

SISTER WHO'S PERSPECTIVE

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Overview

During my masters program, I realized that community renews itself by nurturing individuals—no matter how eccentric or typical—and individuals survive by contributing to communities. What amazed me even more, however, was the realization that some sort of breakdown of this symbiotic relationship is at the heart of every problem throughout human history. This month's essays offer a tiny glimpse of a few of the related implications.

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

Association and Individuality

The general belief seems to be that these two are mutually exclusive; that in order to associate, one must compromise or censor individuality; that in expressing individuality one unavoidably creates distance between the self and others. I suggest the reverse is actually much more true. It is specifically by the expression of individuality, that the possibilities available to association are dramatically expanded. Whenever individuality is repressed, associations experience insidious limitations. Additionally, individuality's expression is impossible without support from association. The relationship between the two is therefore not a competition, but a symbiotic collaboration seeking a way, a place, and a time to happen.

The antithesis would be disassociation, by which association impoverishes both itself and every excluded individual. This awareness also makes clear that poverty is an almost exclusively human creation. If we can create such a nightmare, however, we can also uncreate it by filling that particular space with love and potentiality instead. Certainly along the way there will be riddles to solve, languages to learn, and strategies to devise for resolving challenges and understanding one another

better. Nonetheless, we need to remember that all of these tools may very well be as absolutely ordinary to others and foreign to ourselves, as our methods of coping may seem completely strange and even absurd to them—which is similar to asking when two persons from very different countries are speaking to each other, "which one of us has an accent?"

In the midst of all of this, perhaps as a next level after language and culture, are the peculiarities of so-called disabilities. Even within one's own linguistic and cultural contexts, autism, for example, shifts the interpersonal dynamics dramatically. Being blind, deaf, or even simply left-handed creates numerous shifts as well. Responsibility for dealing with such alterations to interpersonal dynamics ideally rests with all participants.

What humanity's current trajectory toward global community and such interpersonal accommodations have in common is the need for creating an inclusive paradigm, rather than expecting marginalized persons to adapt to whatever paradigm is currently dominant (i.e. gay/lesbian people adapting to a heterosexist paradigm, deaf people adapting to a world within which sound-orientation is dominant, visually impaired people adapting to a world within which vision-orientation is dominant, and so forth). For people with autism, this would mean creating a world that communicates with equal effectiveness both the generalities and the details, such that various forms of collaboration between autistics and neuro-typicals is societally supported. An inability to speak has too often and nearly always erroneously been equated with having nothing to say.

Central to such debates is the lingering rhetorical question of whether it is wrong to be different, but if it was, the world would not be so blessed with both a diversity of species and the all-inclusive possibilities of love.

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

Association against Individuality

To include others conditionally is equivalent to excluding them, since it is not they themselves that are being included, but rather only a biased perception which has been imposed over their true reality. The fact remains that everyone is a combination of desirable and undesirable qualities and it is impossible to exclude only the latter, because both travel within the same package.

It is specifically because both are available within ourselves, however, that miraculous transformations continue to be absolutely possible. This is not to say that all undesirable qualities can be repressed, but rather that—acting communally—one's weaknesses can be replaced by another's strengths. Nonetheless, this never happens by accident; it requires positive intention, effective communication, and a willingness to act.

For those who have been victimized by oppressive dominant paradigms, it would be easy, understandable, and perhaps in very limited ways even effective to accuse those embraced by the dominant paradigm of being somehow privileged—as if they should feel guilty for a classification that was not self-chosen but rather assigned to them. Should right-handed people acknowledge that they are privileged, simply because they can walk into any office supply store and purchase scissors perfectly suited to them? Should they feel privileged that every book, door, and even handshake is oriented to their subconscious behavioral pattern and similarly feel guilty because they are unintentionally creating an adversarial world for everyone else? More concisely, should they blame everyone else for being different or themselves for being (to some perhaps limited degree) examples of a dominant paradigm?

My opinion has long been that blaming and categorical discussions of privilege are an absolute waste of time. More recommendable would be turning attention toward the creation and implementation of inclusive, constructive, and effective paradigms. I continue to be mystified, for example, by the incongruity between increased recognition for people with disabilities, but continuing design practices

within housing development that enable the absence of accessibility.

As instructed by my good friend, Jean, who has been blind since birth, "The thing to remember about people with disabilities is that everyone is a candidate." In spite of whatever plans, preparation, and careful management anyone has ever done, life continues to pitch occasional curve-balls: bestowing traffic accidents, terminal diseases, and previously undetected or undiagnosed developmental quirks upon even the most unlikely candidates; we simply don't know for certain what anyone's future holds. If we go forward together and in love, however, this is not a serious problem.

Within our own time, a dominant relational paradigm is sometimes described as "winner take all" or the competitive dynamic of "either... or..." rather than "both... and...." It is because of this dominant relational paradigm that certain examples of association can feel threatened, wondering whether they will survive certain expressions of individuality. Yet if the individuals who constitute the association want it to survive, there is no question that it will. If such individuals are unwilling to act, however, one must wonder whether they want survival as much as they say they do—or whether they (a) are more willing to allow the association to temporarily survive at the expense of certain individuals or (b) prefer to allow their association to die instead of changing to satisfy new circumstances and needs, thus denying all the benefits of future contributions that would otherwise be made.

No wisdom can ultimately be found within remaining adversarial toward anything other than the absence of love itself. That such adversarial dynamics may currently be common within our world does not make them any more tolerable nor any less adversarial to any intention to survive. As much as some may argue that adversity builds a sort of strength, the strength that results from adversity is too often only capable of further adversity and violence. The strength which arises from love, conversely, is the strength (metaphorically speaking) by which the rebirth of the butterfly becomes absolutely possible.

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Association by Individuality

In coming to an opportunity for association armed with the wholeness of one's individuality and an intention to be relational in the best ways possible, we potentially become the architects of unimagined wonders. We chart new trails, metaphorically speaking, into a wilderness of infinite possibility, which can be used by ourselves and others who follow, to launch individual and collective journeys. In discovering that every individual is special in one way or another, we travel these new trails as more than the mere sum of our parts.

There may be one within those present, for example, who is short in stature but has remarkable vision. Another may be tall and strong, but nearsighted. If the latter lifts the former high into the air, however, the first will be able to describe things which were previously hidden in the distance—resulting in a short person experiencing the benefits of being tall and a near-sighted person experiencing the benefits of telescopic vision.

There are a great many blessings in life which can only be indirectly accessed. Plants in the garden can be nurtured, but never forced to grow. A great many strong-willed animals can be enticed but never driven to do their owners' bidding. Anything an individual may do can similarly be the grain of sand that tips a social balance in a new direction.

As instructed by a college chaplain many years ago, "sometimes the leader is simply the one who goes first." It can be quite difficult, however, to persist when no one is willing to follow. An important consideration for others, therefore, is how important it is for a particular innovator or leader and any related

*"Those who seek power,
typically find only ego;
those who seek wisdom,
truth, and love,
typically become
quite powerful indeed."*

-- Sister Who

contributions to life to be present and available.

No trailblazer is able to be such without particular resources. The common practice, however, is the irrational expectation of self-sufficient individuals. The notion that individuals can survive without symbiotic or interdependent relationships is a lie. Even the solitary North American fur trappers of past centuries were dependent upon a community of plants, animals, and human systems of resource-distribution to sustain them. Had these not been available, such journeys and exploration would have been impossible.

In demonstrating their individuality, however, they opened doors of opportunity to new forms of community. Sadly, these were often used unwisely and destructively. What could have become empowering collaboration consequently fell into reprehensible abuse.

In some cases, this was because specific examples of individuality were not allowed to design and construct empowering association. The history of the United States during the last 150 years, for example, would quite possibly have been radically different if Abraham Lincoln had not been assassinated, specifically because of his reconstruction plans for the South after the civil war.

There are a thousand other examples of individuals whose spirits and dreams were prematurely killed, before they could become the blessing to humanity that they were secretly designed, intended, and inspired to be. That someone has not yet reached a point of sharing or expressing a beautiful and beneficial dream, does nothing to make that dream less real. Deep inside where physical eyes are unable to see, we are each a realm of hidden treasures, seeking ways to emerge into the light; offering possibilities of community and association for which the world has been waiting for a very long time.

It is understandable during times of transition to reach for the familiar instead of what is new, unpracticed, and untested. Time marches forward, however, and we can neither go back nor stop and stay where we are, because everything eventually crumbles to dust—everything, that is, except love.

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Association of Individuality

Building a better world always begins with literally or figuratively joining hands. A community is never built, however, by a sudden miraculous appearance of a circle of people holding hands, but rather by one individual after another being willing to reach with an open hand toward someone else. At first, it is unlikely that such persons truthfully know or understand each other at all—but that doesn't matter as long as they are willing to give unconditional love a chance.

Similarly, it is not only one who bears the responsibility of speaking openly, of being truthful, and of both giving as one is able and receiving gifts graciously. We all need to be both givers and receivers in order for the circle of life, the life of spirit, and the spirit of wisdom to become demonstrably real. Working together in such a manner, what becomes powerfully available is a sort of wholeness—or holiness—that is otherwise unavailable.

It could truthfully be said that—ideally, at least—we most find our own wholeness (or holiness) in discovering our connection and inter-relatedness with others. We cannot form such connections, however, if our own self-awareness is too limited to bring anything to the otherwise resulting inter-relationship. Of the infinite possibilities for constructive inter-relationship, none of them can be created by individuals who are empty inside.

Thankfully, no one is truly empty, as appearances may suggest, if resources have been covered by dark veils of inappropriate expectations, painful past experiences, and illusory projections. Yet it is never too late to remove the veils, embrace the truth, and explore what can be made from an interweaving of all of our material and internal resources. Phrased another way, it is in completing another that I become complete as well. In ignoring another person, I may unknowingly anchor myself to limitations I wish to avoid.

To add my individuality to yours does not require surrender or compromise of who or what we are; all that is required is love.

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

On a Personal Note

Six more episodes of "Sister Who Presents" were recorded early this month and six more will be recorded in another week or so (all dealing with aspects of autism). The first place these episodes will be visible will be at www.YouTube.com/DenverNeVaar on the Internet—just as soon as I can find sufficient time to edit them. Hopefully that will be within the next two to three weeks.

My doctoral program has become much more difficult. Not only do I need to begin my last pre-dissertation paper, I must additionally begin working on three other documents and the dissertation itself and I must also locate and select members of a dissertation committee. Since my topic, focus, and approach are all atypical, please pray that I will be guided to exceptionally open-minded professors willing to support the completion of my degree as effective committee members.

In addition to all of the above, the unusually cold and wet conditions Colorado has been experiencing for the last year or so are having negative effects on my house. The front door often fails to open correctly, heating bills have increased, and various appliances are wearing out more quickly (...and then there is the issue of overdue car repairs).

I'm doing my best to cope, but life has been feeling very overwhelming of late, most of the time. I guess it's a good thing Godde made me stubborn, since sometimes that's all that gets me through the struggles.

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

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*Sister Who a/k/a Rev. Denver NeVaar, MTS
3170 West Longfellow Pl., Denver, CO 80221
email: dn@SisterWho.com*

Internet website: <http://www.SisterWho.com>

Additional Informational Internet Websites:

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