

sister who's perspective

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Overview

In striving for a fresh perspective each month, I find that insights often reside within what is most avoided or initially viewed as inescapably adversarial. The more I learn and grow, however, the more it seems that blessings may be hidden within unassuming places--hopefully even within this newsletter.

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

Vulnerability Defined

In reviewing an episode of "Babylon Five," I was especially struck by a particular conversational exchange: "It's no longer safe," the one said; "but it's home," the other replied. Years ago in Colorado at my former address, I had prayed earnestly about a particular threat and received only the reply that as long as I stayed at that address, I would be safe. In the moment that support for my doctoral program was withdrawn, however, I sensed that it was no longer my choice; that I was being denied the ability to remain within the radius of whatever safety that home had provided for me.

To some extent, I agree with Helen Keller: "Security is mostly a superstition. It does not exist in nature, nor do the children of men as a whole experience it. Avoiding danger is no safer in the long run than outright exposure. Life is either a daring adventure, or nothing." I would like to add, however, that dismissing security as if it were unimportant is equally problematic. Between the two extremes are nonetheless a huge number of other possibilities to explore.

A primary challenge is that few people live with any awareness of how vulnerable they are. Some may even feel that such awareness requires more strength than they

have to offer. Others have only learned how much strength they have by specifically engaging in struggles that initially seemed to be quite impossible in every way.

It is perhaps too simple to say that it is the awareness of vulnerability which inspires one to struggle all the harder to overcome. If failure were regarded as impossible, would the measure of effort and adrenaline one were willing to invest somehow be less? For myself, it has more often not been the awareness of my vulnerability but rather a belief in something greater, from which I have drawn whatever inspiration I needed.

My vulnerability was not for that reason less real. In terms of my mental and emotional focus, however, I suggest that my vulnerability was less relevant. When I make appearances in ritual garb, my vulnerability is never a consideration. The choice is instead based upon higher principles to which I hold.

In coming to terms with vulnerability, I find that as much as I must acknowledge and accept its reality, I have never found any potential of loss to be adequate reason to refrain from making an attempt. In a similar way, while preparing for a collaborative ministerial event while in graduate school, I was asked, "Are you ever afraid?" I was quite surprised by the question, since I had no idea I was projecting an absence of fear, but I responded that to some degree or another I am afraid all of the time; I simply don't consider fear to be an adequate reason to stop whatever it is I am doing.

The fact that we could die at any moment for a hundred diverse reasons is never an adequate reason to forsake living. Doubt is not sufficient reason to abandon faith. The apathy of another is a poor reason to cease any demonstration of love. Vulnerability is not a reason to hesitate, but rather an opportunity to begin.

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Vulnerability Embraced

Very little self-reflection is required to discover how avoided vulnerability generally is. What makes this even more peculiar, is how often this avoidance is based upon speculations rather than experience. Within my own life experience, numerous examples of avoidance are based upon only a half dozen or less experiences. Are these particular events really that archetypal?

All that being said, dismissing any probability that future experiences might follow past precedents for many of the same reasons, is equally unwise and thus not recommended. Yet between probability and possibility--for better or for worse--is generally where life unfolds as a complex interconnected symbiotic system. The invitation and opportunity I nonetheless have within the present moment, is to alter the future outcome by addressing the reasons the past experience was whatever it was.

The fact of one's vulnerability may be inescapable. The form of one's vulnerability, however, is far more responsive to investments of time and energy. Until one embraces a particular aspect of vulnerability and holds it within one's hands, however, the ability to mold and reshape that particular aspect is even more limited.

An important dynamic of such embrace is that I leave behind judgments of what should or should not be and arrive ready to listen, to look at, and to measure exactly what the specific vulnerability is as well as what it is not. Misperception is as unhelpful and even adversarial as greeting someone as if he or she were someone else. Calling someone by any name other than his or her own, is not going to inspire a positive response.

Yet how often this is exactly what we do with the circumstances of our lives. A particular event, circumstance, person, or object may not actually be the embodiment of the name one has assigned. If so, one must embrace the vulnerability and willingness to learn, in the ways and/or to the degree one's perception, interpretation, and/or understanding are in error.

As one of my teachers years ago advised, "When in doubt or discomfort, begin with a question, thereby inviting the other to choose the conversation's continuing direction. If, conversely, my first statement expresses a negative interpretation about someone else, I will have thereby already made the choice and also invited an otherwise unnecessary defensive posture. If I instead allow the other to specify the context within which our conversation will unfold, I can make good use of whatever information is provided, to encourage mutually empowering developments.

Additionally, if I own my vulnerability and describe a negative concern as something with which the other has an opportunity to help me cope, I have thereby also invited a friendly collaboration that may lead to yet more friendly collaborations. If our personal philosophies are in conflict and lacking in mutual respect, however, the first challenge may turn out to be a matter of finding a path around the other's negative judgment. What would nonetheless be revealed is that, in relation to the activity of collaboration, we may not be the ideal choice for each other.

Central to virtually every act within which one embraces vulnerability, is some degree of risk specifically related to issues of trust. I may consider myself to be a person who is absolutely worthy of everyone else's trust, but I must remember the possibility that this is either unknown or incompletely known to the particular person I'm addressing within a particular moment. It is therefore not only my own vulnerability which it is necessary to embrace, but also that of those around me.

The amazing thing is that in loving enough to wisely and respectfully embrace whatever and whomever is around, one may find that not only is one no longer alone, but also that individual vulnerability does not equate to communal vulnerability. In fact, it is specifically within working together that each example of individual vulnerability is canceled out by other individuals' strengths--which includes one's own.

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Vulnerability Empowered

In recognizing others' vulnerability, the hope is that one will recognize a certain duty to care for one another. In much the same way that a certain responsiveness is needed by my vulnerability, the vulnerability of others needs a wise and compassionate response from me as well. It is thus my job to provide what I am able, specifically to encourage others to do the same and to contribute to the creation of a better world within which all have the ability to truly live.

In the final analysis, unconditional love is everyone's job for the simple reason that without it, the world cannot effectively function at all. To the extent that we individually or collectively refuse to embrace this, we all pay the price in the form of a virtually endless sequence of tragic circumstances. In ignoring any subtle indications that such love is deficient, we become accomplices to our own destruction.

Someone recently mentioned to me the common societal dynamic of neediness being ignored whereas complacency inspires rewards. More directly, "if you're sad, people will avoid you; if you're happy, they'll be drawn to you." In contrast, empowering vulnerability is a matter of making it into a dynamic that is noticed, respected, and protected from any and all danger.

Lest this essay come across as some sort of encouragement to pretentiously exaggerate vulnerability, however, one must

"The nice thing about rejection is that it is actually a weak slap on the wrist, with only the ability to deny opportunity, but never the ability to deny existence, to anything genuinely magical."

-- Sister Who

remember that ten thousand vulnerable people all standing together, are no longer vulnerable. Their sum is greater than their parts. Acting together, they can accomplish what none could accomplish acting alone.

Central to such empowerment is the often bewildering dynamic of simultaneously noticing both the particular example of vulnerability itself as well as the larger context within which it unfolds. What is often thereby discovered is that the identities of the particular vulnerability and actors within its context are not what we think they are. In thereby piecing together the larger picture which the various puzzle pieces form, one could even suggest that the vulnerability is some sort of complex illusion.

Standing nose-to-nose with each difficult moment, however, one must never regard them as anything less than fully real, which would negate all ability to constructively interact with them. This is part of a deeper meaning and implication of the oft-quoted biblical text, "You shall know the truth and that truth will make you free."

When vulnerability is empowered, I do sincerely believe that we will experience greater freedom, greater creativity, and a greater sense of our individually unique potential. It's as if in running from it, we only make a negative expression of vulnerability more pervasive, more limiting, and more debilitating--overcompensating in ways that are ultimately self-defeating. By opening itself to the light of the springtime sun, the earth unavoidably experiences a rebirth.

It is within integrating the movements of greater forces into one's life, that one's vulnerability becomes to some degree either irrelevant or the opportunity for others to demonstrate generosity and benevolence--which nearly always brings a warm smile to their faces as well. No one is so poor as the person who refuses to ever give, who refuses to ever acknowledge vulnerability, or who erroneously equates vulnerability with limitation--when it is actually a state of infinite possibility, because nothing is shut out.

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Vulnerability Transformed

The life that is open to all things, has the most opportunity and raw material available for transformation into the best possibilities one could ever experience. There is nothing about such openness, however, that is adversarial to applications of all available wisdom and communal collaboration. This is once again a situation within which our best resource may be each other.

The most difficult part of transformation, however, is the waiting and struggle that occurs before the moment unfolds. My own experiences of such often follow the pattern of feeling stuck and even paralyzed for what seems like a long time, only to be surprised and thrown off balance a bit, when suddenly everything begins to move too quickly. In contrast to human logic, the Divine often seems to take a mischievous delight in doing miraculous things only within the most improbable and unsupportive circumstances.

If one has the strength to hold onto awareness of such transformational patterns, dark times could be interpreted as times of delightful anticipation, perhaps analogous to a drum roll announcing the arrival of someone or something awe-inspiring. The less emotional distance one has from the struggle, however, the more intense the transition will feel. What is often even more difficult than embracing and transforming my vulnerability, however, is forgiving myself for not having the strength to have done better within particular events and contexts.

Transforming such moments may require a shift in perspective: acknowledging the possibility that the particular moment may be serving some other purpose than the one I'd imagined. This is a matter of faith, because that which forms faith's foundation within such times, is rarely if ever visible as quickly as I'm certain we'd all prefer.

The first step is nonetheless pausing to consider that many things are not only what we imagine them to be--including ourselves; new definitions may thus need to be written.

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On a Personal Note

I suppose I am a bit traditional in my preference for paper rather than electronic communication, but it seems we must all do our best to adapt, to whatever extent we are able. What is mysterious yet wonderful to me, are the times beyond both of these when communication occurs spiritually. On June 2, for example, in response to one of my videos yet with no knowledge of my need for encouragement due to recent adversarial circumstances, someone posted within my Internet YouTube channel, "The world needs more people like you, Sister. Please don't stop posting videos."

On one hand, I do find that I'm generally too stubborn to ever give up. On the other hand, however, there are times when even I am completely exhausted and long for a sanctuary in which to rest. The next two to three months, however, will perhaps be more intense and draining than any other time period within the past year.

First will be partial completion of a small video production studio within the first floor of my house. That will be followed by creating a new introduction for the show in HD-quality video (as strongly requested by the public access television entity in Denver, Colorado) and twenty-four new TV episodes, while also creating thirteen new photos for next year's calendar. I guess I'd best get to work.

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*Sister Who a/k/a Rev. Denver NeVaar, MTS
97 Granite Street, 2nd Floor, Berlin, NH 03570
email: dn@SisterWho.com*

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

Additional Informational Internet Websites:

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