

# SISTER WHO'S PERSPECTIVE

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## Overview

As obvious as certain things seem, a certain amount of discussion is often helpful. It is my hope that this month's essays are likewise helpful to you. These elements may typically be part of daily life, but for that reason may not be given the attention they warrant.

## Respecting Another's Culture

It must first be noted that respect must never be presumed to be synonymous with agreement and that even respect has its limits. That being said, one can always disagree agreeably, to prevent further violence and encourage personal growth, whether or not one knows exactly what that growth will include. The point of respect, after all, is allowing each to exist with integrity.

Integrity does not include stagnating within an infantile state, nor does integrity include any obligation of any other to satisfy expectations. I am who I am, no matter whom or what anyone else wants me to be. Integrity is when my internal and external realities are congruent.

Cultural contexts are frequently difficult to define, specifically because generalizations by their very nature are always problematic. Within any cultural context is always a certain degree of diversity. Sometimes this variance is financially determined, but at other times imagination does what physical resources cannot.

To suggest one is not affected by one's environment is ridiculous, but so is insisting that everyone is affected the same way. Certain commonalities persist, but only because they are embraced by relevant individuals. To pretend an association one does not actually have is absolutely dishonest, but so is denying that which is integral to who and what one is.

Sometimes one's cultural context is obvious, but sometimes that which is obvious is misleading, so dialogue becomes essential to understanding and consequently to collaboration. Questions and responses thus become essential. If communication is less than

effective, harmonious life activity and synchronous goals become improbable at best.

On the flip side of all of this is the one with good intentions, but deficient understanding. I recall reading of a gay man who "came out" to a female friend and responded badly to a gift of women's lingerie, because his friend had no idea what being gay meant to him. On a similar note, I heard of a gay man who thought his attraction to other men recommended sexual reassignment surgery, but thereafter discovered he was not truly or authentically transgender.

Within the US, preventing such mistakes is why extensive professional counseling is usually required prior to actual surgery. When I ask how someone's transition is progressing, therefore, I seek guidance in being a supportive friend, rather than being distracted by lurid tales of physical changes that have or have not occurred. Such surgical procedures are still very expensive and followed by life-long prescriptions for missing hormones, analogous in some ways to diabetics dependence upon pharmaceutical companies.

In deciding to live with integrity within any cultural context, therefore, a great many decisions have to be made if, like me, one does not accept any notion that Godde makes mistakes. I may never know the reasons some life journeys are so very difficult while others seem relatively easy, but I have often noticed radical differences in corresponding levels of maturity and understanding. For humanity to be blessed thereby, an enormous amount of civilized sharing must become a relational norm.

Ultimately, respect infers a holistic embrace of individually unique truth. This includes both personal experience and characteristics that may or may not be apparent. Perceiving someone's truth does not mean agreeing with it, but it does mean that for that individual, something is absolutely and completely factual and this shapes one's response in various ways.

Within fully embracing the truth of others, Godde, and one's self, genuine growth occurs.

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

## Respecting Another's Religion

By definition, Godde is transcendent, immanent, beyond human comprehension, and enveloped in mystery so much that no human religion has ever done a completely adequate job of describing who or what Godde is. Yet a desire for loving relationship clearly and persistently exists on both sides. It does not matter that for some, personification is inadequate and scientific speculation is all that remains within reach.

For me, Godde is the spiritual embodiment of highest wisdom and greatest love, but nothing else is certain. All that humanity has are widely varying perceptions. Respecting someone else's religion is thus simply a matter of being thankful that the individual is looking, listening, and attempting to live appropriately--and accepting that any particular perception is not identical in comparison to one's own.

That which is truly Godde is quite capable of providing any correction or guidance needed. If I consider the apparent lack of human response all around me, any gesture or word is apparently good. Yet for each and every one, a spiritual path is one of growth.

It is consequently arrogant and narcissistic for anyone to think that Godde needs defending, if for whatever reason there is no relevant experience. If such interaction were truly helpful, it would be provided. Yet one often learns by hearing of another's experience, so much more discussion should occur.

In a similar way, I have often participated in others' religious events, to see what my personal experience would be. To be a genuinely constructive moment of growth, however, it is imperative that my participation be honest, chosen, and consensual. That being said, new encounters can be quite enlightening.

What remains true is contemplation of each moment, rather than engaging in blind imitation of whatever is nearby. I'm reminded of a particular acting class within which a young man was speaking the words of the script, without considering what they meant. What came out of his mouth, consequently made no sense.

Any change would have to occur within one's relationship with that which one perceives as divine, rather than any aspect of the divine itself, which exists independently. Anything else

would suggest one is greater than one's idea of divinity, which is a contradiction in terms. In the absence of something divine, human growth would become improbable at best and all that exists would be all that would **ever** exist--essentially, complete stagnation or, alternatively phrased, death.

The purpose of all ritual is to illustrate spiritual meanings and actions, but this should never include manipulation of another's religious practices. By providing a means of bridging the dimensional divide, interaction between the spiritual and the material can become part of daily experience. There is no limit to how much can be accomplished, if what can be seen and touched is only a means of documentation and not an indication or definition of possibility.

So central to each person's life is that personally chosen spirituality produce growth. If spirituality is somehow wedded to specific religion, then this will require as much work as any other marital relationship. In truth, they are quite distinct, but ideally complimentary.

Religion begins externally and attempts to manage the spiritual element within each individual. Spirituality begins internally and is most concerned with relating effectively to the invisible and transcendent divine. Central to both is the absolutely unique human spirit, of which no two exactly identical examples exist.

That being the case, a singular combination of commonalities and distinctions exists within every person and the only choice is to live with integrity or conversely to embody lies. If one has not had certain religious experiences, pretending one has, for the sake of others' expectations, remains hypocritical and thinking Godde is somehow fooled is worse yet. Allowing a lie is NOT a respectful thing to do.

Perhaps it is redundant to say, but pretending nonexistent commonality or denying uniqueness is likewise an avoidance of truth. Living in integrity remains the goal, regardless of one's beliefs. First, last, and always, I am who I am and you are who you are.

Life is a matter of discerning what all of that means. Each person may consequently be at a different place in understanding how to specifically relate to Godde. Extend to others the same courtesy you wish to receive.

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



## Respecting Another's Customs

Is there a right or a wrong way to do anything? Probably not, but it's still legitimate to ask, "Why is that effective?" Ultimately there is only one's own way and everyone else's, both of which could benefit from contemplation, often with a goal of possible refinement that will nonetheless be self-chosen.

Dismissing any such question with the lame remark, "Because we've always done it this way," usually indicates a resistance to further growth or an unhelpful preoccupation with homogeneity. Specifically because of personal uniqueness, ways each task is satisfied are likely to also be unique, thus finding new ways of completion. Having only one way, limits perception of possibility.

As an autistic, I respond to many challenges by creating new routines, which I utilize almost religiously, until necessity says otherwise. A custom is often nothing more than repetitious behavior, but often has a deeper understanding behind it that reinforces personal values. So by utilizing customs, I maintain myself as someone who has principles and values.

By respecting the customs of others, I remember that the world is first, last, and always a shared space with an enormous diversity of methods and perspectives. My way is only my way and no more right or wrong than anyone else's. In a similar way, my perspective is only my perspective and will never encompass all there is to see.

To be truly wise, one must aspire to see and understand all there is to see and understand, and then integrate all of it into a more complex, astonishing, and multifaceted symbiosis than has presumably ever previously existed. To do anything less, is to leave questions without response, that could be essential to one's growth and development. It is inevitable that one meets one's future, but recommendable

***"What doesn't work,  
reduces the number  
of times to uniquely try."***

*– Sister Who*

that one is fully prepared and equipped when one does so.

A big part of all of this is allowing for the diversity that in fact already exists. That another is unique, another's religion is distinctive, another's customs are singular, another's culture contrasts, or another's language is structured in an unfamiliar way, demonstrates only that more exists than any individual can completely contain. At some basic level, we really do need each other in order to be complete.

Within each other are a myriad of chances to transcend our own definitions. We are individuals, but we are also inescapably in relationship. We can only decide and influence what sort of relationship it turns out to be.

Part of that definition, however, depends upon the other person. It has often been said that one can only build the bridge halfway. Each and every relationship is a collaborative effort.

Respecting another's religion is likewise only possible if that person respects the particular religion as well. Many wish to be known by a religion the specific individual does not completely respect. This is why hypocrisy is not an exclusively Christian problem.

Customs belong to this lukewarm gray area where any belief that exists is incomplete. One is in the habit of doing something a particular way, but only because it may be in the process of becoming something else. Obviously additional careful contemplation is needed.

Respect does not, therefore, express itself as an absence of questions. Rather, it is within wrestling with questions that the greatest growth frequently occurs. The life that does not wrestle with its questions, may ultimately find itself un-lived.

Positively embraced, others may be teaching new ways to live. Until they are lived in a way that is both effective and makes sense, another's collection of customs may seem arbitrary at best. If one perceives every person whom one meets as potentially a teacher, one maintains a teachable attitude and a posture inclined toward growth.

If disagreeable people are seen as potential collaborators and their mistakes as instruction in ways that won't work, success may be ensured.

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

## Respecting Another's Individuality

To attack an individual is to attack all of that person's supportive relationships. To attack a collection of relationships--or even a single relationship with one's self--is to impoverish those or that relationship(s). To nurture every relationship, is to have a truly healthy and strong community within which to live.

To require the embodiment of expectations, is to impose living a lie. To instead welcome the continuous creative discovery of whom an individual truly is, is to make that individual as well as the surrounding community truly wealthy. To constructively integrate all that one discovers within a community, blesses the life experience of everyone thereby affected.

Respecting individuality means that what blesses one life, potentially blesses all lives. If the content of one individual is wisely shared, so that the person is not consumed within that process, the community is poised to respond effectively to every conceivable challenge that may at any time arise. The children who grow up within such a context, will keep everyone else individually and collectively moving forward at a pace that makes human history look comparatively absolutely lethargic.

At its most basic level, this is accepting that I am me, you are you, and we are different from each other. Obviously the world is sufficiently large enough to accommodate all the diversity it contains. The lingering question is whether human wisdom can do the same.

To some extent, respect involves being willing to ask questions, learn about the other person, and not presume one's self in some pre-Copernican way as the center of the universe. In that way, respect is specifically not narcissistic. The added incentive is that respect thereby expands one's universe--providing more places to go and things to do.

Often within discovering more externally, more is found internally, resulting in new and better forms of one's self. It could be said that the universe is expanding in both directions. In finding a bigger you, I also find a bigger me with more potential than I'd ever imagined.

Yet this is only possible if the respect I extend is identical to what I have for myself.

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

## On a Personal Note

I continue to grow worse neurologically, specifically because I am still without a new address at least a mile away from high-voltage power-lines, as recommended by the World Health Organization. Answers to prayer contrast sharply with current circumstances, which makes me glad that my faith is instead based upon Godde, who is well-acquainted with the mostly unpredictable occurrence of miracles. Exactly how everything will play out, I simply don't know.

Nonetheless, I have begun compiling the essays of more than twenty-five years of newsletters into book format. Four books have been published thus far, including the story of my life ("Reinventing the Sacred Clown") and two small books drawn from my doctoral dissertation ("Relational Individuality" and "The Symbiotic Triad of Holistic Health"). The books featuring essays drawn from "Sister Who's Perspective" will increase that number.

Two other books are in process, but will likely be finished after those named within preceding sentences. A fifth album of original songs is also planned, but will presumably become available after a significant amount of neurological healing has occurred. The album will contain a number of songs never previously recorded, including several specifically requested by viewers. The title song, "Impossible," is a direct reference to the guitello (the only one in the world) which will be featured both within and on the cover of the album.

Obviously I have a lot of living to do.

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

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