defend myself against those who simply didn't want someone so very unusual living nearby. If one interprets their

goal as the elimination of my creativity and perspective, however, they obviously failed, because, after three decades, the creative and ministerial work in which I engage, has only increased in both scope and volume.

The challenge I had to accept throughout that ongoing development, however, was that advancing in one way often meant enduring loss within another. What remains most painful to me, is being in the middle of that transition; being all too familiar with the loss, while still waiting to see the unexpected achievement, evolution, or new possibilities. To relinquish faith in those possibilities, however, would be analogous to becoming my own oppressor and doing the work of my adversaries' so that they themselves had no need to do so.

Having faith is especially difficult, however, when I'm standing too close to the situation that I see, to remember all that is unseen. Among the current examples of that, are the numerous requests for essential information I have made, that are still waiting for answers. There is a sense in which I am being held hostage by others withholding information, but I retain the ability to find another way around the particular challenge--which I have done time and time again throughout my life.

Within the moment before I find the way around, a heavy package of negative emotions is typical, but has always been temporary. The truth of my spirit can nevertheless be found within the fact that I do eventually find a way around. In many cases, it has included growth that comes with deeper understandings and new perspectives, which also empowers me to pursue new, better, and bigger dreams.

Somewhere, fading into the distance behind me, are the bullies who were too small-minded and short-sighted to embrace a similar process of personal growth--perhaps because they lacked the determination and strength by which I moved out of reach. Yet it wasn't impressive to me, as one simply unwilling to do any less.

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

Weakness in Apathy

Brokenness is something I've often experienced, but, to the best of my ability, not something I have ever created within others-- which is similar to my distinction that one may be victimized without ever defining one's self as a victim. This is a significant challenge if one is victimized frequently and finding a way out of such negative relationship is often a long time in coming. Nonetheless, I insist upon defining brokenness as oriented to events rather than as an enduring and inescapable state.

What is most needed is healing. Apathy is when the pursuit of healing and growth is no longer a priority. It's analogous to agreeing with perpetrators of brokenness that current circumstances are good enough.

The result, of course, is a proliferation of brokenness; unhealed emotional, mental, and spiritual wounds. In many cases, this comes from having spent too little time studying the particular problem, to understand what it truly is, how it got there, and the source from which it arose. Apathy discourages contemplation of such complex yet important questions.

Equally essential is constructive dialogue. It is very disturbing, how often within the present time, basic communication that is clear and effective is actually avoided and even hindered by entrenched administrative practices. At one point in time, I was told that one should write to congressional representatives about any governmental concern one might have. All such experiences within the most recent two decades, however, have convinced me that no one in such offices is listening.

Nor have I found contrasting circumstances at municipal, county, or state levels. I can only therefore conclude that apathy is a significant element within those who occupy such offices as well. The weakness that arises from such societal circumstances is that problems and threats to communal health, cannot be effectively addressed.

The situation is analogous to phoning paramedics in response to the occurrence of an injury and being told that they don't care enough to come. If they do not support or invest themselves in communal maintenance, however, the day will come when they are the ones in need and they similarly find themselves

without essential assistance. All of which declares to me that a basic love for one another may be the most essential element of life within communal groupings of any size.

The situation could also be described as a sort of self-imposed blindness, since it involves not truly seeing each other or ourselves as sufficiently worthy and valuable to engage in whatever effort is needed. Phrased another way, the more apathy one feels toward other living creatures, the more diminished is the ability for any to go living. The invitation that nonetheless remains within every moment one ever experiences, is to push aside all apathy and embrace the wondrous potential waiting to emerge from within every person and thing.

As much as some may insist that life offers nothing more than brokenness, that statement is only true if individually and communally humanity allows it to be so. Whether or not anyone wishes to acknowledge it, the fact remains that part of being human, is to in fact be a co-creator of the universe within which we all live. What is absolutely tragic, is the extent to which positive efforts are not rewarded.

Within such a global context, apathy is a blindfold that discourages awareness of how very serious circumstances have become. The assertion that being emotionally uninvolved in desperate societal circumstances will provide peace of mind, only ensures that greater evils will follow. Conversely, being paralyzed by how bad conditions already are, likewise prevents constructive intervention.

I read many years ago a story of a small boy on a beach, picking up starfish that had washed ashore and putting them back into the water. A cynical man standing nearby insisted that what the boy was doing wouldn't make a difference in the tragedy of the deaths of innumerable starfish all around him. Undaunted, the boy dropped another starfish into the ocean and answered, "it made a difference to that one."

Ultimately, any peace that arises from failing to love, will only produce more wounding and brokenness. Those who believe in love and in life, must follow the example of the boy on the beach, who was unwilling to give apathy any place within his life. The world thus created, will be one within which starfish still live.

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

Weakness in Selfishness

There seems to be a ridiculous notion that "looking out for number one" means that the individual to which the expression refers will somehow not only survive but also thrive. The actual truth, however, is that no example of individuality--whether narcissistic or relational--has the ability to survive without a constellation of surrounding relationships. In disconnecting from relationships and valuing only a limited perception of self, all that is assured, is one's own defeat--ultimately in every area of life.

It is not even a complete and accurate sense of self upon which such individuals have fixated. What is conspicuously absent are the hidden treasures and multi-dimensional possibilities that can only be brought to light by interactions and collaborations with others. A huge number of almost miraculous shifts in life experience, can only be accomplished by people working together effectively.

Selfishness is the exact opposite and thus cannot produce the same effects. That being said, one must also distinguish between true selfishness and its counterfeits. Among these are those many times when unique individuals are marginalized or excluded for a somewhat wide variety of possible reasons.

The most insidious is ignorant judgmental attitudes that deny creative possibilities. Being incongruous with an administrator's notion of "appropriate public image" and thus excluded, infantilizes public understanding of diversity and limits creative possibilities. Many creative works arose from engaging the unusual and unexpected in ways that provoked innovation.

A more reasonable sounding excuse, typically accompanied by neglect, is a concern for challenges to physical health. If a particular disease occurred within a particular country, for example, and all travel to and from that region was subsequently prohibited in order to isolate or quarantine the contagion, all of the creative

and intellectual contributions of that region could be similarly be inaccessible. The next necessary realization is that if it's not good for that particular germ to exist within one's own environment, it's quite probable that it's not good for it to exist anywhere--thus inviting a sort of neighborly assistance to eradicate disease wherever it occurs, instead of inferring that the problem doesn't matter as long as it doesn't affect one's self or one's family.

The reason additional vaccinations are required when traveling to certain regions of the world, is because the world has not adequately responded to that particular medical crisis, as if the people affected are somehow people who don't matter to humanity's global family. It must be additionally remembered, that vaccination does not guarantee protection, since no such medical intervention is ever 100% effective. A significant number of basic health-oriented practices must still be consistently maintained.

In some ways, selfishness is analogous to laziness, because living in a way that is healthy and respectful of the enduring fact that the world is a shared space, requires significant effort. Especially as one ages, maintaining physical abilities is increasingly important, because any muscle allowed to atrophy to even a minimal degree, will lead to limitation. More concisely phrased, an oft-repeated witticism advises, "Use it or lose it."

A corresponding communal challenge is the extent to which life is allowed to become more complicated and overwhelming as the years pass, reducing the amount of time and energy available for the maintenance of ability. When passing from childhood to adulthood, a myriad of demands fall upon the individual related to income, housing, annual governmental reports, legal documents, and food provision--all of which are managed by others throughout childhood. The fundamental responsibility of community is to create a world within which being alive remains manageable and good.

Selfishness does not and never will have the ability to create or sustain life, beauty, or essential meaning. When life loses any sense of purpose, the strength to endure struggles and overcome challenges likewise fades. What answers that void, is nearly always relationship.

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

*"If violence and brokenness
are the only expressions,
complete failure and weakness are
the only legitimate conclusions."*

– Sister Who

Weakness in Cynicism

Remembering that human life is finite, every day spent mired in cynicism is an empty and meaningless one that accomplished nothing more than making life's one day closer. There are days, however, when I am so besieged by multiple challenges that it's the best I am able to do. The blessing, in such cases, is that I am available to try again the next morning.

Yet when I greet the day with cynicism, I have become my own enemy and every good opportunity I encounter, will have to fight that much harder to get through to me. As much as I don't recommend being blindly optimistic, meeting life with eyes open means seeing both negative and positive possibilities equally and doing whatever one can to support the result one truly wants. Sometimes all that is needed for something wonderful to happen, is a mind and heart that are open.

While being open and vulnerable may mean getting hurt more often, greater abilities to heal can also develop and cumulative experiences of life will be like a painting that uses colors and contrasts that others may never know. It does make sense, after all, to fully live while there is opportunity to do so, because opportunity will not always be available. Cynicism is like a bird who never learned to fly, due to fear of falling.

Conversely, attacking others who remind of freedoms too frightening to embrace, limits the possibilities humanity can know and defines life as a tiny and oppressive place. Yet even then, cynicism is still a weakness that brings no true strength or protection, but instead predisposes all that it touches to being always broken.

I've met individuals who have loved and lost and responded by avoiding all such future possibilities, but a lifetime of always choosing to be safe is a lifetime never fully lived. As noted by Helen Keller, "Security is a fiction and does not exist in nature, nor do the children of men generally experience it. Avoiding danger is no safer in the long run than outright exposure. Life is either a daring adventure or nothing at all." So I choose to live as fully as I can, while there is time to do so, no matter how many times I may stumble on the way to mountain summits that expand my soul.

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

On a Personal Note

Adversarial circumstances, condescending attitudes, and diminished opportunities were the predominant response from administrators when I set several new standards so high they are unlikely to ever be exceeded. It would seem that, in most cases, conformity is far more rewarded than creative ingenuity or expertise. There are times when I wonder whether the real reason I became Sister Who, is because the world wouldn't allow me to be anything else--that is, that I must conform or be excluded, so I responded creatively--but the possibility also exists of being a divine reply to conformity-related obsession.

My most frequent prayer is nonetheless that what I create is truly helpful to others; that I am effectively serving this ministerial work by trusting my intuition, even when what I express is very unusual. Complete certainty has been rare throughout my life experience, but many wonderful things have nonetheless occurred. A dedication to virtue, has likewise endured.

That such wonderful things have occurred within oppressive, depressing, and mentally and emotionally painful contexts, however, never ceases to puzzle me. The conclusion I retain throughout all such experiences, however, is that I must never stop showing the world what sort of person I truly am. As much as hiding my unique light might make me less of a target for various kinds of bullies, that would also mean running out of time to do what only I can do, to make the world a better place.

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

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